



Redefining India -Afghanistan Relation In Taliban Era

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Abstract:

This article aims to analyse India's post-9/11 foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The 9/11 attacks heralded a new era in world politics, but the US-led military involvement that followed in Afghanistan gave India a much-needed chance to rebuild diplomatic relations with Kabul. Since then, India has maintained a cautious position towards Afghanistan by depending more on assistance-driven foreign policy measures than on military intervention in the country's destabilised environment. However, given that India had to close its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan in August 2021 when the Taliban reclaimed control of the nation, the issue still remains as to the extent to which India has been able to carve out a strategic space for itself in Afghanistan. Or, has India's strategy relied too heavily on soft power, preventing it from taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the fall of the Taliban government in late 2001?

Introduction:

After fighting a twenty-year insurgency, the Taliban, an overwhelmingly Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist party, regained control of Afghanistan in 2021. Less than ten years after the U.S.-led invasion that overthrew the previous government in 2001, the Taliban regrouped in Pakistan and started retaking territory. The Taliban had taken back control by August 2021. They launched a quick onslaught as the United States began to withdraw its final soldiers from Afghanistan in accordance with a 2020 peace deal with the group.

Even though they promised to preserve the rights of women and communities of religious and racial minorities, the Taliban have imposed a strict interpretation of Sharia law. The Taliban have struggled to give Afghans sufficient food supplies and economic possibilities as they have evolved from an insurgent group to a functioning government.

The Taliban pose a threat to the civil and political rights of Afghans, which are enshrined in the constitution drafted by the government with U.S. support. The Taliban have acted in a manner reminiscent of their ruthless rule in the late 1990s since regaining power. Many abuses of human rights have been recorded by the UN mission in Afghanistan. More than 200 news outlets have

closed as a result of Taliban intimidation of journalists and restrictions on press freedoms. Protesters and activists have been tracked and forcibly vanished, and their government has ruthlessly suppressed protests. They also reinstated the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which was previously in place and enforced laws against actions judged to be contrary to Islam. They instructed judges to apply their interpretation of sharia in November 2022; in the weeks that followed, authorities resumed public hangings and floggings.

Women's rights have been completely destroyed. Most girls are not allowed to attend secondary education, all women are not allowed to enroll in or teach at colleges, and women are not allowed to work due to restrictions imposed by the Taliban. The group forbade women from working for local and international voluntary groups in December 2022. (NGOs). According to estimates from the UN Development Program (UNDP), limiting women's employment might cost Afghanistan's GDP up to 5%. (GDP). According to Amnesty International, there has been a sharp rise in the number of women detained for disobeying discriminatory laws, such as those requiring women to wear full body coverings and to only appear in public with male chaperones. Moreover, the number of child marriages has increased.

According to the UNDP, improvements in Afghans' living conditions made during the 20 years following the U.S. invasion have also been undone by the Taliban's rule. The organisation claimed that practically all Afghans were living in poverty in a report from October 2022. Since the takeover, the economy has contracted by up to 30%, and there have been an estimated 700,000 job losses. Almost 90% of the population has experienced some kind of food insecurity. A halt in help from several nations and international organisations, which had been the lifeblood of the economy and public health sector, is aggravating the issue. At the same time, fighting between Taliban insurgents and American and Afghan government forces came to a stop with the seizure. The general security situation in the nation has improved, and the number of civilian casualties has decreased. The terrorist organisation known as the Islamic State in Khorasan has upped its attacks on civilians across the nation, but violence is still pervasive.

Methodology And Theoretical Framework

This essay uses a qualitative method to examine how India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has changed through time. It aims to investigate how India's Afghan policy changed and what internal, structural, and personal causes motivated that transition. To explain how evolution happened.

The paper uses both primary and secondary sources of information to examine India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Primary sources include statements made by members of ruling regimes in each of these countries, the text of signed treaties, and official communiqués released by governments. Scholarly publications, editorials, and news stories that widely address the topic of Indo-Afghan relations are notable examples of secondary sources. The development of ties between India and Afghanistan has been studied in the context of the neo-realist theory of international relations.

An outline of Afghanistan's war's history:

Afghanistan has endured a protracted battle for nearly 40 years. Over this time, the fundamental factors driving the conflict in Afghanistan have changed. The expansionist Soviet Union and the Afghans found themselves at odds during the early years of the unrest. The growth of Islamic

militancy, whose consequences have extended outside of Afghanistan, has been largely blamed for the recent period of bloodshed. Due to Afghanistan's strategic location at the intersection of South, Southwest, and Central Asia, the conflict there has gradually spread throughout the region. The rise in Islamic extremism in and around Afghanistan, however, has been the most important and detrimental of these results, endangering the peace and stability of the entire area. The conflict in Afghanistan is notable for "exporting" Islamic fanaticism to its neighbours in South Asia (Pakistan and Xinjiang, China), as well as Central Asia (Uzbekistan).

In addition to contributing to the country's unrest and turmoil, Afghanistan's regional neighbours' opposing interests in the country have surely hindered efforts to bring about a lasting peace in the country. In addition to suffering from competition among the major colonial powers in the past, Afghanistan has recently been the target of rivalry among its regional neighbours (British and Tsarist Russia). Because of a combination of these reasons, Afghanistan has found it challenging to write the contemporary chapter of its history free from intervention from either regional or international hegemons. The patron-client relationship that Afghan political and ethnic factions had with outside powers always gave the Afghan problem a worldwide dimension, and outside meddling usually resulted in an escalation of the violence there. From the perspective of Al Qaeda's 9/11 assaults on the United States, the ongoing combat in Afghanistan can be examined. The assaults turned the previously unrest within Afghanistan into a serious security worry for the entire globe, notably the West led by the United States, which was explicitly identified by the leadership of Al-Qaeda as its principal enemy. Prior to September 11th, the Taliban's emergence had also caused anxiety in the West, but these worries remained contained to Afghanistan's borders due to the Taliban's fundamentalist outlook and appalling attitude towards women. The Taliban regime's growing ties to Al-Qaeda, whose terrorist plans extended beyond the borders of Afghanistan, as evidenced by the horrific September 11 attacks, are what made it a pariah for the West. The attacks changed the course of the US-led Global War on Terror in that Afghanistan assumed a central role in its development. This is the precise time when Pakistan's influence over Afghanistan increased. The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks forced Pakistan to emerge as a frontline state and a significant non-NATO ally of the United States in Afghanistan, despite the fact that Pakistan had been intricately involved in Afghanistan's domestic politics since the days of a popular uprising against Soviet-sponsored communist regimes. At the time, it was widely believed that winning Pakistan's cooperation was essential to protecting Afghanistan from the Taliban-al Qaeda alliance. The official stance of Pakistan's government was that it had renounced its support for the Taliban and would work with the US to guide Afghanistan into a democratic and prosperous period. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now inescapable to draw the conclusion that Pakistan has contributed equally to both the issue and the solution. Pakistan's approach to helping the US combat the terrorist threat coming from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region has remained, at best, selective. The conflict in Afghanistan has dragged on because Pakistan refused to follow a standardised and unified anti-terrorist approach. The main reason for Afghanistan's never-ending conflict was Pakistan's unwillingness to stop the Taliban-led insurgency, which made the US-led fight there appear impotent and pointless.

Pakistan's security establishment, which regards Afghanistan as Pakistan's strategic backyard and considered the Taliban to be an ideal asset to regain control of it, has held the Afghan campaign's success hostage for the entire time. It became clear to the United States and its

NATO allies that trying to defeat the Taliban and Al-Qaeda without winning Pakistan's support for the cause was a fruitless exercise that focused on treating the symptoms of the problem of terrorism (in Afghanistan) and leaving the cause and source of disease intact (in Pakistan). As a result, the United States and its NATO allies were left with no choice but to announce a withdrawal timetable. As a result, the Afghan conflict has not yet been fully settled. In 2021, the United States and its friends in the west essentially abandoned Afghanistan, but the nation is still faced with many daunting obstacles. They include: a precarious security situation, excessive reliance on foreign aid, poor economic growth, expanding social and ethnic divides, and most critically, a fundamentalist dictatorship currently in power. All of these difficulties suggest that Afghanistan will have a difficult time maintaining its status as a peaceful and stable nation. No one can dispute the real progress Afghanistan made while a US-led force was there, but it is believed that the Taliban's return as the de facto government may pave the way for these gains to be undone. If such a circumstance occurs, Afghanistan may revert to the instability and disorder that prevailed under the previous Taliban government and the years before the civil war.

India And Taliban:

The Indian government committed Rs. 200 crores in aid to Afghanistan in its 2023 budget in February. It was a sign of how far India's involvement with the Taliban has come, despite the fact that New Delhi has not yet formally recognised the Kabul government. The posture India had during the Taliban's previous rule from 1996 to 2001, when the regime was destroyed by an American-led military coalition, is glaringly different from the current one. The Taliban retook power in Afghanistan when the American military withdrew in August of last year and the Afghan government was overthrown, casting doubt on India's diplomatic posture. But since then, India has taken a few babies moves in the direction of developing a cooperative relationship with the Taliban government in Afghanistan. This evolution might have been influenced by a mix of geopolitical and strategic considerations. India maintains a sizable diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and has always had a close relationship with the country due to historical and cultural links. This connection has also sought to circumvent Pakistan.

From 1996 to 2001, India did not maintain a diplomatic mission in Afghanistan and did not recognise the country's first Taliban administration, which came to power in that year. Instead of engaging with Taliban leaders, New Delhi supported the anti-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. India provided support and development funding to Kabul's succeeding governments after the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which resulted in the Taliban's defeat. According to information on the South Asian Terrorism Portal, the Taliban's comeback starting in 2003 increased attacks against India and its projects in Afghanistan. While Indian employees and workers on various projects were being kidnapped or slain, the Indian consulate was repeatedly targeted.

The position of India:

In the midst of these geopolitical changes, India must contend with an Afghan government run by the Taliban. India's stance may have changed as a result of Pakistan's internal unrest and the reduced influence of the United States and Russia in the area. India had already reached out to Taliban leaders through discreet interactions. The Indian ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, was urged to meet with the Taliban's head of political affairs, Sher Mohammad Abbas

Stanekzai, in Doha in August 2021, according to the Union Ministry of Foreign Affairs. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval stated in May of last year that India's approach to Afghanistan would be based on its particular experience of collaboration with the Afghan people. Taliban leaders were met by Indian diplomats in Kabul on June 2, 2022. India reopened its embassy in Kabul on June 23 a few weeks later to organise humanitarian aid. Suhail Shaheen, a Taliban spokesman, had stated last year that the Taliban's leadership in Kabul was prepared to give the Indian embassy a "safe atmosphere."

In August, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the Taliban's foreign ministry spokesman, wrote on Twitter: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan welcomes India's step to upgrade its diplomatic representation in Kabul. Besides ensuring security, we will pay close attention to the immunity of the diplomats and cooperate well in endeavors."

Conclusion:

India has had a stable, functioning government at a time of political and economic unrest in other South Asian nations, making it of major importance to the Taliban. India has gained some support from certain Afghani populations through its investments, which may benefit the Taliban as well.

Afghanistan's strategic location, which provides access to land links with Central Asia, advantages Nigeria significantly as well. The Haqqani network, for example, is one of the terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan with support from Pakistan and that has targeted India. The goal of New Delhi's talks with the Taliban could be to prevent Pakistan from building a pro-Pakistan government in Afghanistan and to dissuade extremist and other terrorist groups from organising attacks against India.

India needs to be cautious about getting caught between two hostile neighbours given the growing threat posed by China. Given China's passivity and largely silent stance regarding the Taliban, it is likely that Pakistan will play a part in determining China's policy in Afghanistan. In the Afghanistan of today, the Taliban exist. In order for a peace process to be truly significant, New Delhi must actively participate. Otherwise, it faces the danger of losing ground in this crucial area.

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