



## Thousands of Civilians are Displaced and Forced to Flee as the Taliban Targets Major Cities in Afghanistan

Thousands of civilians have been displaced and forced to flee as the Taliban continues its offensive by targeting major cities in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of American troops has left the Taliban emboldened, as they seek to secure new areas and expand their presence beyond the traditional strongholds in remote regions across the country. The United States has maintained its support of Afghan government personnel countering the group, and has also conducted airstrikes with the aim of buying time for security forces to fend off the Taliban from their siege against major cities and urban areas. Afghan commandos and air force officials have been spread thin attempting to defend the wide swaths of territory that are under threat. Ultimately, it is Afghan civilians that have borne the brunt of the intensified Taliban surge. In recent months, thousands of civilians have been killed or wounded – with the total number recorded during this time being the highest since the United Nations began monitoring these casualties back in 2009. In addition to this, Afghanistan is currently faced with the prospects of a mass exodus of citizens fleeing the violence including soldiers, and the local government has resorted to enlisting militias in their ongoing fight against the Taliban.

As the Taliban continue their efforts to take over provinces within Afghanistan, many civilians in the areas they are targeting have decided to flee the violence brought about by the group. The Taliban have already begun to enact their inhumane laws and punishments in new territory, including hanging two men who they accused of kidnapping. With fleeing civilians comes complications however, and observers fear the potential of a refugee crisis coming out of Afghanistan. The United States has increased the limit on the number of people from Afghanistan that can stay in the U.S. under refugee status in an attempt to accommodate the ongoing crisis. Some individuals will benefit from this modification, but unfortunately others that stay behind may be left under the extremist rule of the Taliban in certain areas and provinces.

If the Taliban can take their first provincial capital and continue down the path that they are on, they pose a real threat to the confidence in the Afghan government and its ability to govern. In addition to the humanitarian crisis that would result, it would be a major shift in regional and global politics. The Taliban is adamantly anti-West and Afghanistan would shift from a local government friendly to the United States and allies to one that poses major security challenges. The group has been known to foster extremists and terrorists who would seek to benefit from the Taliban's protection if it gained a foothold in areas throughout the region. Thus, surrounding nations have expressed concern with the situation as Iran closed border entrances, Pakistan is completing a surveilled border fence, and Russia voiced displeasure over citizens fleeing into parts of Central Asia.

Afghanistan's citizenry is primarily being protected by the country's armed forces, which have been overstretched and exhausted. The United States continues to provide support in some capacity, but the Biden administration has expressed a desire to greatly scale back its military operations in Afghanistan. Due to the Taliban's offensive and surge in violence, many local civilians are seeking refuge outside of Afghanistan and it is ultimately them who have been most negatively affected by the ongoing situation there.