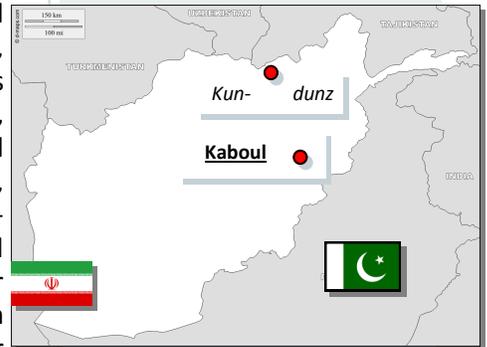




AFGHANISTAN

The capture of Kunduz (north) by the Taliban

- An event
- Its decoding
- An analysis
- Prospects



THE EVENT

On the 29th of September, while the summer had bowed out in Hindukush, some very worrisome news was announced to the 32 million Afghans; in the north, 300 miles from the capital Kabul, Kunduz, the 5th urban centre had fallen into the hands of the Taliban-led insurgency.

A significant breach of peace under the guise of victory for these “religious students”, celebrated in such a manner by the new leadership of the insurgency, now under the authority of the mullah Mansour, as the successor of the deceased mullah Omar, the historic founder of this ultra puritanical Pashtun movement. An event with a particular resonance for the Afghan authorities, just a year after Ashraf Ghani became the current head of State, who has had a limited impact regarding national issues in the last twelve months.

For the Afghan armed forces, the fact that a large urban centre protected by thousands of people has fallen into the hands of several hundred insurgents so rapidly attests to some initial trepidation, or, to be more severe, even their lack of motivation/skills.

ANALYSIS

The preoccupied international community (the West) observes, embarrassed and powerless, its (military) long-recorded withdraw, the compelling and recognised come-back of the Taliban threat, more determined than ever to regain ground by armed force and major military offensives rather than promote dialogue—as much exploratory as randomly— for peace with Kabul, in fact taken by surprise by the events, to say the least...

The ease/rapidity in which the northern Kunduz has changed hands will also remind the observer of the residents on the ground, resigned more than surprised, of the relative resilience of Afghan security forces.

The northward drive of the Taliban (crossing point of profitable traffic of any kind, namely of drugs through the Tajik territory) is confirmed; it seems it is the same for their new military strategy, where the concentration of large volumes of fighters on strategic targets (cities; regular army) conjugates with the recourse always industrial in improvised explosive devices, less greedy in men...

AFGHANISTAN: references

- Territory: 652 000 square miles
- Capital: Kabul (4.6 million)
- Neighbouring countries: China, Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan
- Population: 32.5 million
- Ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen
- Religion: Islam (Sunni)
- Languages: Dari, Pashtu
- Regime: Islamic Republic
- Head of State: Ashraf Ghani
- Annual income *per capita*: 550

PARTIES INVOLVED:

- The Taliban insurgency
- A wave of insurgent groups
- A Ghani’s elected government
- Afghan armed forces (ANA)
- NATO troops/ US soldiers

THE QUOTE

“Foreign terrorists—Tajiks, Uzbeks, Uighurs, Chechens—making their way towards Kunduz (...). The presence of terrorist sanctuaries and support networks to Pakistan continue to create trouble on Afghan soil”, Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer (*The Hindu*, Sept. 29; *New York Times*, October 1).

Recent CHRONOLOGY

- 02/10: fights ongoing in Kunduz
- 01/10: Kabul announces the partial resumption of Kunduz by the army.
- 30/09: Pdt Ghani 'promises' a swift resumption of the city by armed forces
- 29/09: talibans seize Kunduz city
- 16/09: post-mullah Omar Taliban leadership claims end of internal disputes
- 31/07: talibane hierarchy confirms the death of mullah Omar (Pakistan; on 2013)
- 31/07: mullah A.M. Mansour appointed new Taliban leader
- 31/07: Kabul announces the death of the leader of the Talibans, mullah M. Omar

TESTIMONY

"A Pul-i-Kumri (capital of the nearby province of Baghlan; 150 miles north of Kabul), the situation is not favorable to the government. If the first come Taliban appears by shouting 'Allahu akbar', the city will fall. The Taliban are very close", by Z. Rustami, former provincial member of council of Baghlân, New York Times, October 1.

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ISSUES AND CONSEQUENCES

In the recent impaired signals (security, political, socioeconomic) uttered from Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad is added that so worrisome revealing since the contested Kunduz the uprising Taliban ability to:

- (Re) Take major cities;
- Defeat better armed and numerous regular strengths;
- Reinvest provinces theoretically minority pro-Taliban;
- Obtain the submission of populations, when police and militias do not do the same there;
- Attract fighters, including from the larger area (Central Asia; Pakistan);
- Convince the local rulers (North; West) outside their traditional territory in the south and the southeast to support their cause.

If the administration (dual, divided, unpopular with the public) of Ghani -Abdullah promised the fast re-taking of Kunduz, the regular strengths collide on the ground with a fierce resistance can reveal the determination of the opponent. It remains to be seen if the operation is achievable as is, even by taking advantage of the (aerial) support of the residual (special) strengths of the NATO still deployed in the Afghan-conflict theatre. This prestigious success obtained by the Taliban enables their new leadership, which, from now on is placed under the authority of the mullah Mansour (since the making official at the end of July of the mullah Omar's death, their historic leader), struggle to estimate —and have the upper hand— on an unprecedented internal struggle.

Hastily praised by the media, the

short-lived and unnatural honeymoon between Kabul and Islamabad (since the election of A. Ghani in September 2014) seems challenged by the events described in these paragraphs, President Ghani and his Chief Executive Officer A. Abdullah not hiding their convictions that the authorities (only military?) Pakistan is continuing to play an equivocal part and at the wrong time (by supporting the Taliban schedule in the fragile Afghan theatre, despite denying such actions.

For Washington and the White House, this setback (facilitated by a government always subject in question in Kabul and the limits of the internal security in Afghanistan) also resounds as the promise of very likely one and politically delicate revision of the scope of action of the mission post ISAF *Resolute Support*.

PROSPECTIVE

By frequently demonstrating these last months a capacity to mobilize large volumes of fighters on strategic targets and to defeat (without insurmountable difficulties) regular troops with uncertain determination, the last armed attack of Taliban -insurgents radical venture rekindles the debate on the medium-term viability of the current Afghan power. As well as the necessity, for Kabul and Washington (by collaborating with it, according to a subtle option remaining to develop with Islamabad, Tehran, as well as Beijing and Delhi), of bending, in the light of a negative tendency and of occupying pre-fortune-tellers, over a collective approach 'revisited' by the future Afghan patient undoubtedly badly embarked.

Paris, October 2, 2015