



## RISE OF TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

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### **Abstract**

*The dramatic events in Kabul over the last few months have stunned India, which, like the rest of the world, appeared unprepared for the government of Ashraf Ghani to collapse so quickly. Delhi has stepped up its opposition to the Taliban and increased its support for Kabul in recent months. The Indian elite and popular sentiment in favour of Kabul bolstered this argument. India's genuine affection for the Afghan people and deep commitment to their well-being may have prevented it from recognising the government's flaws in Kabul. Delhi may have also overestimated domestic political support in Washington for a tough stance against the Taliban, as well as the Biden Administration's ability to manage the end-game of its troop withdrawal plan. President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, after two decades of military presence in the region, has been met with scepticism and questions about the country's fate, as the country is paralysed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Taliban's continued presence, and an American military pull out at this juncture will result in the country's gains from the previous 15 years being erased. The objective of this Research paper is to analyse the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its implications for India and examine how India and Afghanistan can improve their relations in the future. In this paper, mainly secondary sources are being used for this.*

**Keywords:** *Taliban, Terrorism, Implications, Military, War, Democracy.*

### **Introduction**

The Indian government has publicly acknowledged that the Indian Ambassador met with the Taliban's political office head for the first time. The meeting took place at the request of the Taliban at the Indian Embassy in Doha. The Taliban's triumphant return and the rapid collapse of the Afghan government will have a significant global impact. The restoration of Taliban rule in Afghanistan with Pakistan's support poses serious security and Afghan policy challenges for India. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, which began a few weeks ago, is now almost complete. All those who have worked for a democratic Afghanistan for the past two decades under US leadership will suffer a major setback. This includes not only the US's NATO allies, but also India.<sup>1</sup>

The strategic environment around Afghanistan today is vastly different from that of the 1990s and 2001. Major Powers such as the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union are likely to recognise the Taliban as the legitimate rulers. The chances of a civil war breaking out in Afghanistan are slim, given how quickly they swept the country. According to recent reports, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani and top officials fled the country on August 15, and Kabul has also fallen to the Taliban. The Taliban now control virtually the entire country of Afghanistan, as well as all border crossings. The country has escaped major destruction so far due to the way the Afghan National Forces have crumbled and negotiated deals with local leadership. India will be in a relatively disadvantageous position in Afghanistan in the coming years. This is the price India has to pay for being too close to the US and making some policy mistakes of its own. The new security and economic architecture in Afghanistan will be distinct from that which Kabul has followed for the past 20 years. China, Pakistan, Russia, and



Iran, as new influencers, will be pleased to see the US's influence diminish further. China and Pakistan will also try to keep Indian involvement to a minimum.<sup>2</sup>

### **Historical Background**

Afghanistan is an ancient mountainous landlocked country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, bordered on the east and south by Pakistan, on the west by Iran, on the north by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, and on the northeast by China. Its location along the Silk Road linked it to the cultures of the Middle East and other parts of Asia, and it has historically been a source of conflict and violence since the military campaigns of Alexander the Great, the Mauryas, the Arabs, the Mongols, the British, the Soviets, and the United States with NATO-allied countries in 2001. Though it has been occupied at various times throughout history, it has been dubbed "unconquerable" and the "graveyard of empires."

The Hotak and Durrani dynasties founded the modern state of Afghanistan in the 18th century, but it quickly became a buffer state in the "Great Game" between British India and the Russian Empire. The Durand Line, which separates Afghanistan from British India, was established in 1893 but is not recognised by the Afghan government, resulting in strained relations with Pakistan since the latter's independence in 1947. Following the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, the country was ruled by King Amanullah until Zahir Shah was deposed and a republic was established nearly 50 years later.

Afghanistan became a protectorate of the Soviet Union in 1978, following a second coup. This sparked the Soviet–Afghan War in the 1980s against mujahideen rebels, and by 1996, the Taliban had taken control of the majority of Afghanistan, which they retained after the US invasion in 2001 following 9/11. On August 15, 2021, this 20-year war came to an end, with the Taliban sweeping across Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul as a result.

On May 1, 2021, the Taliban and their various allied militant groups launched an offensive, coinciding with the withdrawal of most US troops from Afghanistan. Following the rapid defeat of the Afghan National Army, the Taliban and their various allied militant groups launched an offensive on May 1, 2021, coinciding with the withdrawal of most US troops from Afghanistan. Following the rapid defeat of the reportedly 300,000-strong Afghan National Army across the country, only the 201st Corps and the 111th Division, both based in Kabul, remained operational by mid-August. After Taliban forces captured Mihtarlam, Sharana, Gardez, Asadabad, and other cities and districts in the east, the capital city was left encircled. The situation in Kabul rapidly deteriorated in the days leading up to the fall, with US officials forecasting in early August that Kabul could hold out for several months, but the week of the fall brought even more grim forecasting; five days before the Taliban arrived in Kabul, expectations were degraded, and analysis suggested the capital would last "30 to 90 days," and officials suggested the city would fall within two days.<sup>3</sup>

### **Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan**

An Afghan group of mujahideen, or Islamic fighters, who had fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89), with assistance from the CIA and its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, founded the Taliban in the early 1990s (ISI). "Taliban" is Pashto for "students," and they were joined by younger Pashtun tribesmen who studied in Pakistani madrassas, or seminaries. The majority of Afghans are Pashtun, who are also the dominant ethnic group in the south and east of the nation. Taliban militiamen chant slogans as they travel toward the front line close to Kabul in



November 1997. After four years of conflict (1992–1996) between competing mujahideen groups, the movement won over the public's support by promising to impose stability and the rule of law in the early post-Soviet era. To calm the violent southern city of Kandahar, Talibs invaded it in November 1994. By September 1996, they had taken Kabul from President Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik whom they viewed as corrupt and anti-Pashtun. Before being overthrown in 2001, analysts estimate that the Taliban regime held control of 90% of the nation. The Taliban imposed their own version of justice as they expanded their sphere of influence. Taliban law was based on the strict Wahhabi doctrines of the madrassas' Saudi patrons and the pre-Islamic tribal laws of the Pashtun people. While the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice enforced laws against actions the Taliban considered un-Islamic, such as requiring women to wear the head-to-toe burqa, or chadri, outlawing music and television, and imprisoning men whose beards were deemed to be too short, the regime neglected social services and other essential government duties. The regime was marginalised internationally from the start. The Taliban were urged to stop abusing women in two resolutions that the UN Security Council adopted in 1998. The following year, the council condemned the regime for harbouring al-Qaeda. Only Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan recognised the government. Many scholars say that Islamabad supported the Taliban because they saw them as a force that could unite and stabilise Afghanistan while keeping India, Iran, and Russia from having too much power.<sup>4</sup>

### **Challenges Imposed by the Taliban on India**

In light of the Taliban taking power, India should review some of its policies and procedures. First and foremost, recognise that other means of achieving foreign policy goals exist in addition to the Ministry of External Affairs. It's not necessary to only have contact on a "diplomatic" level with the Taliban. India should connect with Afghanistan's new leaders through a number of backchannel channels in order to assess Kabul's populace and provide the groundwork for official diplomatic engagement. In addition to offering diplomatic cover, putting the military-intelligence community in charge of Afghanistan will avoid premature leaks, disasters, and diplomatic embarrassments. While the media focuses on diplomatic recognition, India should use its intelligence resources to "engage" with the Taliban both inside and outside of Afghanistan.

There will be domestic repercussions if the Taliban is acknowledged or engaged. Both proponents and opponents of that strategy will utilise this to further their specific agendas. Individuals should not see government interaction with the Taliban as a licence to pursue, support, or excuse Taliban practises in Afghanistan or their imitation in India. Some Indians may attempt to Talibanize and radicalise the youth through official "accommodation" with the Taliban, if the attractiveness of ISIS ideology is any indicator. No matter what strategy the government chooses, it must make it clear that official involvement with the Taliban is different from individual activism in the country. Official involvement with the Taliban is a diplomatic requirement, but individual activism is not.

The only democracy that continues to reject the 30-year-old rule of declassifying government papers is India. It's past time to re-evaluate its practise of shielding official documents from public scrutiny and view. The National Archives in New Delhi cannot be used to get the majority of official Indian documents. Permit the administration to capitalise on the huge amount of public interest in the declassification of all Afghan records since 1979. How did Indian diplomats at the highest levels perceive, perceive, interpret, and finally advise the Indian government in Kabul and elsewhere? In the absence of official documents, we are left with selective memories, self-glorifying stories, partial truths, post-retirement enlightenment, and anti-American public posturing. Even harsh criticism of Moscow's behaviour won't set off a diplomatic ruckus now that the Soviet Union has disintegrated. In light of the



Taliban's takeover, which even the most knowledgeable Afghan observers found strange, the government should be able to declassify official documents longer than the usual 30 years if they need to.

India's constrained diplomatic options in the region were underlined by the Taliban takeover and its aftermath. Afghanistan's neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, great powers China and Russia, and aspirants to power, have emerged as the major players in the grand game (Turkey). Despite their differences, none of them consider India to be important. Even countries with a stake, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have attempted but failed to gain access. Following the withdrawal, the US's role will become even more ambiguous. The former Northern Alliance option is unrealistic because no major power wants to add more fuel to the fire. India's involvement in Afghanistan is therefore unclear. While keeping a careful eye on the drama that is developing and the conflicting pulls and pressures, the priority should be on rebuilding a peaceful Afghanistan. Until a clear image is developed, New Delhi should hold off on making any public remarks. Silence on Afghanistan is the best policy because it is impossible to walk the talk.

The hurried evacuation revealed the extent of American mistakes as hundreds of Afghans ran alongside the C-17. Let academics and elites in the United States, however, examine, analyse, and critique the errors of various governments and agencies. Such intellectual discussions won't affect India's interests or financial situation. Instead, let's look inward and consider whether we appropriately read our neighbourhood. If that is the case, why does no one want us to take part in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

### **Implications for India**

The Taliban's re-entry into Afghanistan was inevitable with the collapse of Kabul, the nation's capital. Numerous people fled the capital when Taliban fighters attacked the presidential palace and assumed control of the area. In just one day, the situation in Afghanistan underwent a significant transformation. According to media accounts, demoralised Afghan troops retreated from their positions and surrendered to Taliban fighters engaged in combat outside the capital city, allowing the Taliban to approach Kabul. Kabul fell as soon as Afghan President Ashraf Ghani escaped to Tajikistan. After running away, Ghani declared that the Taliban were now in charge of protecting their countrymen's honour, property, and ability to survive. Nearly 80% of the mountainous, landlocked nation is currently under Taliban control, primarily in the north and west. They had initially occupied the southern provinces of Afghanistan, including Kandahar, the nation's original capital. The Taliban fighters then moved north and then west. The world, including India, will be greatly affected if the Taliban regain power in Afghanistan.

#### **1. Taliban's proximity to Jammu and Kashmir**

The Taliban's conquest of Afghanistan has brought them within 400 kilometres of the Line of Control in India's Jammu and Kashmir region. The Taliban is in a position to spread more terrorism on Indian soil because of its proximity to Jammu and Kashmir. Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, which borders Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, is now under the Taliban's authority.

#### **2 Terrorism is on the rise.**

Successive According to allegations from the United Nations, the Taliban collaborates with extremist organisations like Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Al Qaeda is reportedly still being harboured by the Taliban. The Islamic state, which has taught and even prepared numerous Indian citizens to take



up guns and carry out suicide attacks, has ties to its close fighting wing, the Haqqani network. With more bases and training facilities in Afghanistan, the Taliban may become more dangerous and effective, which would boost terrorism in the area.

### **3. Pakistan's Taliban support**

There are rumours that Pakistan backs the Taliban, which would be bad for India. In countries like Tajikistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, the Taliban have taken over parts of the country.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. China's Problem**

As China's relations with India have worsened since last year's border confrontation, India may face significant difficulties if China decides to forge close ties with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban would wish to keep their stronghold, which will require Chinese funding, as practically all other nations have refused to recognise an Afghan government that was imposed by force. China is apparently one of Afghanistan's top investors.

### **5. India's Afghan investment has gone to waste**

Since the 9/11 attacks, India has given Afghanistan more than \$2 billion in aid. Among India's significant investments in Afghanistan are the new Parliament building, the Salma Dam in western Afghanistan, and the Delaram-Zaranj route, which may now be pointless. Even investments made at the Iranian port of Chabahar to open a new trade route and break Karachi's grip on Afghanistan's landlocked country may not pay off now that the Taliban are in charge of that country.

### **6 International Drug Trade**

Opium, heroin, and other drugs are the mainstays of the Taliban's economy. According to estimates, Afghanistan produced more than 85% of the heroin consumed worldwide in 2020, mostly in Taliban-controlled regions. According to reports, the Taliban have set up production facilities for other drugs like methamphetamine in their regions during the previous two years and are planning to use the drug trade as their main source of income. According to a UN Monitoring group's study, the levy on poppy production contributed more than 460 million USD to the Taliban's total revenue in 2020, or about 50%. In order to increase their earnings, the Taliban will encourage the creation of additional narcotics. Yet, because they will hold the power, there will be no way to stop the spread of drugs over the globe. The drug trade will be supported by the government, which is a very big problem for the whole world. All of these things are actual and will soon become a problem. When the Taliban last came to power, it displayed its true colours. Nothing has changed since then. While international powers, including the United Nations, helplessly observe it, the situation in Afghanistan is extremely severe. India has its own concerns, but since nothing can be done to change the situation at this point, it is best to take everything with a grain of salt. While Kabul is about to collapse, India should be patient, keep an eye on events, and carefully consider its next course of action.<sup>7</sup>

### **Suggestion to Improve India Afghan Policy Way Forward**

1. India's role in the Afghan peace process, and the difficult road ahead, as we see more process and less peace In Afghanistan, India has called for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.



2. Peace within and around Afghanistan is required for long-term stability. India also stated that terrorism must be treated with zero tolerance. Cooperation on diplomacy, policing, and intelligence with countries bordering Afghanistan can help to contain terrorist groups and prevent them from travelling beyond the region. International organisations such as the United Nations must take action to stop Pakistan from sponsoring terrorism. The FATF should move away from grey listing. Aid and development cooperation through the United Nations, India, and the United States must be implemented simultaneously in order to restore democracy.
3. Immediate actions: To protect minorities in Afghanistan, India must implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. Medical visas for students who have already secured admission can be considered once the situation has stabilised.<sup>8</sup>
4. Domestic initiatives: India must remain vigilant against a resurgence of cross-border terrorism, which could destabilise Kashmir and escalate the India-Pakistan conflict. India must make every effort to persuade the international community to hold the Taliban accountable for allowing all foreigners to leave in peace, protecting Afghan citizens' lives, and abiding by international humanitarian law.
5. Similarly, India should press the international community to help the large number of Afghans who have been displaced by fighting. India must quickly engage directly with the Taliban and shift its attention to our maritime and other challenges.
6. Furthermore, a long wait may make India's negotiating more difficult. India was recently invited to Doha for the "Troika Plus" talks. It should take an active role in this.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

India and Afghanistan had long had a positive relationship, though it had its ups and downs. The first traumatic period was after Russia's withdrawal, and the story is being repeated after the United States' withdrawal. Whether it's infrastructure development, military training, defence hardware, or aid during the corona pandemic, India has always stepped forward to help Afghanistan. However, following the US withdrawal, India has found itself in an unenviable position. With various factions speaking in different tones, the situation is quite uncertain. Though the Taliban have declared the formation of a new government, it is still unclear how things will play out. In addition, India is concerned about China and Pakistan's efforts to woo the Taliban. On economic, security, and strategic levels, India has far too much invested in Afghanistan. India is weighing several options. A meeting between India's ambassador in Qatar and Mr Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, a senior Taliban leader who may play a key role in the new regime, has opened the door to dialogue with the Taliban. However, it remains to be seen how things will play out on the ground. Evidence from the past suggests that the overthrow of the Ghani regime would result in an increase in terrorism. There is also the possibility that new extremist groups, such as the ISKP, will emerge and radicalise Indians. To make matters worse, the Haqqani network and Pakistan's ISI will conduct operations that may be detrimental to India's interests. Furthermore, the danger posed by Pakistan's influence is greater than that posed by any other nation's activities. China is focused on getting the most out of the region while remaining cautious about the developments. When two of India's adversaries, Pakistan and China, are taking steps to expand their footprints, things could get ugly. In a country where India has invested heavily and developed friendly relations with non-Talibani leaders, it must take calculated steps to avoid everything going to hell.



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