

WAITING FOR THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN

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The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan will leave the country worse than it was before 2001 in some respects. There is no clear plan for the future. Washington will progressively lose its influence over Kabul, and drone operations in Pakistan are not a credible way to fight jihadist groups on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The situation will only worsen after 2014, when most U.S. troops are out of the country and aid going to the Afghan government steeply declines.

Key Themes

- The Afghan political system's center of gravity—the east and the Kabul region—is gravely threatened by a Taliban advance that will take place in the spring of 2013 following the winter lull in fighting.
- The Afghan regime will most probably collapse in a few years.
- Political fragmentation, whether in the form of militias or the establishment of sanctuaries in the north, is laying the groundwork for a long civil war—a dangerous scenario for Western interests.
- Though negotiations with the Taliban are unlikely before the troop withdrawal, the United States will not be able to pursue its longer-term interests in and around Afghanistan if it is not willing to deal with the Taliban.
- Poised to take power after the Afghan regime's likely collapse, only the Taliban can potentially control the Afghan border and expel transnational jihadists from Afghanistan.

Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers

The coalition must strengthen security in the east and the Kabul region. Even if it means withdrawing troops more rapidly from the south, bolstering forces in the east will slow the Taliban's progress and encourage them to take negotiations more seriously.

The United States must end its reintegration policy. The attempt to attract fighters away from the Taliban and “reintegrate” them into society enjoys few successes, fuels corruption, fosters insecurity, and ultimately convinces the population that the Taliban presence is justified.

Washington must not further limit its ability to open negotiations with the Taliban. Listing the Haqqani network, which is part of the Taliban movement, as a terrorist group was counterproductive.

Coalition operations should focus first and foremost on foreign jihadist groups.

The Taliban should not be the primary target of drone attacks and night raids.

The United States must develop a new approach to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

A long-term regional policy that is not contradictory is needed to stabilize Afghanistan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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