

Evolving Geopolitical Dynamics of Afghanistan: Implications for Enduring Peace

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Abstract

The road to peace and stability in Afghanistan is long and is full of uncertainty. The efforts to bring peace to this worn-torn country started with the Bonn Agreement which has laid the foundation for a 'New State' of Afghanistan finally culminated in February 2020. Potentially putting an end to the longest-ever civil war in Afghanistan. However, the feasibility of such an arrangement is doubtful due to the complexity and entanglement of the regional security situation and the existence of multiple issues that involve lack of shared role and responsibility. Issues of trust deficit, mutual misapprehension, and rigid approach of almost all the stakeholders are fundamental challenges for bringing perpetual stability in Afghanistan. This article examines all these core issues that act as stumbling blocks in the way to bring back peace in Afghanistan. The article has further explored the changing contours navigating Indian's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and decide its *fait accompli* post the withdrawal of the United States.

Keywords: Geo-political, Geo-strategic, Peace, Strategic depth, Pashtunistan, Taliban, withdrawal.

Introduction

Ever since the Taliban seized control of Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan has been ecstatic that due to the changed power dynamics in Afghanistan, it now has the strategic advantage because it can use its considerable influence over the new Taliban administration whom Pakistan called natural ally, to accomplish its long-term objective of having strategic depth against India. However, Pakistan's security is also significantly affected by the shifting geo-political and geo-strategic power dynamics in Afghanistan, and the country is starting to experience the disruptive effects of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan as it spreads across the Afghan border. The Taliban's victory has rejuvenated terrorist organisations fighting a violent insurgency within Pakistan as well as hard-line religious parties working to reshape Pakistan into a more fundamentalist Islamist country. As a result of this situation, the Pakistani military establishment, which has worked to strategically exploit and prudently regulate the country's volatile surge in religious vehemence since the late 1970s, is now faced with a new security dilemma. Over the years the prospects of strategic alignments between both the countries have given to worsening relations and open hostility (Shekhawat & Safi, 2026).

Ever since the Taliban reclaimed the authority over Afghanistan the country has been trapped in a political stalemate. Regional and Western stakeholders are unable to reach a consensus on how to address the Taliban incongruity? The United States (US) and its allies are urging the Taliban to eliminate the restrictions they have imposed on women's rights and the establishment of an inclusive administration, as per the Doha Peace talks of February 29, 2020. After seizing power, Taliban have reserved the authority

to exclude rival political leaders being involved in the government. So, Afghanistan is presently caught in stalemate where the Taliban has no realistic solution to escape its pariah status, avoid sanctions, and become a member of the United Nations. On one hand, the Taliban disallowed any concessions that may weaken their position among their core supporter and compromise their ethical values. On the other hand, the Western leaders contend that accrediting ambassadors from a regime that blatantly discriminates against women would contradict their own ideals and have negative political consequences. The notion of engaging a US envoy to Kabul continues to be a contentious proposition in Washington, and the Biden administration has chosen not to pursue it. The process of granting formal diplomatic recognition to the Taliban may take years, if it will happen. These years must not be wasted. The imposition of sanctions, freezing of asset, and other economic restrictions, which have resulted in the isolation of Afghanistan, have severely stalled its prospects of recovering from an economic catastrophe which has been recognised by the United Nations as the worst humanitarian calamity in the world for the past two years (Smith & Bahiss, 2024).

The Doha Peace deal between the US and the Taliban led to the realisation of key foreign policy objectives of President Donald Trump to bring back home all the US troops from Afghanistan. Whereas, the purpose for Taliban to enter such a deal was enable the speedy withdrawal of US troops out of Afghanistan and to gain control over Kabul. The peace deal had been an exultation for the Taliban who considered the regime of Ashraf Ghani a puppet in the hands of America while claiming to be the country's sole legitimate political leaders (Jafferlot and Jumle, 2020). Besides the so-called Peace deal intended for bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan included a timeline for the conditional withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and to bring an end to US longest ever 18 years of civil war in Afghanistan. It was merely a pre-arrangement to bring the Taliban and the Afghan government to the negotiating table. The core theme of this deal included Afghan peace talks and the Taliban's commitment not to support terrorism in Afghanistan, withdrawal of all US led troops from Afghanistan in a phased manner within a period of 14 months, release the 50000 Taliban prisoners in exchange for thousands of Afghan security forces prisoners. Further, it is also decided that the US will lift all the sanctions imposed against the Taliban. While the US cautions to come back and strike with an unprecedented force if anything bad happens in Afghanistan (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan & United States of America, 2020). However, Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating the return of the Taliban to the negotiating table, highlighting once again the significance of Pakistan in determining the situation in Afghanistan. Such prominence of Pakistan signified a grave threat to India's interests in Afghanistan, jeopardising \$3 billion investment in Afghanistan.

Factors that are Inevitable for the Establishment of Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

However, when it comes to the establishment of eternal peace in Afghanistan certain historical factors are inevitable which needed be resolved. Unless these issues are pondered upon Afghanistan continues to haunt for peace and stability. Those issues are:

The bilateral Issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan:

It is a well-established fact that no enduring solution for predicament of Afghanistan is possible without active cooperation of Pakistan, as their bilateral relations have been significantly influenced by various geopolitical and geostrategic factors. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are contagious neighbors and have enormous implications for each other's security and stability (Ian, 1953, 108). Despite sharing common

cultural ties and faith their relationship continued to be dominated by mutual hostility, and a deep sense of suspicion. Afghanistan was the only country to vote against the Pakistan at United Nations due to the issue of Durand Line and the consequent Pashtun issue that continued to remain as the core area of conflict between these two neighbours until the late 1980s. Later, these issues were overshadowed by the Taliban insurgency. Afghanistan continues to blame Pakistan for interfering in its internal affairs Afghanistan by actively supporting the Taliban who could not have survived and later evolved into an unconquerable force, without the help of Pakistani deep state. However, Islamabad has always denied any kind of involvement in the destabilisation of Afghanistan while also arguing that its legitimate interests are not being appropriately addressed, as border area with Afghanistan has severe implication for Pakistan's national security (Grare, 2006, 3-5).

Territorial Dispute regarding the Durand Line

The Durand Line which characterizes the approx. 2450 km border between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Raikar, 1998). It was created by Britishers for safeguarding against a potential Russian attack. This pact also aligned with Britain's tactic of dividing and controlling to suppress the growing Pashtun nationalism in the region. Ever since its establishment in 1893 Durand Line has remained a source of continued conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as this border delineated the Pashtun-inhabited area, causing a division among people who shared the same culture and ethnicity and did not align themselves with either side (Abbas, 2014). Afghanistan has always maintained that the 1947 referendum was not fair as it did not satisfy the claim of right to self-determination of Pashtuns because the significant part of Pashtun community boycotted the referendum and it was a unilateral step taken without the consent of Afghanistan. Afghanistan further augured that the Durand Line is not a legitimate border as Pakistan was not the successor state of British India but carved out of it. So whatever treaty rights existed was, therefore, cease to exist. The legitimacy of agreement regarding the legal status of Duand Line, which is often regarded as sacrosanct by Western nations, has been called into doubt due to specific clauses of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) (VCLT). Afghanistan invoked Article 51 and 52 of the VCLT to assert that the agreement, which was signed under pressure by the Amir Afghanistan. These actions, together with its one-sided termination of all agreements made with the British Indian authorities in 1949 and its disagreement to Pakistan's status as the successor state, raise significant inquiries about the relevance and retroactive effect of international law. Pakistan justifies its claim by citing four further agreements that were signed in 1905, 1919, 1921, and 1930 (Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations and the Durand Line: Why Is It Important? 2022).

However, irrespective of whosoever has come to power in Afghanistan including the Taliban Afghanistan has maintained their position that Durand Line lacks legal validity. Although the intensity varied from time to time. The new Taliban regime stated that "we have never acknowledged the legitimacy of the Durand Line and we will never do so. Considered the imposition of visa and passport regulations for travelling to Afghanistan as unacceptable by the Afghan people (Afghanistan Will Never Recognize Durand Line as Border: Stanikzai, 2024).

Current Pakistan -Taliban Dynamics

Pakistan's relationship with new Taliban administration, a long-standing ally appears to be growing more tense. Islamabad blamed Kabul of being responsible for a series of deadly attacks in Pakistan's tribal area that shares border with Afghanistan, in violation of 2020 Doha Peace Agreement. Asserting that Taliban

has failed to adequately control the movement of armed groups across the porous border, and bowed act according to international law. Whereas, the Taliban denied the accusations made by Pakistan and expressed advised Pakistan of focusing on enhancing their country's security, rather than blaming Afghanistan for their own failure. Affirms its obligation to prevent the use of Afghan territory for hostile actions against Pakistan (Hussain, 2023).

However, the intensifying war of words reflects the worsening relations between the two countries, with Pakistan seeing a growing number of attacks on its law enforcement officers and civilians. Official data reveals that the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Bajaur, has had over 300 attacks in the year 2023 alone. Over 90 percent of attacks in recent years have been attributed to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP); also known as Pakistan Taliban. Established in 2007, TTP although functions independently have ideological affiliation with the Afghan Taliban. It wants the implementation of strict Islamic rules, the release of its members currently held by the government, and a reduction in the presence of the Pakistani military in some areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Notwithstanding the Taliban consistently denying any involvement in the attacks, due to which Pakistan believes that it is unlikely for the two neighbouring countries to have a friendly relationship in the near future, as they continue to indulge in blame game. The Bajaur incident further deteriorated the already strained relations between the two countries. Pakistan had anticipated the Taliban administration to take strong measures against the TTP. However, the Taliban's response has been lacking in firmness and determination. As, the TTP presented a specific dilemma for the Afghan Taliban because of their historical connections, common origins, and the support they get from certain Taliban members. Nevertheless, the prevailing circumstances forced Pakistan to look for a remedy. Pakistan is observed to be renewing its engagement with the US in order to address regional security challenges. Pakistan's army chief meeting with General Michael Erik Kurilla, the leader of the United States Central Command which Islamabad categorised as the engagement about the regional security situation and defence cooperation but the real motive behind such meeting believed is the significant challenge posed by the TTP a constant problem for Pakistan in terms of counter-terrorism efforts. Till now the US has regarded it as a localised matter. Regarding the issue of TTP the Taliban administration has explicitly held the Doha agreement did not address issues related to Pakistan and that TTP issue an internal matter of Pakistan (Taliban's ties with Pakistan fraying amid mounting security concerns (Hussain, 2023).

The escalation of tensions between the Pakistan-Afghanistan led to frequent closure of their border resulted into the halt of Trade operations at the at certain trading points seriously impacting the economy and lives of people. Contrary to expectations, the assumption that security would enhance following the Taliban's takeover and the collapse of the Western-supported government in Kabul has proven to be incorrect. Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, the security situation across borders has been unstable. The closures of border at Torkham escalated into violent confrontations, characterised by exchanges of gunfire between security personnel. Pakistan has conducted military operations against alleged terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan, further worsening their bilateral relations (Dawn.Com, 2024).

Strained Bilateral Relations between India and Pakistan

This has been found that the same pair of states which commonly refers to as Dyads are the source for the majority of violent territorial changes and low-intensity conflicts. Enduring rivalries are described by Zero-Sum Game perception where the states become deeply involved and consider each other as a serious threat to their security and territorial integrity, which is exemplified by the rivalry between these two

countries sharing contagious borders. Since 1947, both the countries have fought four wars, and there have been major terrorist attacks inside India sponsored by Pakistan. The hostility between them shows no sign of abatement (Sitaraman, 2015, 154-155). Among various bilateral disputes, the issue of Kashmir remains the core conflict between these two neighbours. Although the credit goes to Pakistan for Kashmir to remain a problem, as it allows the sentiment to triumph over the strategic thinking, in terms of emotions not based on realpolitik, continue to claim it be an unfinished agenda of the partition (Haqqani, 2016, 44) None of Pakistanis efforts have yielded it any substantive outcome, their fixation with India once called ‘obsession’ by US President Bush. For several decades both have engaged in spy games. Pakistan intelligence agency ISI perceives that Indian intelligence agency RAW caused the breaking up of its territory in 1971 and have similar ambitions in Balochistan, Sindh, and FATA area, which seems illogical for such misadventure in this era of both being a nuclear power. Both countries are caught up in a proxy war. India and the majority of the Western and Asian countries except few accuse Pakistan of using terrorism as an instrument for pursuing the policy of flexing muscle to advance its strategic goals against India and Afghanistan. However, Pakistan like always denies such allegations and argues that terrorists represent the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims oppressed by India (Haqqani, 2016, 46,77,111-113). Nevertheless, Pakistan’s foreign policy regarding India symbolizes with that of political paranoia, most of its fear centers around India indulging in a political conspiracy against Pakistan. The history between these countries explains the rigid approach of Pakistan to accept the changed reality. After a long time, Pakistan admitted supporting insurgency in Afghanistan due to security concerns about possible threats from India, this argument is ill-founded as India does not have an offensive policy towards Pakistan and nor the Afghan are willing to Indian conspiracy against Pakistan. Further, Pakistan has also lost all the Afghan goodwill which it had earned during the 1980s by supporting millions of Afghan refugees (Haqqani, 2016,189-190).

The India-Pakistan Strategic Competition in Afghanistan:

There is an extensive strategic competition between India and Pakistan for regional influence in Afghanistan. India endeavors to nurture Afghanistan as a natural partner and to safeguard against Islamic terrorists, including Pakistan based groups. On the other hand, Pakistan seeks to counter what he calls India and Afghanistan nexus to encircle and threaten its existence. In Afghanistan, Pakistan adopted the policy of supporting the militant groups including the Afghan Taliban while India relies on its soft power to pursue their mutually exclusive interest. The intentions and potential of each other are viewed as negative by both countries. Pakistan misinterprets India’s presence in Afghanistan and considers it a threat to its territorial integrity. Although, the correlation between Pakistan-Afghanistan and India was described as, “three countries caught in a deadly triangle of mutual mistrust and competition” by historian William Dalrymple, the prospects of this deadly triangle largely influenced by the nature US policy with regard to the Afghan peace process and the changes that took place in Kashmir. India has a three- interconnected objective in Afghanistan, to promote a stable democratic order, counter Pakistan influence, and prevent Islamabad backed terrorists (for instance Jaish-e-Mohammad which has attacked India many times in 2001, 2016 and 2019 besides several attacks in Kashmir) from using Afghanistan as a platform which could threaten Indian security. Since 2001, India has invested \$3 billion in economic assistance for supporting infrastructure and human resource development across multiple projects (Constantino & United States Institute of Peace, 2020, 1-4,6). Pakistan argued that they wanted a stable and peaceful Afghanistan for which they were doing everything in their capacity to deal with terrorism which is far from reality. Pakistani army General Ashfaq Kayani had stated that the Taliban in general or Haqqani

network in particular are the assets that Pakistan needs to keep to have a strong ally in Afghanistan when American and other international forces have left (Gall, 2014, 189). India's soft presence in Afghanistan is often viewed as Machiavellian. The three causal factors which guide India's Afghan policy are; firstly, to strike a balance between Kabul and Islamabad in a way that Afghanistan should not become too dependent on Pakistan which will not only compromise India's strategic interest but can also obstruct its access to Central Asia. Secondly, the continuously evolving international political pressure towards Afghanistan is critical in the light of India's desire to have multi-stakeholders and least dependence on Pakistan, and thirdly, Afghanistan's domestic politics, that is to manage its ties with different political factions that prioritizes India differently, for instance, New Delhi had more proximity with Kabul during the time of Karzai government and brief cold response from Ghani government, are mostly at confluence but can also be at odds with each other.

Both countries India and Pakistan followed divergent foreign policy towards Afghanistan. India's Afghan policy went through several big and small changes during the past few decades following the course of history. During the Cold War period, India's Afghan policy was similar to that of the Soviet Union and Iran and was anti-mujahedeen's and during the rule of the Taliban New Delhi supported the Northern Alliance an anti-Taliban alliance. Later India voluntarily stopped this partisan policy and engaged with most of the Afghan's political factions and shifts its focus from providing military support towards the soft sectors, such as war reconstruction and infrastructure development. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to blame India for destroying its western area via Afghanistan. By signing 2011, Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) India has pledged to support an Afghan-led peace process instead of getting embroiled in factional politics (Paliwal, 2017, 9-14).

Furthermore, the bold decision by the government of India to do away with the distinctive position enjoyed by the state of Jammu and Kashmir has enormous implications for the trilateral relationship between India-Pakistan, and Afghanistan. With the exit of US from Afghanistan, India fears about the nature of radicalism and terrorism in the region with the return of the Taliban in the power spheres might lead to the repeat of 1989, and Pakistan becoming aggressive concerning the issue of Kashmir. By taking direct command of Jammu and Kashmir can be seen as a pre-emptive move to thwart potential negative consequences from the developments unfolding in Afghanistan and US-Pakistan relations. Though, the success of this historic move will depend on New Delhi's capability to reassure the people of the region that the changes are not directed at negating their identity. Further, India will also need to demonstrate high levels of diplomatic skill to manage with a hostile reaction from Pakistan and the potential criticism from the international community including the Taliban (Mohan, 2019).

US Withdrawal and India:

Undeniably, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan drive a strategic shift in politics of South Asia by altering the power dynamics of the region, especially for India, largely when Pakistan has been used as a conduit to work out a peace deal with the Taliban, placing Islamabad in a strategically advantageous position vis-à-vis India. Regarding the future course of Afghanistan President Trump categorically stated that, "It is the time for someone else to do that work (fighting terrorist) and it will be the Taliban and it could be surrounding countries". To involve the neighboring countries to resolve the problems of Afghanistan does have implications for India. With the Taliban coming back to power, which not putting India's huge infrastructure investment into jeopardy but also losing a friendly government at Kabul. Worse, Pakistan coming back in the Afghan helm of affairs. The peace deal does not end the war but it

puts the burden of ending the violence on the Asian powers. It also compromises India's interest in Afghanistan which is to deny any opportunity for the return of the Taliban to the office and Indian assets in Afghanistan's neighboring countries such as the Chabahar port becoming redundant (Ahmadi & J. Singh, 2020).

For India, the newly emerging state of affairs is not only disturbing but also one that necessitates deep strategic thinking. Former India ambassador to Kabul Rakesh Sood held that, "India should not be in rush and let the situation unfold. While Pakistan can help to bring peace in Afghanistan but India remains the region's largest and indispensable development aid provider, which can be resumed once peace is re-established" (Basu, 2020)

India's major involvement in post-Taliban Afghanistan relied heavily on the security cover provided by the presence of the US; the return of Taliban to office in Kabul hurled a huge diplomatic challenge for India who has to find its place in the geopolitics of the region to protect its stakes in an extremely fragile situation in Afghanistan (Kumar, 2020). Moreover, whether India has been able to convert its political capital into strategic assets and value, the former Indian diplomat to Kabul, Gautam Mukhopadhyaya held that, "India intentionally did not play its strategic cards in Afghanistan. India has the potential of doing so, adding that India determined to support any efforts for bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan, even such initiative involves the talks. India will have to certainly start a dialogue with the Taliban, it also needs to be seen if the Taliban will be open to talking to them. However, the nature of the relationship between the Pakistan - Taliban and other militant groups in the region have huge implications for India. Although, the Taliban today is far more independent minimum under Pakistan's influence giving them far more say in dictating policies towards India such as those related to Kashmir, even towards Pakistan, while, still not in position to abandon the Pakistan (Kumar, 2020).

Regardless, of the fact during the Taliban's pursuit to capture power at Kabul India had been pushed into the margins of international diplomacy on Afghanistan. Similar to the circumstances that of 1990s, when India was kept out of crucial global forums on Afghanistan as it was considered a problem due to oppositions by Pakistan. India was also kept out of the crucial 6+2+1 meeting of the United Nations for Peace in Afghanistan. Neither the Ghani nor the US insisted on India's inclusion. India must realize that its Afghan policy needs to change (Katju, 2020). Besides, the public denouncement of the Taliban has made Indian position awkward. In addition, India's goodwill in Afghanistan has also suffered because due to controversy over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act putting a damage to the vast reservoir of goodwill which India enjoys in Afghanistan. Many Afghans have treated India as their second home, have felt left out of the move to offer fast track citizenship to only Afghan minorities, as much as they have by reports of anti-Muslim rhetoric and incidents of violence in India (Haidar, 2020).

Although, today India's foreign policy is more realistic than ever before, not to be dominant by anyone. On the Afghan question at this moment, India will have to debate its merit and assess the costs and benefits of different options. The option of involving militarily seems most unlikely as India doesn't have the potential for that kind of force protection, will also be completely vulnerable to direct or indirect targeting by Pakistan or terrorist groups in Afghanistan (South Asian Voices-Stimson Center, 2021). On the question of lasting peace in Afghanistan, Sood had cautioned that the conflict in Afghanistan will not end, because peace was never the real objective of the dialogues but intended at providing an excuse for the US forces to have a graceful withdraw from Afghanistan (India Today, 2020).

Following Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan like other countries India too severed all diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, just like in 1996 when Taliban for the first time captured the power. It was only after

the ousting of Taliban in 2001 as a result of the US-led war on terrorism against the al-Qaeda and their supporter the Taliban. India was able to reestablished its mission and acknowledged the newly formed state of Afghanistan under the Hamid Karzai. India provided substantial help and support to democratic Afghan administrations over a period of twenty years. However, the change regime of Afghanistan due to hostile takeover by the Taliban altered the geopolitical and geo-strategic dynamics of Afghanistan. New Delhi also expressed its opposition to the negotiations for a peace agreement between the US and the Taliban, due to concerns over the potential security risks and unfavorable regime. However, the new situation forced India to engage with new regime to avoid further damage to its interest. India's reluctance to cooperate with diplomats of previous regime highlight a change in the perception. Leading to the closure of Kabul permanent shutdown of its embassy in New Delhi. Nevertheless, India reestablished its embassy in Kabul within a year after the Taliban's resurgence, by deployed a group of specialised professionals to manage the mission. New Delhi has initiated informal dialogues with the Taliban, although not officially acknowledging the Taliban regime as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. In order to maintain its influence in Afghanistan, India has refrained from openly establishing diplomatic relations with the Taliban while also avoiding any actions that would distance itself from the group since it regained control (Kumar, 2023).

However, India's stance began to shift, when the Taliban's threats to the Afghan government intensified before to August 2021. The Taliban's assumption of power has certainly sparked worries about the possibility of increased Pakistani influence in the nation, which might potentially endanger Indian presence and interests. The assumptions were partially correct as there is evidence indicating that the Pakistani establishment has significant control over the Taliban. Indian intelligence saw the Haqqani branch of the Taliban as a surrogate for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. Relations between Pakistan and the Taliban have significantly deteriorated since the organisation regained control, particularly in recent months. Islamabad has accused Kabul for doing enough to prevent the anti-Pakistan armed groups (TTP) for undertaking attack in Pakistan. Their relations deteriorated further with Pakistan's recent decision to forcibly remove around 1.7 million Afghan refugees, claiming security concerns. This draws serious reaction from the Taliban regime who termed this step of Pakistan as an act of unreasonableness and humiliation. Simultaneously, India has been discreetly establishing contact with the Taliban. India continued its humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan by shipping substantial quantities of wheat to Afghanistan in collaboration with the Taliban administration, with the aim of alleviating the famine situation in the nation (Kumar, 2023).

Since the Taliban took over, the TTP has increased the number of cross-border terror attacks. Official hopes that a Taliban administration would assist Pakistan in stabilising and securing its western border have not materialise. The TTP is still based in Afghanistan and still launches its assaults from there. Due to this frustration Islamabad carried out an air strike on Afghanistan which Pakistani military claimed was targeted at base of terrorists attacking Pakistan. This attack was deadliest clash between both countries since Taliban came to power in 2021. Since then, the outbreak of violence along the border continues (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026).

Conclusion

After years of dramatic turnover of events finally the US and Taliban signed a peace deal to decide the fate of Afghanistan which has ushered the politics of Afghanistan into new dynamics to bring an end to the 18 years of Afghan civil war and for the establishment of peace and stability in the state of Afghanistan.

Though, Taliban's seizure of power in 2021 brought about significant changes in Afghanistan, but it did not alter the circumstances that result from its geo-political position. Due to the negative reputation of the Taliban, they encounter significant obstacles in establishing Afghanistan's position in the security framework and economic prospects of the area. The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan expressed serious concerns about the potential spillover of violence into their territories. The Taliban, who have been mostly isolated by Western forces, are seeking to establish stronger relationships worldwide.

While the majority of the international community is unsolicited towards the Taliban for their infringements on the rights of women and girls, countries in the vicinity of Afghanistan are engaging with the regime to fulfil their need for security and economic stability. Regional involvement is now restricted due to amalgamation of distrust and obstacles imposed by Western sanctions. The disruption in the relations between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries has a significant impact on the lives and economic activities in South and Central Asia. But the world has no options rather than to engage with the Taliban on matters of security and economy. Kabul and its neighbouring countries have obligation to actively find out prospects for enhancing trade, effectively counter transnational violence, as the failure has the potential to cause instability across a large region.

While all of the stakeholders acknowledge the need for communication with the Taliban administration. However, their involvement thus far has been restricted. Kabul and its neighbouring countries are facing difficulties in establishing a mutually agreed approach to address several shared concerns, including enhancing commerce, resolving water conflicts, and combating cross-border insurgency. Although it may be challenging, pursuing this attempt is important and Western capitals should not obstruct it. The Taliban's refusal to grant fundamental rights to Afghan women and girls and its enforcement of severe social regulations since reclaiming power in August 2021 has now hindered the possibility of the UN and other international organisations acknowledging their authority. Despite Western diplomats withdrawing from talks with the Taliban, regional actors continued to pursue more engagements with Kabul. The Taliban's treatment of women and girls, including the prohibition of girls' secondary and higher education, has been widely criticised.

However, experts firmly believe that the most effective approach to safeguard their nations' interests and influence the Taliban's conduct in the long run is through patient diplomacy with Kabul, rather than isolating them. However, the level of regional coordination has not met the expectations of several neighbouring countries in Afghanistan. The Taliban, however, rejected all efforts to persuade them to include old adversaries in the government. Consequently, most regional actors have opted for limited involvement with Kabul, focusing on individual matters as they arise. This method is in line with the Taliban's tendency for transactional ties that prevent foreign interference in Afghan affairs, although it is more out of necessity than intentional design.

Security issues are of utmost importance on the regional agenda. Following the Taliban's assumption of power, neighbouring countries of Afghanistan expressed concerns on the potential spillover of violence into areas such as Kashmir. Although, as of now these worries were found to be unsubstantiated; except in case of Pakistan where TTP's violence leading to a substantial escalation of hostilities in Pakistan. Due to this the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan reached to their lowest ever. Moreover, the Taliban have not established sufficient trust with their regional allies. To bridge this difference, it is necessary to establish a shared forum for debating regional security problems and a unified strategy for tackling challenges. Enhanced border management, definition of Afghanistan's challenging boundaries would be advantageous for all parties involved. China, India, and Russia, as regional powers, have also examined

the option of involvement to address concerns and assist their allies in managing any potential overflow from Afghanistan. However, with regard to India, the new situation of Afghanistan has enormous implications for its geo-political interest in the region. Though, India has been left with limited strategic options in the post US-withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nevertheless, India's foreign towards Afghanistan experienced a shift. On the question of Afghanistan, India deliberates its strategy on the bases of merit and assess the costs and benefits of different options. Today India's foreign policy is more realistic than ever before, not to be dominant by anyone. Taliban also acknowledges the positive contribution made by India and continues to see it as an important partner for the better future of Afghanistan. In addition, the deteriorating of relations between the Taliban and Pakistan also has benefited India's strategy.

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