

## *The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan could extinguish U.S. influence in Kabul.*



By Lara Jakes and Michael Crowley

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The fall of Kabul leaves the Biden administration facing the once-unthinkable prospect of whether, and how, to engage with a Taliban-led government in Afghanistan's capital — or cede all influence in the country to an extremist group that brutalized Afghans and harbored Osama bin Laden as he planned attacks on America.

The sudden exile of President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan on Sunday, just hours after President Biden and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken each assured him of full American support, gives the Taliban little incentive to negotiate a transitional government for a country in crisis, said two U.S. officials involved in discussions inside the administration.

The officials said Mr. Ghani had fled his country without telling his cabinet or leaving plans for a government handover. That has all but ensured the Taliban's ascent to power — one that the Biden administration can only hope will be carried out as peacefully as possible.

It also most likely extinguishes a long-stalled American effort for peace talks toward establishing a power-sharing system between the Taliban and Afghanistan's elected leaders, and leaves U.S. officials hoping that a group that has defied nearly all pleas for moderation in recent months will protect some semblance of women's and political rights and honor a pledge not to harbor Qaeda terrorists.

Mr. Blinken said the United States would support talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban “about the way forward.”

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