

## Taliban Victory May Strengthen Pakistan in Dispute for Kashmir

By [Lucas Leiroz](#)

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*In recent weeks, several debates have been held about Afghanistan. The security crisis, the rise of the Taliban and the defeat of the US are issues that have caught the attention of experts. However, some aspects have been ignored, such as the effects of the Afghan crisis in other parts of the Asian continent. In New Delhi, the government has been increasingly concerned about the possibility of escalating violence and tensions in the Kashmir region, considering that the Taliban and Pakistan could act together against Indian interests in the disputed territories.*

The Indian government has significantly strengthened its security apparatus since the takeover of Kabul. Surveillance of activities in Kashmir has also increased. The existence of local militants with an ideology similar to that advocated by the Taliban raises fears about the possibility of an insurrection encouraged and even militarily supported by the new de facto Afghan government. Such a scenario would be tragic for Indian interests, as New Delhi could hardly contain its enemies without the use of force, which could result in a new armed conflict.

Commenting on this topic, **Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar** said:

“At this point of time, we are looking at the evolving situation in Kabul... the Taliban and its representatives have come to Kabul and I think we need to take it from there (...) At the moment we are, like everybody else, very carefully following developments in Afghanistan. I think our focus is on ensuring the security in Afghanistan and the safe return of Indian nationals who are there”.

In an attitude different from that of its biggest geopolitical enemies, Pakistan and China, India has taken a posture of open opposition to the Taliban. The country did not try to establish diplomatic dialogues to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, but it evacuated its embassy and all its official representatives. There are many reasons to explain the Indian position, but undoubtedly what the Indian government wants is to avoid the formation of a scenario similar to that of the 1990s, when thousands of Afghan fighters, after the end of

the war against Soviet troops, entered the Kashmir and incited a violent conflict, which persists to this day – albeit on a much smaller scale.

Ties between the Taliban and Pakistan are extremely worrying for New Delhi. Pakistanis have always supported the Afghan jihadists and this alliance tends to grow more and more. Indeed, in Islamabad, the Taliban's victory was seen as a great triumph for the country's international interests. Some local political leaders have publicly stated that the Taliban will help Pakistan to conquer Kashmir. Neelam Irshad Sheikh, the senior leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), the PM Imran Khan's Political Party, said he has information from the Taliban that there will be direct support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. Although information about such pronouncements is not yet entirely clear, there is reason enough for India to be concerned.

The Chinese factor cannot be ignored either. For Beijing, negotiating with the Taliban is interesting, as Chinese intentions are only pragmatic. The best government for Beijing is one that can bring enough stability to pursue the Belt and Road Initiative's cooperation projects, which is currently only possible with the Taliban. However, if the Taliban poses a possibility of encircling India, there will be more direct interest from Beijing in consolidating the new Afghan government. The Chinese will not get involved militarily in a possible jihadist-Pakistani maneuver against India, but they will be able to use several methods to cooperate in a non-military way.

For these reasons, India has been seeking for support from its international allies in the QUAD group, mainly in intelligence operations. Chief of Defense Staff General Bipin Rawat said recently: "Any support forthcoming from Quad nations in getting some intelligence inputs to fighting the Global War on terror... I think that would be welcome." However, Washington is taking a long time to respond satisfactorily in this regard. This is due to a central point: QUAD is a "NATO against China", not for Pakistan or the Taliban.

In fact, relying on a US-led group to deal with the Afghan issue is a mistake on the part of India. Indian officials apparently forgot that Washington negotiated publicly with the Taliban and that it made no resistance to the takeover of Kabul. There is simply no American interest in that region anymore, and as far as India is concerned, the interest is only in opposing China. The US government wants Indian troops as allies in a strategy to encircle Beijing, but it doesn't want to help New Delhi in its ambitions in Kashmir.

In this scenario, it is possible for the Indian government to see the mistake of engaging in US-led strategies. Washington acts in Asia as a foreign power, not concerned with regional problems. For the US government, it does not matter whether or not there will be violence in Kashmir, as long as there is a siege against China. Indeed, India is alone in this issue.

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**Lucas Leiroz** is a research fellow in international law at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

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