

## A Critical Analysis Of Afghanistan's Regime Change And Opportunities For Pakistan

Asad Altaf, Zahid Mehmood Zahid, Tahir Abbas Sial

Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: September 05, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: April 07, 2022</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords :</b> Taliban, USA, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Doha Agreement</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> 10.5281/zenodo.6423469</p>	<p><i>In 2020, the United States of America and the Taliban signed a peace pact known as the Doha Agreement, which brought an end to the two-decade-long conflict. As a result, the US and its NATO partners made a quick military departure from Afghanistan, leaving the nation in a state of chaos. On the 15th of August 2021, the Taliban took advantage of the circumstances and regained momentum by conquering Kabul, Afghanistan's capital city. Considering the ongoing multinational engagement, the Taliban takeovers have far-reaching implications both at home and abroad. Because of interdependence, advanced technology, urbanization and cosmopolitanism, which is collectively known as globalization, interconnection, multilateral involvement, and economic integration are the key features of the world in the modern period. No state can remain isolated and unconcerned with what is going on in other states. As a result of the Taliban's rise as a significant participant in Afghanistan, a variety of positive and negative consequences for the area and the country's war-torn neighbors have become unavoidable. Pakistan, as one of Afghanistan's major neighbors, shares a number of cultural, religious, and social identities with the latter. Pakistan confronts a range of political, strategic, and economic consequences as a result of the Taliban's recent takeover. The purpose of this work is to identify those implications in a systematic manner. Furthermore, it emphasizes recommendations for Pakistan's foreign policy in order to address all of the ramifications in an appropriate manner.</i></p>

### Introduction

Everyone understands that international politics is self-centered, cruel, and chaotic. However, in international affairs and politics, it is a given that a short-term event has a significant impact on the overall dimensions and structures of the international political environment. It may be a brief event lasting only a few hours or days, but it has far-reaching consequences. The events of 9/11 are one of the most outstanding illustrations of such occurrences. In 2002, a small group of al-Qaeda terrorists attacked one of the world's biggest economic hubs, the World Trade Center, as well as a number of other high-profile buildings in the US city of New York. Al-Qaeda, directed by Osama Bin Laden, claimed responsibility for the assaults, which killed almost 3000 people and injured tens of thousands more (S. Malik et al., 2022). Even though it was merely a single incident that occurred in a matter of hours, it had enormous ramifications for international affairs. Almost two decades have passed, but it continues to play an important role in international relations. The international community is still dealing with the aftershocks of that tragedy in some form or another. Afghanistan was governed at the time by the Taliban, who were religiously motivated hardliners. As a result of the world community accusing the Taliban of providing safe haven to the leadership of Al-Qaeda, which was responsible for 9/11, the United States of America invaded Afghanistan in 2001, followed by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Irum et al., 2022). As a result of the 9/11 tragedy, the United States launched a global war on terror with the help of its NATO partners (H. Khan, 2013; Yadav, 2014). For nearly two decades, the United States of America fought in Afghanistan. Although it was successful in driving the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and installing its preferred governments in the form of Hamid Karzai and later Ashraf Ghani, it was unable to totally eradicate the Taliban's resistance and presence in the country. Throughout these years, the Taliban warriors continued their campaign, posing significant challenges to the Afghan government as well as serious blows to US strategic objectives (Z. U. A. Malik, Zhilong, & Ashraf, 2019; Z. U. A. Malik, Zhilong, & Rafay, 2019). On the 29th of February, 2020, the United States and the Afghan Taliban signed a peace pact known as the Doha Agreement, called after Qatar's capital, where the talks between the two parties took place. As a consequence, all sides agreed to several agreements, and the US withdrew its soldiers from Afghanistan a few months ago (M. K. Khan, 2020). The US fast move not only stunned Ghani's already fragile leadership, but also rendered it more vulnerable. As a result, the Taliban ramped up their armed campaign, eventually taking control of Kabul on August 15, 2021. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has a number of short- and long-term consequences.

Similarly, it will have a number of serious consequences not only in Afghanistan but throughout the region. For example, following the Taliban's capture of Kabul, the United States of America and other western countries not only frozen Afghanistan's assets in the national bank, but also opted not to provide any more economic aid. These events have been disastrous for Afghanistan's new administration, with economic crises, inflation, starvation, and health issues at an all-time high in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan (Network, A., Clark, & Duncan, 2021). Furthermore, because of interdependence, modern technology, urbanization and cosmopolitanism, which is collectively known as globalization, interconnection, multilateral involvement, and economic integration are the key features of the world in the current day. No state can remain isolated and unconcerned with what is going on in other states (Ayantoyinbo, 2015; Z. U. A. Malik et al., 2021; Mekaj & Aliaj, 2018). As a result of the Taliban's rise as a significant participant in Afghanistan, a variety of positive and negative consequences for the area and the country's war-torn neighbors have become unavoidable. Some of these repercussions are now affecting the region, while others may do so in the future. Because of its geostrategic location and past political importance during the Cold War, Pakistan is one of the most important countries in the area. It has to deal with a number of serious ramifications as a result of the Taliban's recent takeover of Afghanistan. This study aims to illustrate all of the possibilities that have arisen as a result of the Taliban's takeover, both in terms of challenges and opportunities that Pakistan will confront in the future. The Taliban administration in Afghanistan will have significant economic, strategic, and security repercussions for Pakistan (Threlkeld & Easterly, 2021).

### **Pakistan's Taliban Regime**

Despite their cultural, socioeconomic, and religious similarities, Pakistan and Afghanistan have never had the kind of long-term and durable good relations that could have existed otherwise. There are a variety of factors that contribute to the tensions between the two neighbors. Pakistan has been concerned about Afghanistan's inflexible stance toward the demarcation of the colonial-era Durand line between the two states since the beginning, despite the fact that it is an internationally recognized border between the two countries (Z. U. A. Malik, Zhilong, & Rafay, 2019; Qayyum, 2016; Yaseen & Naveed, 2018; Yousaf, 2019). Similarly, several Afghan governments have blamed Pakistan for bringing terrorists to their country throughout the years. To put it another way, Afghan officials frequently blame Pakistan for the country's internal unrest (Sultana, 2015). The Taliban seized power of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, resulting in both positive and negative implications for Pakistan. Pakistan has long been accused of helping the Taliban by international parties and anti-Taliban actors in Afghanistan. When viewed from Pakistan's perspective, it is clear that every state seeks to protect its own interests. Due to a variety of causes, Pakistan has maintained close connections with the militant group over the years. In Afghanistan, for example, there are ethnic groups such as Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun, and Hazara. During the Cold War, Pakistan sided with the United States of America rather than the Soviet Union. Because the Soviet Union had significant links with Afghanistan's non-Pashtun ethnic groups, Pakistan backed the Mujahedeen, who were mostly Pashtuns. These Pashtuns later became the founders of the Taliban organization in the 1990s, and as a result, they have maintained a close relationship with Pakistan (Khushi, 2018; Perveen, Khalil, Ahmad, & Khalil, 2015; Yousaf, 2019).

### **TTP Factor: The Tahreek Taliban of Pakistan (TTP) is a terrorist organization based in Pakistan:**

Pakistan has long been concerned that India is using Afghan soil against it. Pakistan shares a long border with Afghanistan; hence the stability of its currency is crucial for Pakistan's stability. In the past, India had close ties with several Afghan regimes, resulting in difficult relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has long been concerned that India is using Afghan soil against it. Pakistan shares a long border with Afghanistan, hence the stability of its currency is crucial for Pakistan's stability. In the past, India had close ties with several Afghan regimes, resulting in difficult relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. (Iqbal, Iqbal, Uzzaman, Malik, & Munir, 2021; Khalid & Roy, 2016). Terrorist insurgencies rose in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and FATA region, forcing Pakistan to start military operations against select terrorist groups. So, between 2004 and 2014, Pakistan undertook a series of high-profile military operations in Swat, Waziristan, Bajour, and Malakand divisions, among other places, to destroy the terrorists. The terrorist networks operating under the banner of the TTP were entirely annihilated as a result of military operations such as Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, and Zarb-e-Azab. The majority of the terrorists were killed or apprehended, with the others fleeing to Afghanistan (Javaid, 2015). Under the command of Maulana Fazalullah of Swat, KPK province (killed by a US drone assault in 2018) and Noor Wali Mehsod of Waziristan, these terrorists posed a persistent threat to Pakistan (Sahar & Sahar, 2019). The governments of Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai never tried to appease Pakistan over the TTP militants who had escaped. Pakistan has suffered significantly as a result of cross-border insurgencies over the years. Pakistan suffered not just multiple border attacks, but also a number of severe terrorist attacks in populated regions that were organized in Afghanistan. The Army Public School attack in Peshawar and the Jinnah Airport attack in Karachi, for example, were both notable incidents in 2014 (Qayyum, 2016; Qureshi, Gulraiz, & Shahzad, 2016). Taking into account the aforementioned circumstances, the Taliban's control of Afghanistan has a favorable influence for Pakistan. Pakistan's government can take steps to suppress

cross-border insurgencies with the cooperation of Afghanistan's government. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is embroiled in a series of economic crises and has become increasingly isolated. It cannot afford Pakistan's grievance in such conditions, thus it will undoubtedly assist Pakistan in dealing with the TTP. In this context, Pakistan has begun talks with several TTP factions with the help of Afghan Taliban mediation. Although the talks have been stuck for a few weeks, it is hoped that in the next months, the Taliban administration and Pakistan would reach an effective resolution on the TTP (Z. A. Malik et al., 2022; Z. ul A. Malik et al., 2022; Shah & Ayaz, 2015).

### **Pakistan and Afghanistan have a fight over India**

Increased Indian presence in Afghanistan has heightened tensions in Pakistan over the last few years. Pakistan has had a tense relationship with India for the past three years as a result of India's unilateral activities in Kashmir. Trade between Pakistan and India has declined to a greater level, while antagonism along the border has intensified. Pakistan cannot afford to have tensions on both its eastern and western borders in such a situation (Gill, 2019; Perveen et al., 2015). In the past, during the administrations of Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai, India had very close and strong ties with both Afghan governments. India not only made direct investments in Afghanistan, but also gave political, economic, and other strategic assistance to the country. It also aided Afghanistan's health and education sectors by providing hundreds of scholarship opportunities to Afghan students (Akhtar et al., 2021; Nadeem & Khan, 2017). India was able to sway the Kabul administration in its favor and against Pakistan by making similar payments to Afghanistan. As a result, during the two terms of Ghani and Karzai, ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan were rarely cordial. The situation has now shifted to a bigger scale, with the Taliban taking authority. In this regard, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan will provide positive results. The Taliban is heavily pro-Pakistan and has strained ties with India. In recent months, India has attempted to normalise relations with Afghanistan's new administration; but, it is apparent that the Taliban's new government will never allow India to pursue its anti-Pakistan agenda on Afghan territory (Behera, 2016; Fayaz, 2016; M. S. Malik & Khan, 2018). As a result, it will be extremely difficult for India to pursue its old agenda on Afghan soil. It is a positive indication for Pakistan, and it will undoubtedly seek to strengthen its ties with the Taliban in order to counter India's anti-Pakistan presence on Afghan land (Imran & Xiaochuan, 2017).

### **Pakistan's Economic Challenges**

Despite all of the above implications for Pakistan, the latter is constantly accused for categorising Taliban into 'good' and 'bad' categories. Pakistan has been accused by western countries in general, and the United States of America in particular, of having covert sympathy for Afghan rebels (Javaid & Mushtaq, 2014; Nizamani, 2018; Schrickler, 2017). Pakistan is already on the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) because of suspected weak anti-terrorism and anti-money laundering efforts. Given the current circumstances, Pakistan's already strained economy may contract further in the future as a result of the uncertain situation in Afghanistan (A. U. Khan, Malik, & Fatima, 2020). Following the Taliban takeover, the international community has isolated the troubled and war-torn Afghanistan, a country that is heavily reliant on foreign help for its survival. During these cold winter days, the war-torn country faces major obstacles such as a scarcity of food, medication, and clothing. In such circumstances, a catastrophic humanitarian crisis is developing, which would almost certainly increase the influx of refugees into Pakistan, which already hosts over 3.5 million Afghan refugees. Such circumstances will wreak havoc on Pakistan's already ailing economy (S. Malik et al., 2022). In the years 2019 and 2020, Afghanistan imported 15.6 and 11.2 percent from Pakistan, respectively. The Taliban government currently lacks adequate funds in its treasury to pay its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, in order to maintain bilateral trade. Furthermore, the Taliban leadership's commercial assets were frozen, and the US and UN imposed sanctions, making the situation very difficult for the newly formed Taliban regime. Such circumstances have harmed bilateral trade to a larger level, which is wreaking havoc on Pakistan's already burdened economy (Irum et al., 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Increased globalisation and interconnectedness have shortened distances, transforming the world into a global village. No state can remain isolated, untouched, and unaffected by the actions of another. The truth becomes further evident in the case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, as the two countries share not only a long border of 2640 kilometres, but also cultural, socioeconomic, and religious commonalities. As a result, both Pakistan and Afghanistan are vitally crucial to one another, and Pakistan's stability is highly dependent on Afghanistan's. In view of the data presented in the article, it is evident that the change in Afghanistan's administration has a number of significant ramifications for Pakistan. It is a well-known fact that one can change one's friends or foes, but one cannot change one's neighbours. As Afghanistan's neighbour, Pakistan must take proactive measures to mitigate negative consequences while seizing beneficial chances. Rather than rushing to deal with the Taliban rule, Pakistan should engage regional powers such as China, Russia, Iran, and Central Asian states on the issue. Pakistan, as Afghanistan's near neighbour, must develop a broad and comprehensive strategy for

dealing with the country's issues in order to ensure not only a stable political environment in the region, but also a sensible response to the Taliban's regime's aftermath. The special conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the Afghanistan issue in Pakistan in December 2021 was a good beginning, and Pakistan needs more of these attempts to deal with the uncertain scenarios.

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#### Author Information

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**Asad Altaf**

MphilScholar , American Studies at Area Studies Center ,Quaid –I – Azam University ,Islamabad ,Pakistan.

**Dr.Zahid Mehmood Zahid**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations,University of Central Punjab ,Lahore ,Pakistan.

**Dr. Tahir Abbas Sial**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations ,University of Central Punjab ,Lahore ,Pakistan.

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