



# Limited Repercussions:

## Implications of the Emergence of Afghan-US Armored Vehicles in Tehran

Future Briefs

Issue 592, 15 Sep 2021

On Wednesday, September 1, Afghan media published pictures of a number of US Humvee tanks and military vehicles affiliated with the Afghan government, transported by an Iranian army truck from Afghanistan to Iran. This came in conjunction with the publication of pictures of US-made armored vehicles in Iran on another Afghan Telegram channel. The vehicles were in the possession of the dissolved Afghan government.

No further details were mentioned about the type and quantity of vehicles and equipment transferred to Iran. Iranian officials have not yet commented on these reports. The total value of US military equipment in Afghanistan over the last two decades is estimated at USD 24 billion, while the actual value of the equipment in Taliban's possession may be much less than that.

### Various Implications

It is unclear whether Iran has captured US armored vehicles from the Taliban directly, or this was through its Shi'ite militia affiliates within Afghanistan. Even if Iran manages to seize these weapons from the Taliban, which is likely to happen, the implications of this can be summarized as follows:

**1- Common pragmatic interests:** Tehran established communication channel with the Taliban since late 2015 and early 2016, when the emergence

of ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) posed a security threat to Iran. Iran sought to confront that emerging threat by allying with the Taliban. A Taliban spokesperson acknowledged this relationship in July 2016, when he asserted that the Taliban had "established new relations with Tehran".

Iran publicly admitted its relations with the Taliban in late 2018, when they held their first joint public talks. However, Tehran confirmed then that the Afghan government was aware of these discussions, and that the aim of these meetings was to address security problems without specifying their nature.

Meanwhile, Tehran provided military support to the Taliban in their fight against the Afghan government backed by the US military, providing them with light weapons and anti-armor missiles, in addition to training the Taliban militants on Iranian soil.

In January 2021, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Former

Limited Repercussions: Implications of the Emergence of Afghan-US Armored Vehicles in Tehran. Future Briefs, Issue 592, 15 Sep 2021, Abu Dhabi, Future for Advanced Research & Studies.



Iranian Foreign Minister, and the Head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, met a delegation from the movement. Furthermore, Tehran hosted officials from the Taliban and the Afghan government on July 7.

It seems that the Iranian government was seeking to open channels of communication with all parties in Afghanistan, pending the outcome of the developments of the conflicts. With the Taliban seizing full control of Afghanistan, Tehran sought to take advantage of this development, by obtaining US armored vehicles from the Taliban, in exchange for Iran's approval of the Taliban's request to resume the export of oil to Afghanistan.

**2- Iranian media tactic:** It seems that Iran deliberately leaked these photos and scenes about the transfer of US equipment from Afghanistan to it, which was evident in the public appearance of these armored vehicles in the streets of Tehran. Iran could have simply covered the transfer of these weapons, as is the case usually when transferring military equipment to the Lebanese Hezbollah, or the export of weapons to the Houthis in Yemen. However, this intentionality reflects Tehran's insistence on utilizing these scenes as a media tactic to achieve a number of propaganda goals, as per the following:

**A- Confirming Tehran's Influence:** Tehran aims to send a message to Washington and the regional stakeholders that it has gained influence in Afghanistan, and that it has transcended the previously tense relations with the Taliban, specifically after the latter executed Iranian diplomats in 1998 in Mazar-i-Sharif.

**B- Embarrassing the US administration:** Tehran seeks to embarrass Washington, and is attempting to exploit the pressure exerted on Biden because of his mismanagement of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, by portraying that Iran managed to seize the equipment that Washington left behind.

Republicans have already begun to take advantage of this by overestimating the size and value of the weapons Washington left behind. Former US President Donald Trump wrote, in a statement last August 31, that "ALL EQUIPMENT should be demanded to be immediately returned to the United States, and

that includes every penny of the USD 85 billion dollars in cost".

He added saying, "If it is not handed back, we should either go in with unequivocal Military force and get it, or at least bomb the hell out of it. Nobody ever thought such stupidity, as this feeble-brained withdrawal, was possible!"

## Limited Repercussions

Despite what appears to be Tehran's gains from Washington's withdrawal from Afghanistan, recent developments and Iran's seizure of US weapons reveal a number of facts, which can be outlined as follows:

**1- Weapon Devaluation:** General Kenneth McKenzie, Head of USCENTCOM, confirmed in August that prior to leaving Kabul airport, the military had "disarmed" 70 MRABs, 27 Humvees, and 73 aircraft. He stressed that those planes will not fly again, and that "no one will be able to operate them".

During the final days of the withdrawal, the US balanced between loading and destroying equipment. Some equipment was taken on flights, disarmed at the airport or destroyed within controlled explosions. The disarmed pieces left at the airport were either "very large" or old.

A number of Cessna 208 and even other weapons, which were in the Afghan bases, found their way to neighboring countries. A total of 62 Afghan Air Force helicopters and aircraft were reported to be transferred from the bases of Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in August, along with 685 Afghan army officers who were granted asylum in the two countries.

**2- The Taliban's establishing a state:** The Taliban seeks to establish a new state in Afghanistan under its government, which implies establishing pragmatic relations with all countries, as well as rebuilding its security and military forces, and providing services to the Afghan people. This means that the Taliban will need to act with the mindset of the state and develop its armed forces, which represents a constraint on the Taliban's rushing to relinquish their valuable military equipment to Iran.



Meanwhile, the Taliban is well aware that any attempts to antagonize Washington will incur losses, whether in terms of the reluctance of many countries to recognize the government that the movement will form, or the freezing of Afghan cash reserves in US banks. Furthermore, Afghanistan is still dependent on aid and foreign support, which is considered an additional pressure card that Washington may use against the movement.

**3- Persistent Iranian concerns:** Despite Tehran's keenness to emphasize that it is capable of forging alliances with the Taliban, many circles within Iran are still concerned about the Taliban's actions, and are still evaluating their attitude.

On July 10, the Iranian Kayhan newspaper asserted that Iran will not accept any threat to its borders, referring to threats emanating from the Taliban. Also, some elements belonging to the "Fatemiyoun" mi-

litia, formed by Iran from the Afghan Shiites, have expressed their readiness to fight the Taliban, but then went back and denied these statements, which indicates that Tehran is still in a phase of testing its relations with the Taliban.

In conclusion, it can be noted that Tehran will continue to enhance its relations with the Taliban, which is evident in keeping its embassy in Kabul and its consulate in Herat open after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, and despite the concerns about the future policies of the Taliban.

On the other hand, Iran will strive to provide material incentives to the Taliban, particularly as it may seek to provide Afghanistan with its oil and gas needs, even if, based on the worst scenario, Kabul is subjected to US sanctions, specifically with Iran still being burdened with US sanctions as well.


---

Moreover, Iran's military gains from Afghanistan will not be significant, nor will they be the first, as the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq had previously used US weapons and armor in their war against Daesh in 2014.


---

## ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

 [www.futureuae.com](http://www.futureuae.com)

 Tel: +971 24444513

 P.O Box. 111414 Abu Dhabi