

A series of negotiated surrenders helped pave the Taliban's way to Kabul.

By David Zucchino

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Using a mix of coercion and persuasion, the Taliban engaged in an offensive early this year in which they cut surrender deals with local leaders across Afghanistan that handed the insurgents bases and ultimately entire provincial command centers.

It culminated in a stunning military blitz this summer that put the militants back in power two decades after being defeated by the United States and its allies.

It was a campaign defined by both collapse and conquest, executed by patient opportunists.

Each surrender, small or large, handed the Taliban more weapons and vehicles — and, vitally, more control over roads and highways, giving them freedom to move rapidly and collect the next surrenders as the security forces were progressively cut off from ammunition, fuel, food and salaries.

Money, supplies and support from Pakistan, Russia and Iran also bolstered their ranks, analysts said.

And each victory added to a growing sense of inevitability that the Taliban would eventually prevail.

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