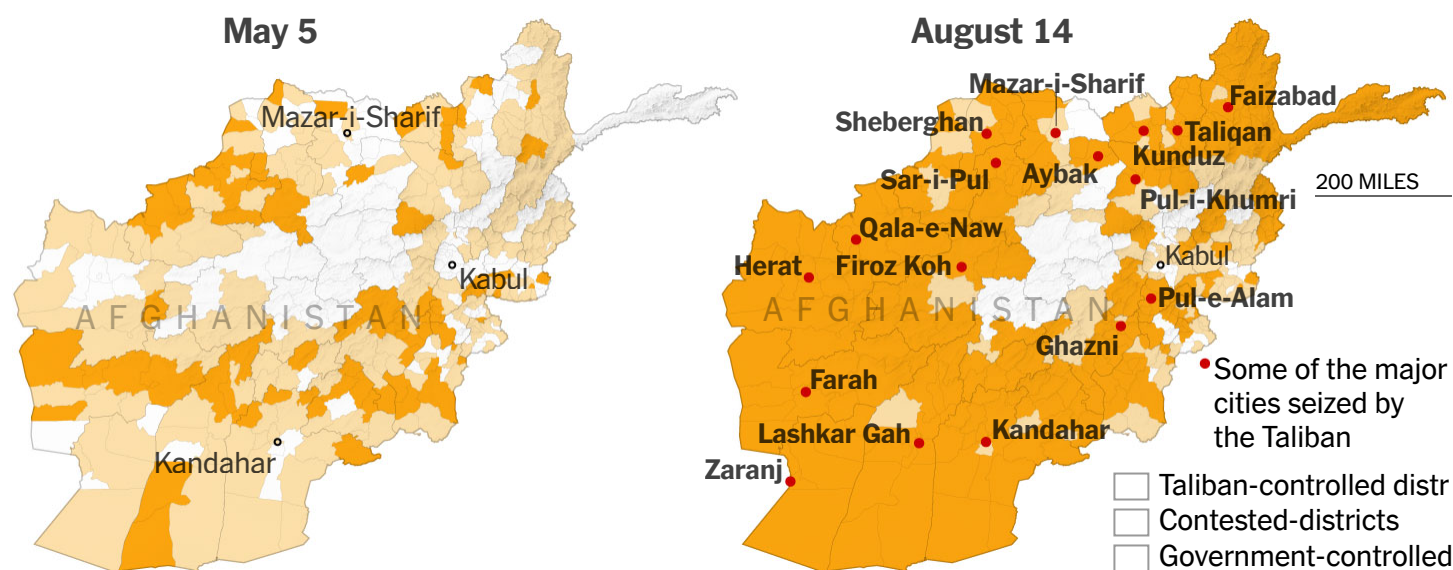


20 Years of Defense, Erased by the Taliban in a Few Months

By Scott Reinhard and David Zucchino Aug. 14, 2021



Source: FDD's Long War Journal

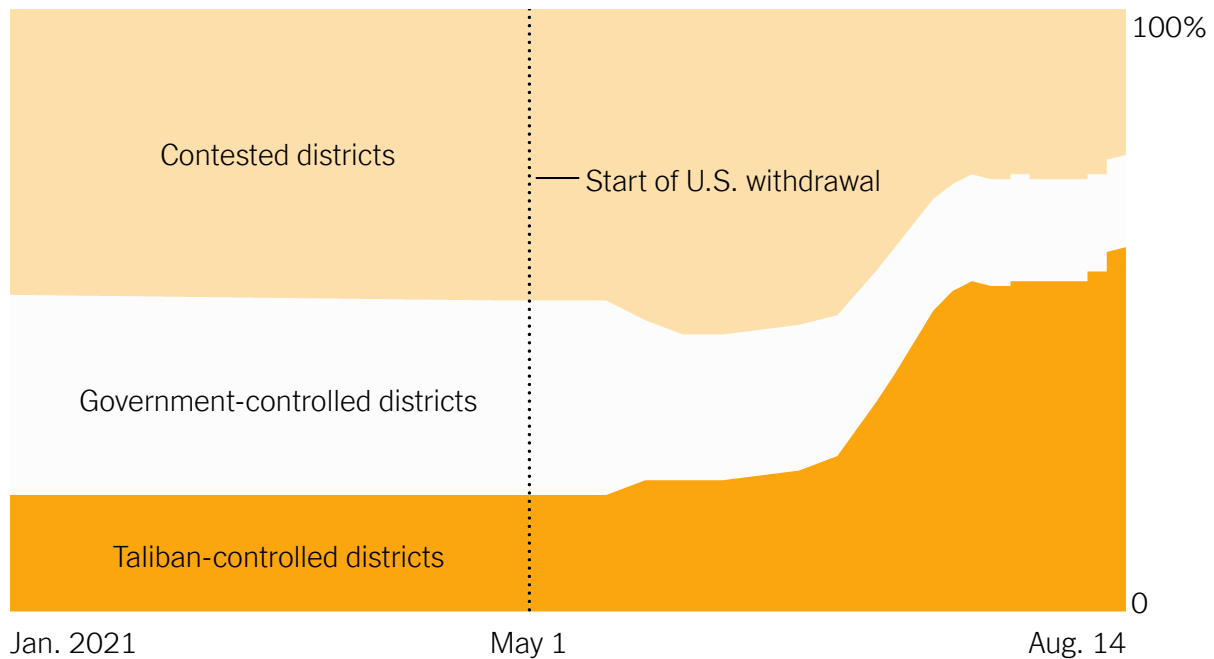
Just a month ago, as President Biden defended his decision to end American involvement in Afghanistan, he said a Taliban takeover was not inevitable.

“Do I trust the Taliban? No,” Mr. Biden said. “But I trust the capacity of the Afghan military, who is better trained, better equipped and more competent in terms of conducting war.”

But in the last seven days, the single most stunning week in two decades of war, that military collapsed. Vital cities fell to the Taliban one after another. A sense of panic has taken hold. The Americans, who for years trained the Afghan forces and fought alongside them to hold off the Taliban, are evacuating most of the embassy in Kabul, the capital.

The brutal campaign by the Taliban to recapture the country gained ground earlier this year, when officers in rural outposts began to surrender. It picked up steam almost immediately after American troops began to withdraw, on May 1, and it has only accelerated since.

Taliban control surged after the U.S. withdrawal began



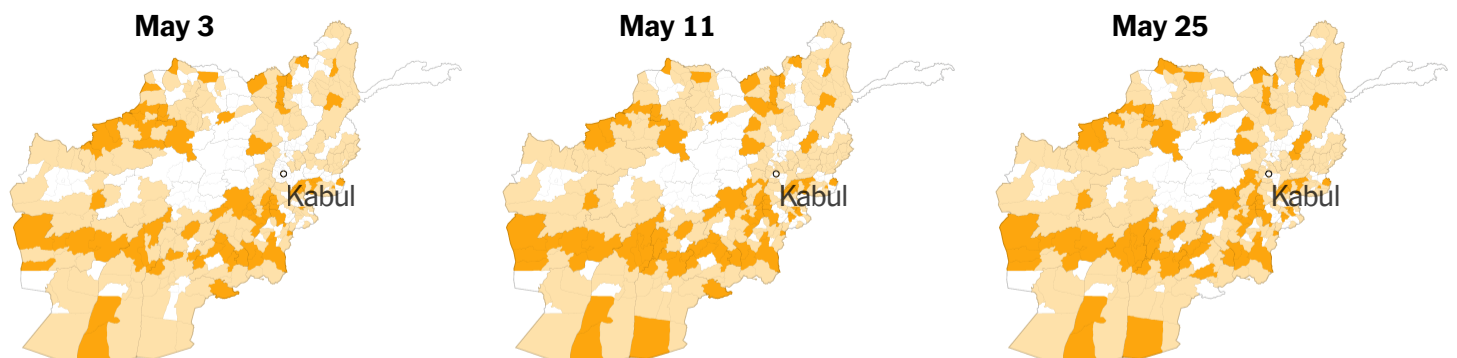
Source: FDD's Long War Journal

As the Taliban attacked cities across the country, it was clear that government forces were exhausted, disorganized and, without American support, overmatched. Many cities collapsed without a shot being fired as forces surrendered or fled.

The Afghan government remains in control of just two major cities: Kabul and Jalalabad in the east. On Saturday night, the last major city in the country's north, Mazar-i-Sharif, fell to the insurgents. Two more provinces, Uruzgan in the south and Zabul in central Afghanistan, are on the verge of collapse.

Here is how the Taliban took over most of the country since the United States started its withdrawal:

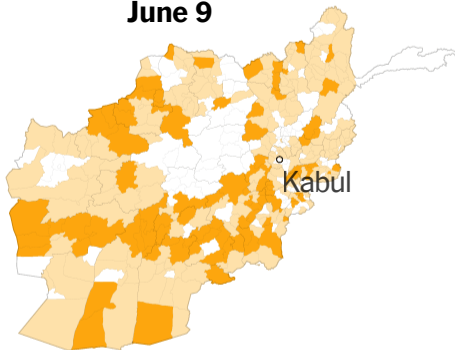
☐ Taliban-controlled districts ☐ Contested districts ☐ Government-controlled



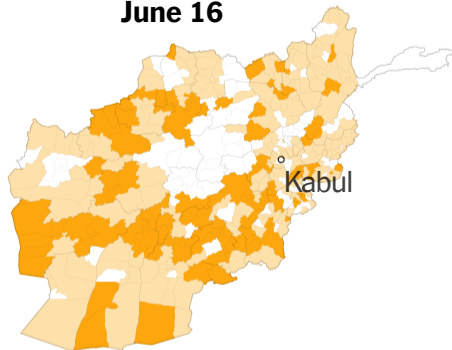
As U.S. troops began to withdraw, the government retained control of all 34 provincial capitals. But the Taliban began making headway in lightly defended rural districts.

The Taliban consolidated their control of major highways, cutting off government bases. More rural districts fell.

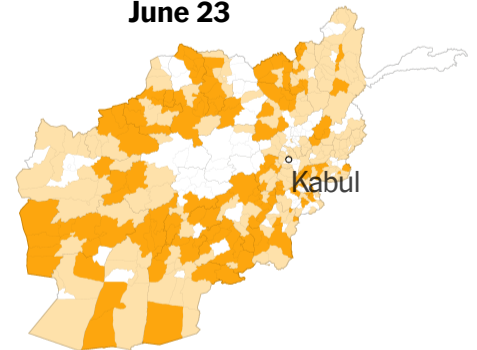
June 9



June 16

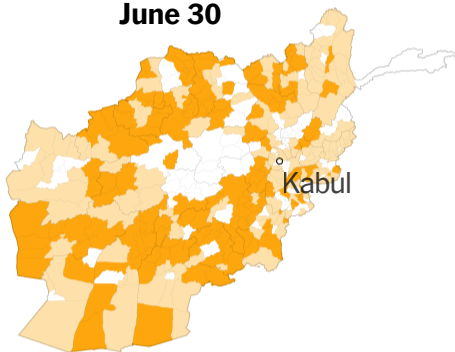


June 23

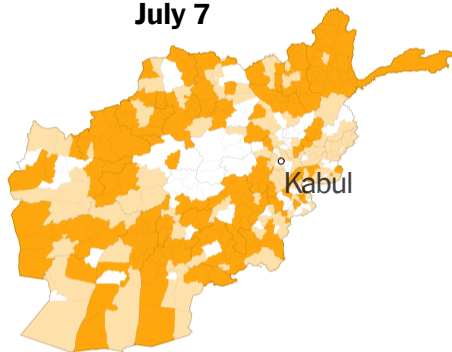


Besieged Afghan forces realized that government promises of reinforcements and supplies are not forthcoming. Demoralized, they begin abandoning checkpoints and bases en masse.

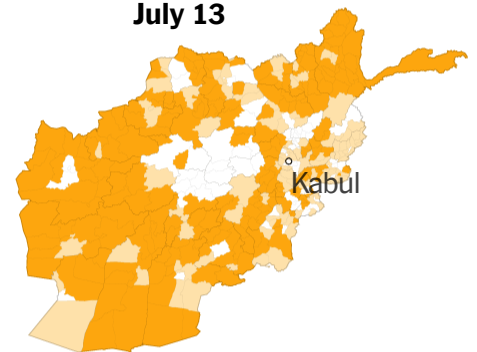
June 30



July 7

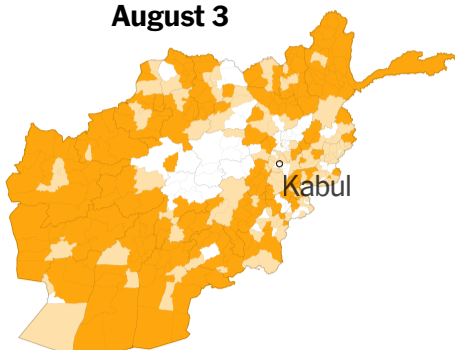


July 13

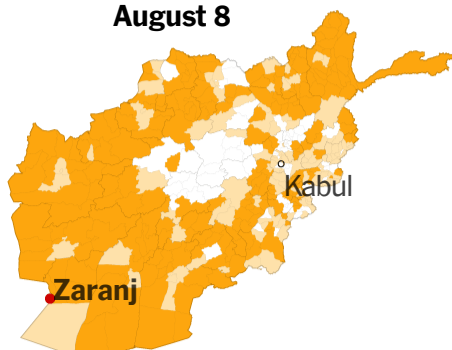


The Taliban dispatched village elders to deliver a message: Surrender or die. Many soldiers and police surrendered and handed over weapons in return for assurances of safety.

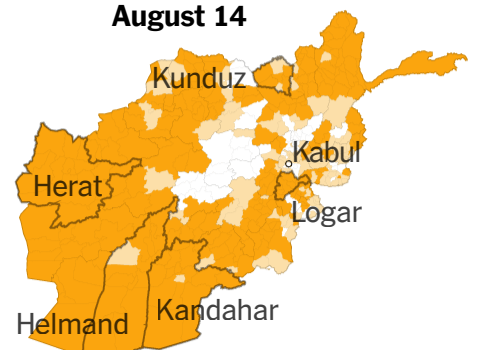
August 3



August 8



August 14



Taliban fighters intensified sieges of several provincial capitals. Government troops and officials began to abandon fortified compounds where they had long managed provincial affairs.

On August 6, after nearly 20 years of war, the first provincial capital fell to the Taliban: The small, remote city of Zaranj. Over the next week, 14 provincial capitals collapsed.

The Taliban captured the strategic southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, along with Herat Province on the Iranian border. The collapse of Kunduz and Logar provinces cleared a direct path to Kabul.

Source: FDD's Long War Journal

The Taliban had agreed, in a February 2020 deal with the United States, to negotiate with the Afghan government over the shape of a power-sharing government and a lasting ceasefire. It also broadly pledged to reduce violence, suspend mass-casualty attacks in cities and not attack American troops as they withdrew.

But there was no real mechanism to ensure that the Taliban honored those commitments.

While the Taliban did refrain from attacking U.S. troops and greatly reduced mass casualty attacks, most of the other pledges have not been met, according to American intelligence and Pentagon assessments.

The Taliban consolidated its control of major highways, levying taxes on motorists. It seized several border crossings and appropriated custom duties. And it intensified an assassination campaign, killing government officials, human rights and civil society activists, police officers, journalists and religious scholars.