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Afghanistan: the Darkening Glass

There is an air of inevitability, and trepidation, and déjà vu, gripping Afghanistan. The Taliban are back, and they are closing their fingers around Ashraf Ghani's government like a fist, squeezing.

Casualties are not yet on the scale of the civil war. The Taliban are biding their time, encircling cities, waiting for the Americans to depart. Many local garrisons have surrendered anyway, while elsewhere, tribal elders have negotiated bloodless transfers of power.

When Ghani and his government, riddled with corruption and edging rapidly towards irrelevance, look down, they see only paint. They're in a corner from which no amount of U.S. 'support' (bombs) can extricate them. Their collaboration with foreign powers has marked them with a black spot, too, that no soap can wash off.

Yet in strict terms, the Taliban were created from the same geopolitical rib: Ghani's government and the Taliban are both cotton sugar confections spun by foreign powers. The U.S.A., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, and India are all up to their necks in this multiplayer iteration of the Great Game. The Talibs are not so much the 'scholars' their name implies; they're more of an armed faction. They reconstituted themselves to fight the invaders, and they have an ideology that because of its Islamic flavour makes them generally comprehensible. The failure of statecraft in Afghanistan by Ghani has fueled their revivification.

Meanwhile, enthusiasm for the Talib 'scholars' is rather thin on the ground, worldwide. China is not a big fan, ill-disposed as it is to anything with the word 'Islamic' in it (the Taliban intend to set up the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan', a political entity with the

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same name as the one they established in 1996). Russia isn't mad keen on them either. The Western powers loathe the Taliban, but they saw they could never win the conflict and simply had to cut their losses. The Taliban have attended the talks just enough to keep the ball rolling as they position themselves in-country, and have been regularly accused of bad faith in Doha. They used their special UN travel permissions not to fly back to the UAE but to visit Moscow.

In Afghanistan itself, many remember the excesses of Taliban 1.0, and scratch militias are popping up to fight them off. The Taliban are widely reviled for their adolescent neuroses over women and music, and their propensity for ultraviolence, so what does their de facto control of the countryside say about the standing of the central government? A trillion dollars and more has utterly failed to provide Afghan citizens with a sense of security.

None of it bodes well, unfortunately. Once the Yanks go home, Taliban forces will make their final push on urban centres, at which point the body count will rise once again. Will America 'do a Vietnam' and deal decades of spiteful passive aggression, having been whopped yet again in a war of invasion? The ingredients are there for a long-run tragedy to befall the Afghans yet again. We all hope not.

John Clamp writes for [Maqshosh](#).

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