

## **Consequences of events in Afghanistan for Iran**

The Biden administration's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan by August 31 has created instability in the country.

Following this decision, the Taliban in the country became active and took all control of 210 provinces and the capital. An ad hoc committee was formed, headed by former President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, to peacefully hand over power to the Taliban. The current instability poses a number of threats not only to Afghanistan but also to neighboring countries, especially Iran.

Iran hosted a meeting of the Afghanistan government and Taliban officials on July 7-8. One of the main goals of the meeting is to fill the gap created by the retreating US military and prevent any security problems. In this regard, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif stressed the establishment of a temporary committee, the peaceful transfer of power is the right step and that Iran will continue its peacekeeping efforts in Afghanistan. It should be noted that Iran has always tried to pursue a balanced policy against Afghanistan. For this reason, while deepening its political, economic, and energy relations with the Afghan government, it has begun to support Taliban groups financially, educationally, and logistically to improve relations using the Taliban's hostile policies toward the United States (Rahimullah Farzam, 2019). Despite pursuing a dual policy of maintaining relations, the return of the Taliban government poses a number of political and socio-economic risks to Iran.

### **Political Threats**

Although the Taliban government has repeatedly said it will improve relations with neighboring countries, there is mutual insecurity between Iran and the Taliban. One of the



reasons for the insecurity is the support of the Taliban, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan is one of the most profitable countries from the return of the Taliban, increasing Pakistan's support for the Taliban in the future may result in the strengthening of Sunni states in the region. This situation, in addition to directly harming Iran's security and foreign policy, could lead to an ideological blockade of its southern and eastern borders.

Second, the return of the Taliban has made terrorist groups active inside the country. In addition, given the Taliban's timely collaboration with a terrorist organization such as Al Qaeda, this situation will exacerbate instability within the country. The presence of active terrorist organizations around Iran poses a threat to its domestic policy and border security.

A third reason is the Taliban government's policy toward Shiite Muslims, which, according to a group of officials inside Iran, does not expect any change in the Taliban's behavior or general policies toward Shiites. For this reason, Iran will use proxy forces (Hashdi al-Shia) here, as in other regional countries, to support Shiite Muslims here. Finally, it is likely that the Taliban would support Sunni Baluchis to interfere in Iran's domestic politics in the future (B. Alagoz; E. Kandemir, 2015).

## **Social Threats**

With the outbreak of the civil war in Afghanistan, people began to leave the country. The first country to which the Afghan people turned was Iran. In the current situation, migrants are more dangerous for Iran. There are currently 750,000 official and 2 million unregistered Afghans in Iran. First of all, the presence of so many immigrants in the country causes the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus. As a result, the rapid spread of the virus is harming Iran's health system.

Secondly, the majority of migrants prefer to work in Tehran. This not only limits the

employment opportunities of the locals but also increases unemployment. Therefore, the influx of migrants into the country after the sanctions and the impact of Covid-19 reduces the welfare of the people. In addition, given that Iran allocates a certain amount of money each year for the education, shelter, and health services of migrants, this situation increases the hostility of the people against migrants.

Another problem caused by migrants is the rapid spread of drug trafficking in Iran. Afghanistan supplies 80 percent of the heroin supply, and most of the drugs are shipped west along the Iranian border. Based on the Taliban's active involvement in the drug trade in the past, we can say that with the return of the Taliban government, drug addiction and trade in the region may increase. Despite the fact that the General Directorate for Combating Drugs of Iran and the Ministry of Internal Affairs allocate some funds on this issue every year, the number of drug users among the locals is growing rapidly. This, in turn, leads to an increase in diseases such as HIV / AIDS, unemployment, and crime in the country, as well as damages Iran's image in the international system. As a result, this situation poses a serious threat to Iran's security and health situation.

## **Economic Threats**

Iran, whose economy is weakening primarily due to US sanctions, is struggling to meet domestic demand for dollars. For this reason, Afghanistan is the source of currency for Iran. Thus, \$ 5 million is transferred from Afghanistan to Iran every year. In doing so, despite the small amount for Iran's economy, it meets a few shares of the internal dollar demand. However, the withdrawal of the United States and the suspension of dollar supplies to Afghanistan may pose serious problems for the Iranian economy.

Second, Afghanistan is one of the most important markets for Iran's non-oil sector. Iran

exports \$ 2 billion worth of non-oil products a year to Afghanistan. However, the suspension of the supply of dollars could lead to higher prices, certain trade restrictions, and, worst of all, inflation within Afghanistan. As this situation results in a decline in demand for non-oil products from Iran inside Afghanistan, Iran may face the threat of losing its most important non-oil market in the region.

On the other hand, Afghanistan is not only an important market for Iran, but also one of the countries of strategic importance for access to Central Asian and European markets. For this reason, several measures have been taken between the two countries to improve the infrastructure on the Iran-Afghanistan border, and international assistance to Afghanistan for the development of railways and other routes has been beneficial for all three. However, both the withdrawal of the United States and a significant reduction in aid, as well as the lack of funds for the development of these lines due to sanctions in Iran, can put Iran in a difficult economic situation and hinder the development of infrastructure.

## **Opportunities**

Despite all these threats, another group inside Iran says that if they pursue a pragmatic policy against the Taliban, new chances will open up for Iran. Although the mutual insecurity between the two countries, both the Taliban government and Iran are taking some steps to develop relations with each other. , Qatar's mediation in the rapprochement between Tehran and the Taliban is an example of this.

First, the policies of the Taliban and Tehran against the United States bring them closer together. Thus, Iran has approached the Taliban to increase its influence in the country, using the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the Middle East. Therefore, the Taliban's use of Iranian weapons in the civil war indicates the development of bilateral

relations. Tehran and the Taliban have said they are ready to fight not only against the United States, but also against local ISIS forces in the Islamic Khorasan province.

Another opportunity for the Taliban to return is to resolve the water crisis between Afghanistan and Iran. Thus, the Helman / Hirmand River is the only river that crosses the border, and given the water shortage in Iran, this river is of great importance. On March 24, 2021, at the opening of Kemal Khan Dam A. Ghani's announcement that he would sell water to Iran in exchange for oil has revived the water crisis between the two countries. However, the return of the Taliban government and the takeover of important dams in the country will have a positive impact on resolving the water dispute between the two countries.

Another possibility is Iran's illicit economic income. After sanctions and the damage caused by the pandemic, Iran has become dependent on the black economy. Drug trafficking is one of the most important, but most lucrative, illicit economies in Iran. At present, drug trafficking in the region is expected to increase again with the return of the Taliban government. Although the United States and some European countries are struggling, 80% of the drugs are produced in Afghanistan and 40% are shipped to Central Asia and Europe via Iran. As far back as 2015, it earned \$ 3 billion from drug trafficking alone, much of which was spent on the military, educational, logistical, and nuclear equipment for proxy forces in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. For this reason, despite the fight against drug trafficking, one of the important factors that keeps the Iranian economy afloat is its revenues (Sarah Canina, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the return of the Taliban, along with threats to Iran, has created many opportunities. However, first of all, Iran must take steps to ensure regional stability and

security. If Iran pursues a pragmatic policy against the Taliban government, it can turn threats into an opportunity by resolving the issue of insecurity between them.

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