



Post-2021 situation in Afghanistan: Implications on Regional Security



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Abstract: *The circumstances in Afghanistan beyond 2021 will have a significant impact on the dynamics of regional security. After foreign forces left Afghanistan, the Taliban took over and the country saw a dramatic political upheaval. Concerns have been expressed by neighboring nations and others over this change in power. The dynamic circumstances present obstacles to the stability of the area, with possible ramifications for commerce, security, and geopolitics. A difficult security environment has resulted from worries of rising terrorism sparked by the Taliban's comeback. As a result of regional powers reassessing their approaches to deal with the shifting circumstances, alliances, and diplomatic relations are becoming less secure. A cooperative regional strategy is required to address common security issues and advance stability in light of the current circumstances. In the post-2021 Afghan environment, fostering a safe and prosperous future requires balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders while navigating the complex geopolitical terrain.*

Key Words: Taliban, Regional Security, Humanitarian Crisis, International Response, Human Rights

Introduction

For decades, the gateway of Asia has been caught up in a mixture of religious fervor, national aspirations, historical and economic grievances, status quo conundrum, territorial rivalries, foreign invasion, and geo-strategic enmities (Hussaini, 2021). Subsequently, Afghanistan has stayed a less homogenous state and a more montage of feuding ethnicities and warring tribes bound by strings of self-interest and foreign subservience (Khan & Ali, 2021). The predetermined US withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, ended the two decades-long futile war; followed by the safe evacuation of

American citizens, US diplomats, and military force on August 30, 2021. Afterward, with the pace Taliban entered Kabul and took over the entire country shocked many in the US and Afghanistan (Bobkin, 2022).

After the US withdrawal, Afghanistan was declared a "free country" by the current regime and pledged cordial relations with the West, though many question the creditability and accuracy of this initiation as the West recalls the brute governance of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001. With Post US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the socio-economic situation in the country remains tense and causes serious

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concerns as the Taliban have suppressed organized political activities and free speech in the backdrop of establishing a formal government. The government in Afghanistan is presently governed by a UN-sanctioned group of 33 mullahs group for terrorist activities. Taliban have prioritized political recognition of their government and forming cordial diplomatic relations with other countries as their top-most agendas in the backdrop of addressing economic issues (Pop & Onel, [2023](#)).

Though, the Taliban government awaits political recognition; China and Russia's pragmatic foreign policy does not please the US as the West believes that the regional powers are trying to increase their influence in Afghanistan and undermine the remaining leverage the US has after its withdrawal which limits Americans' chances to build a new Afghanistan. But building a new Afghanistan with strong institutional capacity backed by a strong Afghan National Army (ANA) remains a dream for the West as the successive US governments lack policy consensus about Afghanistan such as President Trump's South Asia policy prioritizes hard power (improving combat capacity of Afghan National Army) over soft power (investing in institutional building) of the country. The lack of interest by the international community to help push forward institutional building resulted in massive security concerns for Afghanistan as a dysfunctional army and self-serving governance based on politicking and corruption rather than focusing on the country's core interest remains a defining characteristic of the Western-backed Kabul government during the two-decade-long foreign presence in Afghanistan (Miller, [2022](#)).

The resurgence of the Taliban after a 20-year war with the world most strongest and developed military machine has raised serious questions about the present and immediate future security concerns of neighboring countries in general and regional stability in particular.

Biden's Afghan Gamble Exodus the US Competence Narrative

While giving the structural explanations, the US' elected representatives and academicians pointed out varying reasons for the US withdrawal from

Afghanistan but none of those explanations are connected with President Biden's arrival at the White House such as bipartisan consensus between political parties. The prevailing view is that bipartisan consensus between Democrats and Republicans stimulated the US troops to withdraw from Afghanistan. The leaders of both Democrats and Republicans decided to withdraw from Heart of Asia despite losing a 20-year-long futile war with the Taliban (Walldrof Jr, [2022](#)). The words of President Barack Obama resonate to recall: "I think Americans have learned from Afghanistan's misadventure it's harder to end wars than it is to begin them" (Lopez, [2022](#)).

President Joe Biden had given the order to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan by following the policy of President Trump who gave political recognition to the Taliban directly negotiated with the leadership of the Taliban and signed the phased withdrawal plan of NATO units within fourteen months from the date of signing with certain conditions. The conditions comprise the lifting of sanctions on the Taliban, intra-Afghan dialogue for peaceful settlement, and the exchange of prisoners. In reciprocity, the Taliban guaranteed that Afghan territory would not be used against the US or its allies and cut ties with Al-Qaida, which challenged the territorial sovereignty of the US and carried out the attack under the auspices of the Taliban on September 11, 2001. Holistically, the conditions were more about the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power and less about peace in Afghanistan (Ullah & Rehman, [2022](#)).

It is pertinent to mention that the February 2021 Doha agreement resurged and gave political recognition to the Taliban in Afghanistan and undermined the legitimacy of the elected Afghan government. Moreover, neither the elected government of Afghanistan gave any consent to the international community to negotiate with the Taliban on their behalf nor promised to implement those consensual terms and conditions in the country. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation drew the attention of the President Trump administration that the Taliban were not ready to negotiate with the elected Afghan government as they consider the current

government as foreign installed puppet regime; and do not represent the pulse of Afghanis. Hence, the prerequisite of the Doha agreement to end the civil war in Afghanistan was not launched because both parties questioned the legitimacy of each other but still, the US circumvented the legitimately elected representative of Afghanistan and continued table-talk with the Taliban (Boys, [2022](#)).

The continuation of the table talk questions the intention and attributes of NATO's led Operation Enduring Freedom (installation of people-representative government and eradication of terrorism) notion in the first place. Moreover, the Taliban have not kept their plan secret to remove the existing government, abolish the enforced constitution, and gain key positions in the next one. Back to the table talk testifies one thing there is no military solution to the Afghanistan issue in the first place as the Taliban have benefited from the continuation of war and returned to their leadership in the country. Nevertheless, President Biden's administration fulfilled the promise to the Taliban but the international community questions whether President Trump's administration who had negotiated the withdrawal plan could have provided a more honorable and competent retreat mechanism than President Biden's administration. Indeed, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan ended in chaos contrary to the promises of President Biden's administration (Cox, [2022](#)).

The dysfunctional Afghanistan institution formed by the West could not withstand in front of the policy-making mechanism of the Taliban and collapsed within a month; warned by many in the United States. For example, the former commander of US forces in Afghanistan and former director of the CIA, David Petraeus commented that the US has to take some prerequisites before withdrawal to help Afghanistan to stabilize the security situation in the country. To do this, David Petraeus proposed the government to reconsider the withdrawal plan on the following conditions: to allow the US government to obtain the necessary information needed for the security situation in the country through the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

(UAV) and implementation of direct air support (Mockaitis, [2022](#)).

However, the Taliban had decided not to yield any further conditions of the US that could challenge the sovereignty of Afghanistan. Subsequently, President Biden's Post withdrawal speech was intended to close the most painful chapter in US history as he confessed the following: (1) the US administration misguided desire of "state-building" in unprepared Afghanistan, (2) the focus of the US should have been to combat terrorism from the country and not state building, (3) the Taliban are part and parcel of the social fabric of Afghanistan and believed in the nationhood of the country unlike other militant groups, and (4) Taliban cannot be marginalized from the conventional politics of Afghanistan. His concise speech seemed to resonate with the audience as the mainstream media didn't raise serious objections to Biden's description.

However, the problem in Afghanistan does not appear to be uni-dimensional which is the US' national building campaign because there was no visible campaign but rather scattered efforts from different Western agencies and various US governments. The problem lies in the inability of the US to use political leverage to advance political reforms, lack of clear goals, and excessive reliance on the use of military force enabling the Taliban to increase their influence with every passing day and further strengthen their militant potential across Afghanistan. The lack of clear goals and means to achieve those goals continue to prevail in the US Congress as the week of a congressional hearing on the Afghanistan war remained nonconsensual amongst different stakeholders' rather different departments and agencies relied on the blame game (Fahmi, [2022](#)).

Ryan Cooker, who served as the US ambassador to Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Kuwait made President Biden responsible for the US hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan and the implementation of President Trump's withdrawal plan was wrong because the US force's presence in Afghanistan provides leverage and concession to the West against long-standing demands of Taliban that include: their readiness to engage with the US and not

with foreign-backed puppet regime in Kabul. Further, R. Crocker noted that the implementation of President Trump's withdrawal plan delegitimized the foreign-backed Afghan government and its security forces and led to the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

President Biden's hasty retreat from Afghanistan to end the 20-year war resulted in chaos in the country as a large-scale humanitarian crisis provoked across Afghanistan. Neither NATO nor the United States nor any other coalition countries have kept their reconnaissance and monitoring team, active military presence, or strong assertive administration in post-US Afghanistan. The experts have assessed the first-year foreign policy of Biden's administration and noted that his first mistake was his failure to roll back President Trump's erroneous withdrawal plan from Afghanistan. The connoisseurs further say that the US has made too many concessions to the Taliban at the expense of security forces and the Afghan government. President Biden's second mistake cited by experts is his failure to leave a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan supplemented by several thousand NATO forces; ensuring some physical presence would have given some leverage to the West in peace talks with the Taliban. President Biden's third mistake cited by experts is his abrupt and hasty withdrawal of all US troops and 16,000 contractors while lacking the proper plan for the safe evacuation of America and its allies in Afghanistan. The current US administration refused to comment on the inability of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to defend the country against the Taliban in the absence of foreign troops (Ibrahimi, 2022).

There is broad consensus in the international community that the US hasty retreat and chaotic evacuation of America and its allies left a stain on the international image of the US and would have earned a failing grade had the US administration not taken the lead in sending humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

Return of Taliban and Implications on Regional Security

Afghanistan does not remain a peaceful country neither in foreign occupation and foreign-back

installed governments nor in the Taliban regime subsequently the Post US Afghanistan with dysfunctional institutions such as the Afghan National Army (ANA) has signaled to the regional countries that their national security is again under threat. For more than twenty years, different factions of the Taliban had faced the wrath of the US and Western forces, but now these handfuls of insurgents have an entirely different role to play which is to run the country according to their ideology. Will the Taliban achieve a sustainable pace in the country? Only time will tell.

Afghanistan

The international community avers that recognition of the current regime in Afghanistan and the start of diplomatic relations depends on to what extent the will Taliban fulfill its promises. Some factions of the Taliban are trying to design a more modified version of the group based on a new awareness of the realities of the world. However, the extremist group still wants to practice the older version of brute governance in the country. There is no doubt in the fact that the return of a stable government in Afghanistan is a time-consuming process and the present inexperienced government would not be more stable than the foreign-backed, mixed governments of the past 20 years. The rivalry of clans and leaders of ethnic Pashtuns, the struggle between religious and ethnic communities, the periodic arms clashes, and the de facto autonomy of different factions in the country's regions seem inevitable. Mountstuart Elphinstone in his manuscript *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815) noted, "*To sum up the characters of Afghans in a few words: their vices are envy, revenge, rapacity, avarice, and obstinacy.*"

The first negative implication on regional security also includes the increase in terrorist threats and activities from Afghanistan. In a speech, President Biden argued that the threats from Afghanistan are manageable now in comparison to 2001 but many experts believe that it is not true because different factions of the Taliban are still struggling to secure their respective share in the government. Those various factions include Taliban-backed groups

like al-Qaida and its affiliates, several Central Asian jihadist groups, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), anti-Chinese like Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and anti-Indian jihadist groups e.g. Islamic State Hind Province (IS-HP), and Islamic State (IS) still exist in Afghanistan and are recovering from foreign military casualties (Malay, [2023](#)).

Though most of the above-mentioned groups are banned and face restrictions from the international community they still hold safe havens and breathing space in Afghanistan despite decades of counter-terrorism operations from the West. This general socio-political landscape makes it impossible for militancy to be manageable in Afghanistan as claimed by President Biden. The second negative implication of the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan also includes the dangerous aspect of global jihadism. The triumph of the Taliban in Kabul is considered a significant milestone for activists of inclusive jihadist phenomena and is likely to enhance their strength and morale significantly. The fear is that ISIS and other militant groups that have lost control in Syria and Iraq might start regaining it through organizing terrorist attacks. On online platforms, various militant groups celebrated the conquest and resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and promised to join hands to resume global jihad.

Thought, President Biden's administration refers to an anti-terrorism guarantee from the Taliban as part of the agreement signed in February 2021 in Doha agreement and has several detailed commitments not to provide a haven and breathing space for terrorists in Afghanistan but will the Taliban comply with those guarantees is yet to be seen. In October 2021, the Taliban ruled out cooperation with the international community and the US representatives to allow reconnaissance and monitoring teams, military presence, or strong foreign administration in Afghanistan to contain extremist groups in Afghanistan without actionable intelligence. Another argument that President Biden's administration gives that threats from Afghanistan are manageable because is that the Taliban have learned the lesson that the international community has zero tolerance for providing asylum to Al-Qaida and

other supporting militant groups and now the Taliban cannot afford to engage in a civil war with the international community and stretch that war to decades as the Taliban focuses on legitimizing themselves through governance (Abawe & Daud, [2023](#)).

Tajikistan

The traditional threat of ethnic conflict between Afghan Tajik and Afghan Pashtuns (Taliban is predominantly ethnic Pashtun) also remains a possibility. The neighboring country Tajikistan has not recognized the current regime of Afghanistan suggesting that the country may draw into ethnic-cum-civil conflict in the future. Commenting on the ethnic composition of Afghanistan, ethnic Tajik are in sizeable majority likewise ethnic Pashtun and in this connection, Tajikistan feels a strong connection with ethnic Afghan Tajik and would come to rescue ethnic Tajik whenever needed. Nonetheless, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also value their ethnic communities residing in Afghanistan. But ethnic Uzbek and Turkmen numbers are much smaller. The previous estimates suggest that as with other communities, Turkmen (3%) and Uzbek (9%) make up a total of 12% of Afghanistan's population in total.

Afghanistan-Tajikistan bilateral relations are also preoccupied by the presence of Tajik militants from the Jamaat Ansarullah Organization enjoy higher ranks in the Taliban government and are banned by Tajikistan. The Jamaat Ansarullah Organization was formed in 2009-10 to overthrow the legitimate government of Dushanbe, though remained unsuccessful in Tajikistan, these militants gained massive success in the Taliban's campaign in Badakhshan and occupied large territories in several parts of the north-eastern part of the country (Pardabaev, [2022](#)).

Iran

Though recently China has taken center stage in Middle Eastern diplomacy in connection to the Saudi-Iran rapprochement; one cannot ignore the possibility of ethnic conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia being transported to Afghanistan in the form of a Sunni-Shiite clash. The penetration

of ISIS in Pakistan and active involvement in Afghanistan; recent attacks against the Shiite community in Afghanistan testify to the fact that various disgruntled militant groups still exist and are migrating to Afghanistan from the Middle East and could challenge the governance model of the Taliban. This also applies to Al-Qaida as a significant part of the leadership still exists in Afghanistan and has a close association with the Taliban due to ideological similarities. Taliban and Al-Qaida remain in close connection through the Haqqani network. Even some of its key leaders including Khalil Haqqani enjoys the position of Ministry of Interior in the government of the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan.

It is rightly stated that Post US' Afghanistan will have a direct positive implication on neighboring Iran. In 2001, Tehran had tough relations with the Taliban regime of 1996. The confrontation escalated to such an extent that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) backed by the Iranian government helped Washington to occupy Kabul. It was professed as a double-sword strategy from Tehran, as Iran had tough hostile relations with the Taliban regime but more than that Iran helped the US to occupy Afghanistan, as refusal to cooperate could be perceived by the West as pro-Taliban act resultantly could face diplomatic isolation in the backdrop implementation of OEF in Afghanistan. Since 2001, Iran's relations with Afghanistan did not remain cordial and even Tehran could not stop Kabul from creating security problems in Iran after the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan. But a resurgence of the Taliban regime proved a blessing in disguise for Tehran as deterring jihadist groups such as ISIS is a common threat and area of cooperation for present governments of both countries.

Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Tehran welcomed the Taliban in power and did not seem to rule out the possibility of forming good neighborly relations with the Taliban regime in Post-American Afghanistan. In post-US Afghanistan, Tehran's main priority will be forming cordial relations with the Taliban regime dictated by political pragmatism (Rokabian, [2022](#)).

The first negative implication on Iran in connection to Post US Afghanistan revolves around the influx of refugees in Tehran as three million Afghan refugees already live in the country. However, Iran might experience a new wave of refugees depending on the Taliban's governance, after recent developments, Tehran has already exercised caution when accepting immigration and installed special regimes on the Afghan-Iran border. Many Afghan settlers, both economic immigrants and registered refugees, fear for their relatives especially women and friends who fall under the Taliban regime. The second negative implication of Post US' Afghanistan on Iran could be a nightmare for a large number of ethnic Shitte living in Afghanistan and it is the moral obligation of Tehran to protect their ethnicity against any sectarian violence. For now, the new regime in Afghanistan has assured regional countries that peaceful co-existence will prevail among different ethnicities living in Afghanistan and Iran hopes the same when the Taliban consolidate its power.

Russia

The Post US' Afghanistan could also challenge the security situation of the Russian backyard. The various disgruntled militant groups operating in Afghanistan will try to bring neighboring countries including Central Asian Republics (CARs) into its orbit of influence which are Russian allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It is pertinent to mention that if one of them is attacked by disgruntled militant groups in Afghanistan, Moscow is bound to intervene based on the treaty's obligation. For some countries of Central Asian Republics (CARs), the first year of the Taliban's power remains very stable. Neither the situation on Afghanistan borders remains out of control nor a crowd of refugees flooded into said countries nor disgruntled groups inspired by the success of the Taliban in Afghanistan show their willingness to overthrow and replace local regimes with the Taliban-like Islamic ideological regime inside these countries. But the calmness in bordering areas does not indicate that Central Asian Republics (CARs) have become secure from

disgruntled militant groups in Afghanistan, much depends on where the crisis in Afghan will turn in general and what course the Taliban and its affiliates groups will choose.

In speeches, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov does not signal to open any additional bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan or any other remaining country of the Central Asian Republics (CARs). This shows that the Taliban regime might have guaranteed that Afghanistan will not be a source of destabilization for regional countries and in reciprocation, Russia and China are so far in genial relations with the Taliban regime. Distinguished international affairs publication such as Foreign Policy magazine proclaims that regional countries have outweighed the leverage of the US in Afghanistan. This is inevitable to ensure withdrawal has given face-saving to the US in Vietnam

However, Moscow likewise other China and Pakistan has accepted the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a reality and the immediate reaction of Russia could be described in two words that is pragmatism and restraint towards the new regime in Kabul. Moreover, Russian embassies in Afghanistan's capital have expressed their readiness to cooperate with the de facto Taliban regime. However, it is pertinent to mention that Russia alike other countries is in no hurry to recognize the present regime or remove it from the list of terrorist organizations. Russia has conditioned de jure recognition and transnational legitimacy of the current government of Afghanistan on the behavior of the Taliban towards the international community and on global happenings (Faheem & Khan, [2022](#)).

China

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has proved sanctify for China from a strategic perspective because Sino-US rivalry will remain the dominant theme in 21st-century politics, and since then regional power in general and China in particular has gained massive leverage in Afghanistan. President Donald Trump had already branded Russia and China as revisionist powers and following the footstep of his

predecessor containing China through alliances and counter-alliances remain a major foreign policy priority of President Biden's administration. Following, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, President Biden's administration demonstrated US US-initiated NATO-led military exercise in Trident Juncture to showcase that Washington still can fight a war on multiple fronts and fulfill international obligations. The Washington Wall Street Journal (WSJ) labeled this military exercise as unprecedented since the 1980s.

But NATO's unprecedented military exercises neither frightened nor surprised China Chinese leading newspaper "China Times" which focuses on international news stated that China has become an economic giant in decades further directing the US to play by the rule of great power and not dare to test the military strength of China. The US does not keep itself limited to military exercises but rather initiated treaties of security with Great Britain and Australia and the establishment of the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) union which is to counter China's assertive posture across the world. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin explained that President Biden's administration has decided to come close to Great Britain and Australia to counter China's belligerent behavior and before formalizing AUKUS, President Biden had discussed China's "destabilizing activities" with his counterparts as well.

The future of Sino-Afghanistan bilateral relations in the Taliban's regime will remain dependent on interference syndrome. The only troublesome challenge for China from Afghanistan is that Kabul must not export extremist militant groups into a troubled region of China as it fears that Uyghur militants may step up and start terrorist activities in Xinjiang through the assistance of disgruntled groups in Afghanistan. In reciprocity, China has to turn a blind eye to human rights abuse in Afghanistan, which Beijing believes will be a feasible bargain. This non-interference and national interest-driven foreign policy of both countries will give a clear message to other regional republics that China supports the particular Afghan regime against whom the US has adopted the policy of

international isolation and sanctions for ages. The statement of the Taliban's spokesman "Relations of Afghanistan with China will remain cordial because Beijing is willing to invest in our country" testifies that both countries could become regional partners in the future (Hamdard, [2022](#)).

Afghanistan could become a main regional economic destination for China as in 2019, Beijing was the fifth largest exporter to Kabul following UAE, Pakistan, India, and the US. In the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing needs to gain access to important minerals and strategically essential trade routes.

Pakistan

The cordial relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan date back to Soviet Union intervention when Islamabad sided with the US-led capitalist bloc against the Soviet-led communist alliance. Pakistan was among those three countries that had recognized the Taliban regime back in 1996 and was the last one to halt diplomatic relations after the September 11, 2001, brute event. Islamabad has also helped the current Taliban regime to rebuild its government after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Islamabad has remained in close contact with Taliban leaders and provided them with shelter and food for which the US often scapegoated Pakistan for its failure in Afghanistan. The US after two decades has realized that there is no military solution to fight against non-state actors and Islamabad should be given space in Afghanistan because it has remained an important stakeholder in this impasse for decades.

Nonetheless, experts believe that Islamabad's influence is going to remain limited because the Taliban have started to diversify their diplomatic options and prefer to build cordial relations with regional countries e.g. China, Russia, and India. In Post US Afghanistan, Taliban leaders neither require safe havens nor dependent on Pakistani ammunition because the weapons left by the US troops and inherited from the Afghan National Army (ANA) suffice their need to ensure the country's national security. Pakistan likewise the US might

lose the leverage in Afghanistan at a time when needed the most for its national security as the contemporary security situation starts to deteriorate across Pakistan. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan may inspire disgruntled militant groups with the same ideology and goals as the Taliban in Pakistan such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which has confessed its involvement in many terrorist activities inside Pakistan including a brute Army Public School (APS) attack back in 2014 in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Choudhary & Hanif, [2022](#)).

Though, Pakistan's armed forces have launched multiple operations against said militant group and have limited their activities their existence in sleeper cells active contact between disgruntled groups on both sides of the border remains a main national security threat for Islamabad.

India

The Taliban's triumph represents a nightmare for India as it remained a main developing partner in Afghanistan and was allowed to play a more vibrant and direct military in Afghanistan during President Donald Trump's administration. India remained the largest donor to Kabul moreover also involved in the construction of the Salma Dam and Zarnak Delaram road, heavily invested in cooper reservoirs, and through the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership (2012) trained 35000 Afghan military officers in Dehradun. In all those years, India remained aloof from the Taliban and enjoyed cordial relations with Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani's administration moreover Northern Alliance in general and Abdullah Abdullah in particular remained blue-eyed boy for India. But India lost all earned leverage in those years since the change of regime in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Pakistan has made all possible efforts to end Indian influence in Afghanistan and continued cordial relations with different factions of the Taliban movement. It is pertinent to mention that with an increase in China's influence in Afghanistan, Indian influence and remaining leverage might face a double blow.

The Post US Afghanistan has posed serious concerns for the national security of India as it fears that militant groups such as Jaish-e-

Mohamed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Islamic State Hind Province (IS-HP), and Islamic State (IS) could be launched by neighboring countries against the national interest of New Delhi. Subsequently, the Indian government likewise the US administration accepted the Taliban as a reality and promptly started to engage with the current regime of Afghanistan by addressing all ambiguities and ambivalence in connection to Kabul's strategic backing and prioritizing President Ghani's administration over the Taliban in Afghanistan. New Delhi believes that to let go decade of investment in infrastructure and capacity building and making tough diplomatic decisions are not feasible options for India (Farooq, [2022](#)).

Conclusion

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was a large-scale US-initiated operation against the Global War on Terrorism with the end goal of eradicating Al-Qaeda and Taliban-led government, installing people representative government, and socio-economic development of Afghanistan. But despite successive policy changes from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Disrupt Dismantle Defeat, Winning the Hearts and Minds of people, Operation Blue on Green, Surge, and Exit and Trump Policy of South Asia; none brought the desired result. Moreover, spending \$1.72 trillion in Afghanistan till 2013, and \$72 billion on the Afghan National Army (ANA) alone, the military remains on a spike in Afghanistan and different factions of Taliban were openly operating in seventy districts of the country.

President Biden's speech summed up the US' 20-year aching journey in Afghanistan as he confessed that the US administration's misguided desire of "state-building" in unprepared Afghanistan and the focus of the US should have been to combat terrorism from the country and not state building. Moreover, the Taliban are part and parcel of Afghanistan's social fabric and believed in the nationhood of the country unlike other militant groups, and the factor Taliban cannot be marginalized from the conventional politics of Afghanistan.

Though the US finally withdrew from Afghanistan without any reconnaissance and monitoring team, military presence, or strong administration in Kabul President Biden's administration argued that threats from Afghanistan were manageable unlike September 11, 2001 brought massive negative implications on the region. The regional countries believe that their security is under threat as the success of the Taliban in Afghanistan might motivate and inspire disgruntled groups of militants for the dangerous aspect of global jihadism existing in the Heart of Asia. Post-Afghanistan has created a traditional threat of ethnic conflict between Afghan Tajik and Afghan Pashtuns, and a more controlling Jamaat Ansarullah Organization as Tajik militants enjoy high ranks in the Taliban government.

Likewise, to form cordial relations with the present government in Kabul, the influx of refugees from Afghanistan as Iran is a home of three million Afghan refugees and ethnic conflict between ethnic Shitte and ethnic Afghans remains a source of concern for Iran. Moreover, Iran also fears the emergence of ISIS from Afghanistan which could challenge the security situation of Iran but sanctifying both countries to deter jihadist groups such as ISIS is a common threat and area of cooperation for present governments of both countries.

Similarly, the Post US' Afghanistan could also challenge the security situation of Russian backyard as The various disgruntled militant groups operating in Afghanistan will try to bring neighboring countries including Central Asian Republics (CARs) into its orbit of influence which are Russian allies in Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and afterward Moscow is bound to intervene based on the treaty's obligation. Though The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has proved sanctify for China from a strategic perspective Beijing fears that its security could be threatened by Uyghur militants assisted by the assistance of disgruntled groups in Afghanistan.

The experts believe that Islamabad's influence is going to remain limited because of the Taliban's independence syndrome as the Taliban are no longer dependent on Islamabad

for breathing space and weapons moreover the Taliban have started to diversify its option and started to build cordial relations with regional countries e.g. China, Russia, and India. The security situation of Pakistan is under threat as disgruntled militant groups with the same ideology and goals as the Taliban such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) may inspire and start terrorist activities inside Pakistan.

The important regional player India has seen the resurgence of Afghan Taliban as a nightmare as it remained the main investor and developing partner in the former government of Afghanistan but in Post US Afghanistan India fears that Kabul can be used as a launching pad by neighboring countries for terrorist attacks against New Delhi's regional interests through Jaish-e-Mohamed and Lashkar-e-Taiba which reportedly have

breathing space in Afghanistan and have assisted in Taliban's campaign. Nonetheless, BJP's administration in India has started to engage with the present Afghan government in connection to clear its actions and intentions before making tough diplomatic decisions.

In the Doha Agreement 2021, the Taliban guaranteed that Afghanistan would be no a haven for terrorist organizations and it seems that the Taliban have done course correction as they are more inclined towards the socio-economic development of Afghanistan and less about exporting jihad to other countries. The attitude and behavior of the current Afghan government towards international happenings could be a benchmark for its recognition from the international community.

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