



## PERSPECTIVES

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### The Taliban Victory as a Victory of Faith

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The American defeat in Afghanistan will have a direct impact on Israel. Like the pseudo-government foisted by the Americans on Kabul, which, despite massive investment, proved a broken reed, the PA and its security mechanisms will collapse in time against its Islamist adversaries, notably Hamas. For all its overwhelming material and technological superiority, the IDF stands no chance of defeating Israel's Islamist enemies unless its soldiers are driven by a relentless belief in the national cause.

To understand the last 40 years of the Islamic struggle in Afghanistan, it is worth looking at the legacy of Abdullah Azzam. Born in a small village near Jenin in 1941, he moved to Jordan after the fall of the West Bank during the Six-Day War. While there, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood and participated in activities of Palestinian terrorist organizations against Israel. He eventually went to Afghanistan, where he was a major factor in helping the *mujahideen* repel the Soviets. An inspirational figure and a mentor of Osama bin Laden, Azzam would come to lead thousands of volunteers from across the Islamic world as they fought in Afghanistan, earning the title the "father of global jihad." Azzam was assassinated with his two sons in Peshawar in November 1989.

Unlike the leaders of the pan-Arab movement, from Gamal Abdul Nasser to Hafez Assad to Saddam Hussein, who failed to unite the "Arab nation" on behalf of a common struggle, Azzam managed to bring together large numbers of Muslims from different countries, clans, and tribes to participate in a "holy war" — a jihad — for the first time in the modern era.

Azzam explained his vision in simple terms:

We will fight and defeat our enemies and establish an Islamic state on a piece of land in Afghanistan ... Jihad will spread and Islam will fight elsewhere. Islam will fight the Jews in Palestine and establish an Islamic state in Palestine and elsewhere. These countries will then be united into one Islamic State.

Echoing the prophet Muhammad's key message in his farewell address ("I was ordered to fight all men until they say 'There is no god but Allah'"), Azzam viewed the fighting in Afghanistan as the starting point for a global jihad, the ultimate goal of which was the establishment of a worldwide "Islamic Nation" (or *umma*). To him, the struggle in Afghanistan was a strategic opportunity for a reconnection between the religion and the military and political spheres that characterized Islam from its inception, and which were cut short with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after WWI and the abolition of the caliphate. Azzam believed achievements on the battlefield could entice millions of believers into participation in the global jihad.

When President Joe Biden expressed his confidence in the stability of the regime in Afghanistan by pointing out that "the Afghan army has 300,000 well-equipped soldiers ... and they also have an air force. In contrast, the Taliban has only 75,000 soldiers," he made clear that he has no understanding of this reality. The victory of the Taliban over the US in Afghanistan is a lesson for the world on the tremendous capacity of spiritual strength and faith to win protracted conflicts against far superior enemies.

In the first years of the war, the Americans had overwhelming superiority over the Taliban and inflicted many severe defeats upon it. But by virtue of their religious faith, the Taliban fighters were able to withstand those defeats. They believed in what is known in the Islamic faith as the "stage of weakness" (Rahlat al-Istidaf), which requires patiently biding one's time in anticipation of opportunities. Their faith thus served as a strategy enabling them to cope with what might be a long wait.

The Americans, on the other hand, could not bear the burden of a protracted struggle without a solution in the foreseeable future. On a deeper level, they discounted the religious roots of the conflict, which are expressed, among other things, in the rejection of the message of Western-American prosperity. As Mordechai Kedar put it, "August 15, 2021 will forever be remembered in the Islamic world as the victory of Islam over Christianity, the victory of faith over heresy, and the victory of tradition over permissiveness... These events are pumping new blood into jihad arteries and the results are being seen around the world, including in Israel."

Indeed, the American defeat will have a direct impact on Israel. Like the pseudo-government foisted by the Americans on Afghanistan, which, despite massive investment, turned out to be useless against the forces of jihad, the PA administration and its security forces will collapse in time against its Islamist adversaries, notably Hamas. Its overwhelming material and technological superiority notwithstanding, the IDF stands no chance of defeating Israel's Islamist enemies unless its soldiers are driven by a relentless belief in the national cause.

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