



RESEARCH PAPER

Afghanistan's Security Situation and the Regional Dynamics: An Analysis of the Convergence of Interests

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Afghanistan's security situation and its implications for the region. Despite the old notion about Afghanistan being a threat for the regional stability it can become a source of peace and harmony. The vitality of Afghanistan cannot be ignored by other actors since regional stability and peace are crucial for their respective economic interests and the same cannot be achieved by not considering Afghanistan's internal situation. To explore this phenomenon descriptive and analytical methods are used via secondary data analysis based on journals, newspapers, reports and governments publications which provide a comprehensive and in detail analysis and understanding of the topic. Regional Security Complex Theory is multi-layered levels of analysis which can help construct the sources of convergence via no traditional interests. As Barry Buzan Regional Security Complex incorporates social constructions of amity and enmity which are constructing the convergence in the region.

KEYWORDS: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Regional Security Complex, Regional Stability, Taliban

Introduction

Allamah Muhammad Iqbal, famous poet and a philosopher described Afghanistan as the "Heart of Asia". Turkish former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in a conference citing Iqbal's verse that "Afghanistan is the heart of Asia and without stability and security of Afghanistan, there cannot be security, stability and prosperity in Asia all together" (Hasrat-Nazimi, 2012). Afghanistan, a landlocked country has been a focal point of regional security dynamics for centuries due to its important strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the greater Middle Eastern region. Centuries of great games between mighty empires, decades of long foreign intervention, years of civil wars, border strife and instability have shaken the nation's social, political, economic, cultural, and institutional foundations.

In addition to strategic location, its porous borders, ethnic and sectarian diversity along with long standing love hate relationship with the neighbors adds to the equation. The developments in Afghanistan are strongly linked with the stability of Iran, Pakistan and even with its extended neighbor India. Central Asian Republics have also been influenced by the security situation in Afghanistan. This is related to more general regional problems including drug trafficking, cross border terrorism and energy security (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019;Hasrat-Nazimi, 2012).

Since 1979 the Afghan society is experiencing destruction and anarchy. First it was the Soviet Union that tried to expand its influence in the south followed by the ultra-conservative Taliban government which was not recognized by the majority nations of

the word. The Taliban regime's support for the terrorist groups resulted in the invasion by the US led coalition in 2001 (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021). The overthrow of Taliban government as well as installation of a democratic and pluralistic government gave hope to the war-torn people. But despite the two decades long military intervention and lethal war with state building initiatives, Afghanistan's security situation is still precarious. After the withdrawal of the NATO forces in 2022, the situation could be characterized by the persistence of insurgency attacks, fear of civil war, fragile and unrecognized government, political unrest, and regional rivalries. Large portions of the nation are under the Taliban, an ultra-conservative Islamic organization. Terrorist organizations like Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Al Qaeda continue to operate in the area and expands and proliferate its activities in the region. The security interests of neighboring nation's including economic concerns, geopolitical rivalries, and historical belligerent relationships, have also had an impact on the overall security situation in Afghanistan.

The dynamics of the region have significantly changed and have influenced by the deteriorated security situation in Afghanistan. Recognizing the country's significance to regional stability and connectivity, states including Russia, China, Pakistan, and India have increased their influence, involvement, and engagement with it despite international isolation and non-recognition. Addressing terrorism, reducing extremism, promoting economic development and trade opportunities, leveraging its strategic location for regional connectivity, and countering drug trafficking are areas where these states converge. However, conflicting interests, power struggles for regional dominance, involvement of non-state actors against each other, and support for different sectarian and ethnic groups by these states pose serious challenges. Moreover, regional organizations like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have been greatly impacted by the sudden shifting regional dynamics surrounding the security predicament in Afghanistan. These organizations were founded to foster regional collaboration, cooperation and Connectivity, free trade, and stability. Nevertheless they have struggled to accomplish their objectives and goals due to Afghanistan's complex and intricate security situation (Zhou, 2022).

This study aims to explore Afghanistan security situation and its implication on the regional dynamics. The old notion over Afghanistan to perceive as threat but it can be source of convergence for the regional stakeholders to establish peace and harmony in the region. Afghanistan is the vital state in the region cannot be ignored when it come the economic developments and prosperity of the region. For future need and developments stability and peace is crucial for every state and it is the only to enhance the regional prosperity. BRI project is considered the game changer and without stability in region the best outcomes from the flagship project of BRI, CPEC cannot be achieved. As Barry Buzan Regional Security Complex incorporates social constructions of amity and enmity, which helps to understand the behavior of states and the bottom up approach of the theory to form a global picture by analyzing regions that give a real picture. RSCT is multi-layered levels of analysis which can construct the source of convergence via no traditional interests (Buzan et al., 2003).

Literature Review

Afghanistan's security disposition could be traced back to 19th century Russo-British rivalry. The country's internal affairs, its security and foreign policies were the consequence of the involvement of the two major powers. This continued in the 20th century when USSR invaded Afghanistan and was countered by a coalition of fighters called Mujahadeen. These Mujahadeen in turn were being aided by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Pakistan's ISI. These agencies helped the Mujahadeen socially, politically, and economically and made strong links with their leaders to have an effective

and collaborative struggle against USSR. Those factions were also supported by China, UAE, and Saudi Arabia based on their national interests. The decade long conflict not only resulted collateral damaged and immense human suffering but also the institutional and governmental breakdown resulting in a divided society and a weakened security apparatus (Byrd, 2012).

The post-Soviet Afghanistan fell to Taliban in 1989 and resulted in exacerbating ethnic and sectarian tensions along with becoming an epicenter of international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. The incident of 9/11 had more negative implications for Afghanistan than any other region of the world. Through a reactive foreign policy decision, the US with international coalition launched a military operation to dismantle Al Qaeda and toppled the Taliban government. After successfully ousting the Taliban government, a democratic government was installed but the insurgents in various parts of the country particularly in areas neighboring Pakistan, regrouped themselves and launched a resilient insurgency against the government and the coalition forces. In two decades, the conflict led to significant casualties, damage to the state and its institutions, and hindrance in the efforts to established lasting security in the state and beyond. In 2021, after the withdrawal of US and allied troops, the collapse of the Afghan army, the Taliban formed the government again (Center for Preventive Action, 2023).

Material and Methods

Research methodology, therefore, is viewed as a strategic tool that enables one to conduct the proper and efficient investigation of any issue. The researcher in this study used primary research through a qualitative method with a descriptive and analytical nature of the given issue as well as, the use of secondary research data. The literature papers employed in this literature review include newspapers, journals, and government publications which are secondary sources that facilitate a deep understanding of security situation in Afghanistan and the subsequent influence on the region.

Based on the examination of the work's extraction of regional stakeholders' interests, it is seen that the identified qualitative approach allows for a qualitative understanding and analysis of the complex processes involved in the regional strategies in region. This research methodology enables the researcher to discover traces and reality of the emerging interests regarding security, economic growth, and stability of the region, which might not be very conspicuous when looking for them statistically. While the quantitative approach gives extensive knowledge about the numbers of people affected and the intensity of the conflicts, the qualitative approach offers richness and prescriptions which make it better to explain the inter-calibration and social construction that define regional security as argued Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory.

Results and Discussion

Importance of Afghanistan Security for Regional Stability

Due to its strategic location, the security of Afghanistan is deeply entwined with regional stability. It serves as crossroad between western, central, and south Asia while sharing mostly porous borders with countries like Pakistan, Iran, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Its porous border, historical ethnic and tribal affiliations, multiethnicity, sectarian differences and rugged terrain provides sanctuaries to various non-state actors. Cross border illicit activities such as arms smuggling and terrorist attacks, displacement of refugees, proliferation of extremist ideologies and drug trafficking have the potential to destabilize the neighboring countries.

Its security is also linked to the regional and global power politics. All major regional powers have historically pursued their national interests within Afghanistan, either supporting certain ethnic or sectarian groups, government or opposition forces or engaging in proxy wars. The security situation in Afghanistan is crucial for neighboring countries and play a vital role in maintaining regional stability. (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2008).

The country has been a breeding ground for extremist and terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, ISKP, Taliban and various sectarian groups in different era. Afghanistan's security is closely intertwined with effective counter terrorism efforts. These groups not only threaten Afghanistan's security but regional stability as well and have global ambitions. Without secure and stable Afghanistan, these groups can recruit, regroup, train, and prepare for war, plan attacks and target not only Afghanistan but could get involved in trans-national border terrorism activities, posing significant risk. Effective counter terrorism efforts require a stable and cooperative environment, sophisticated security force with modern weapons and a supportive regional framework to prevent the menace of terrorism. Afghanistan also shares a long porous border with several countries, making Afghanistan's security crucial for them as well. Instability can lead to proliferation of violence and cross border security challenges. To prevent such situation, regional cooperation like intelligence sharing, joint operations and coordinated border management is crucial. Due to its location, the country's security is also linked with regional economic development. As a crossroads between various region, it can provide stable transit route to landlocked central Asian states, help building of energy projects such as TAPI gas pipelines to energy thirsty south Asian states along with successful implementation of game changer projects like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). Trade and connectivity can be improved through the extension of project like CPEC and will be game changer for whole region (Maley, 2021).

Afghanistan under Taliban 2.0

15 August 2021 as an important day in the history of Afghanistan when a zealous Taliban drove into Kabul without major clash to re-establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. As the dust settled over the war-torn country, the world sees these developments with skepticism and hope, fear and optimism. While at Doha Agreement, the Taliban promised of inclusive government, women and human rights and that Afghan land will not use for any terrorist related activities give glimmer of hope while possible revival of previous draconian rule create fear and uncertainty. While the two decades war and destruction come to an end and the state return to normalcy. However, there are significant worries or apprehensions that cast a shadow like women and marginalized groups' rights, fear of possible civil war and imposition of draconian law. The moot question was, how the Taliban managed to claw back into power within two decades of being expelled from power and even state. While at the time of US forces occupation, it was easy for the Taliban to push the jihadi narrative of liberation through a combination of a nationalist struggle and an ideological one.

Afghanistan under Taliban 2.0 refer to the period since Taliban toppled the government of Ashraf Ghani and regained control of Afghanistan as a de facto ruler almost two decades later. While the Taliban shifting from a non-state actor as a ruler, the state has undergone significantly internal changes and external capricious in the term of public relation, girls' education, human and women rights, governance, media independence, security and justice and relation with other states. While the previous democratically elected government were engaged with the public through their elected representatives and members of houses. The had a relatively open approach, held regular press conferences, granted interviews, and had answerable to national and international journalist's questions. Previous government was also engaged with public through Loya

Jirga (grand council) and normally focused on promoting legitimacy of their respective governments. Various representatives of government mentioned their achievements, development projects and nation building.

On the other hand, the Taliban public relation aims to gain acceptance and international legitimacy by projecting themselves as a viable alternative to the previous government (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021a). They normally used the same strategies which they did from late 90s with minor changes. The most important strategy was a very strong public relation campaign that enhanced their ground operations in different part of Afghanistan. Former commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan Gen David Richards said in a statement that he had never seen 'a more sophisticated propaganda machine' than the one put together by the Taliban against the internal and external forces and its representatives. Another statement given by professor Maley that the Taliban public relation in the post-2001 invasion era used a much more sophisticated and varied range of techniques and strategies that included Pamphlets, magazines, night letters to opponents, statements, and sermons from podium on daily and weekly basis and on important religious and others sacred occasions like Eid. Interviews to selective journalists, mobile radio station (voice of sharia) broadcasting via mobile transmitters in Pushto and Dari languages. They also used application like Facebook (page name Alemarah) or twitter and promote strong Pashtun nationalism against the northern alliance dominated government in Kabul. Along with the effective using of previous methods, there have also been some crucial changes in the public relation of Taliban 2.0. Now they are the de facto rulers of Afghanistan and have direct control on state media. They held regular press conferences, grant interviews on state television like Tolo news and Shamshad tv and established relationship with national and international journalists. They regular engaged with international media and gives interview to eminent international media channels like Aljazeera, CNN and BBC (Maley, 2021).

The Taliban's governance changes in Afghanistan have been significant since takeover in 2021. They changed from the name Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the Islami Emirates of Afghanistan and implemented policies aligned with their interpretations of Islamic law known as Sharia. They also adopted a new flag consisting of a white background with the Shahada (Islamic Proclamation of faith) at the center (Jacinto, 2022). The Taliban also appointed their new leaders on key positions. Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund was named the interim Prime Minister and various important roles were given to influential commanders in the government and administrative structure. Taliban as a dominant Pushtun group, now given important positions to non-Pashtun like Chief of Army Staff Qari Fasihuddin, who is from Badakhshan and a Tajik in the Taliban leadership highest rank (Rahimi, 2023).

Media Freedom and Cultural Suppression

In the past two decades, Afghan see relative's media freedom and celebrated all cultural events with zeal and zest. But under the Taliban rule, wide and draconian rules imposed on media with ban on several cultural events like music and films etc. Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report after one month of Taliban takeover and said that "wide-ranging restrictions on media and free speech" According to the same report, Taliban has taken more than 32 journalists into custody since 15 August. On 6 September 2021, a young photojournalist Murtaza Samedi was detained while covering a protest. Taliban official accused him for organizing protests and connections with foreigners.

The Taliban authorities announced rules for media on 19 September 2021, and forbid the broadcasting of news or stories which insult national figures, violate privacy or contrary to Islam. According to Voice of America (VOA) report, Taliban perused two prolonged media strategy being in power. They showed a friendly image to the outside world by inviting journalists, having Q/A sessions, and holding regular press conferences

while they issued draconian rules, detained and beaten journalists who criticize their policies or having critical programs.

With rich and diverse culture, Afghans loved and celebrated their cultural events with zeal while their new de facto ruler policies discouraged and banned cultural events and its celebration. Various artistic and cultural expressions have been banned and prohibited like celebration of Nowruz, censorship of music and shut down its school, visual arts like painting and sculpture, films and even video games. While the Taliban terminated Ministry of Women's Affairs and replaced with vice and virtue ministry. These restrictions on media freedom, expression and celebration of cultural events have wide range of negative implications like impeding the development of an open, diverse, and inclusive society, respect for different opinions and lack of critical thinking.

Taliban Foreign Policy Shift and Relation with other States

Over the last decade and particularly after 2013 opening of Doha political office, Afghan Taliban moved from being a non-state actor to one of the main legitimate parties in Afghanistan. Their leaders visited frequently to important capitals around the world like Moscow and Tehran. The Taliban opening of political office in Doha in 2013 was a move in right direction through which they engaged to various capitals and decrease its reliance on Pakistan. Taliban realized the importance of foreign relations and learn lessons from past mistake of isolation. In press conferences and dialogue with various stakeholders, they repeatedly committed a foreign policy of non-interference, non-intervention and of neutrality.

In their previous rule, they adopted a very harsh and isolated policy with very limited engagement and diplomatic relations. They also took side in various rival states and their land used as a fertile ground for international terrorism and against various states. Taliban 2.0 shown sign of a shift in their interaction and engagement with other states particularly regional one. They also repeatedly said that Afghan land should not be used against anyone and for cross border terrorism. They also committed policy of neutrality and see towards Turkmenistan as a role model. With decreasing dependency on Pakistan, Taliban also established a relation with India and having an independent foreign policy.

While their government is not recognized by anyone like previous one by Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia, but Taliban 2.0 is far less isolated today than the previous rule. Taliban knows that without proper external recognition and legitimacy, it will not be easy to rule and improve Afghanistan situation. While the international community linked recognition with respect for universal human rights and inclusive government. Taliban divide their foreign relations in three sections. The first section of Taliban foreign policy is with neighbors. They expected recognition and good relationship with all neighbors and also compelled them with different tactics for recognition like Afghanistan anarchy will affect neighbors and create refugee's crisis. The second section is Islamic world with which Taliban want a cordial relations based on Muslim Ummah. The third section is with whole world state and non-state actor based on equality, non-intervention and interference. Taliban also want recognition because in case of government breakdown and anarchy, Afghan land will be a heaven for non-state and will be used for international terrorism.

Current Security Dynamics and key Regional Players

Since the withdrawal of foreign troops, the security dynamics of Afghanistan are intricately and volatile. Various non-state armed groups start fighting against each other's with ethnic or sectarian affiliation for control and country has experienced a deterioration in security. The de facto ruler faces threat from these national and

international militants' groups and local warlords. Intra Taliban fragmentation, activation of various local and international anti-Taliban groups, fragile economy and unemployment further deteriorated the situation.

Despite such grim challenges, the overall security situation of Afghanistan shown a sign of slowdown in the pace of violence. Because pre-15 August, Taliban as an insurgent group involved itself in violence against civilians, Afghan security forces and international forces. Now Taliban became the defector ruler and have responsibility to control and improve the situation. According to International Crisis Group (ICG), an estimated 20000 to 40000 fatalities per year were happened in pre-Taliban era while now it remains 18% of the previous level. A comparison of Taliban government first 10 months with the same period a year earlier found that violence has fallen significantly as shown in figure 1.0.

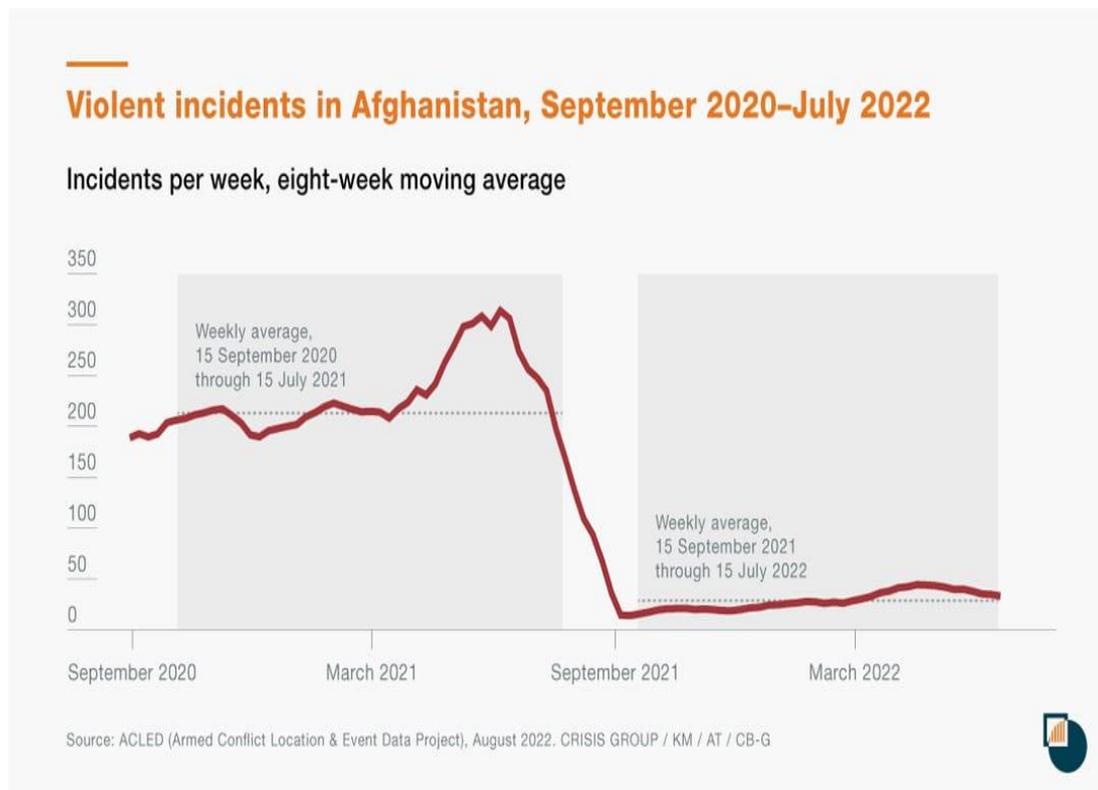


Figure 1. Violent incidents involving major anti-Taliban groups Source <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghanistans-security-challenges-under-taliban>:

Despite the decrease in violence, several armed groups already declared armed resistance to the Taliban rule including Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) and National Resistance Front (NRF) and other groups aligned with the former government. The local branch of Islamic State (IS) emerged in 2015 and intensified their attacks since. ISKP targeted several Taliban leaders including religious one Sheikh Rahimullah Haqqani, targeted Shia and Sufi community with deadly suicide attacks. NRF, which is mostly composed of former government affiliated people and active in the north of the country particularly Panjshir. NRF lead by Ahmed Masood, son of former guerilla fighter Ahmed Shah Masood from Tajikistan. The group did dozens of attacks in summer of 2022. They are active in Panjshir, Parwan and Kapisa and used mostly hit and run tactics. Figure 2, illustrating the number of attacks by both groups, ISKP and NRF.

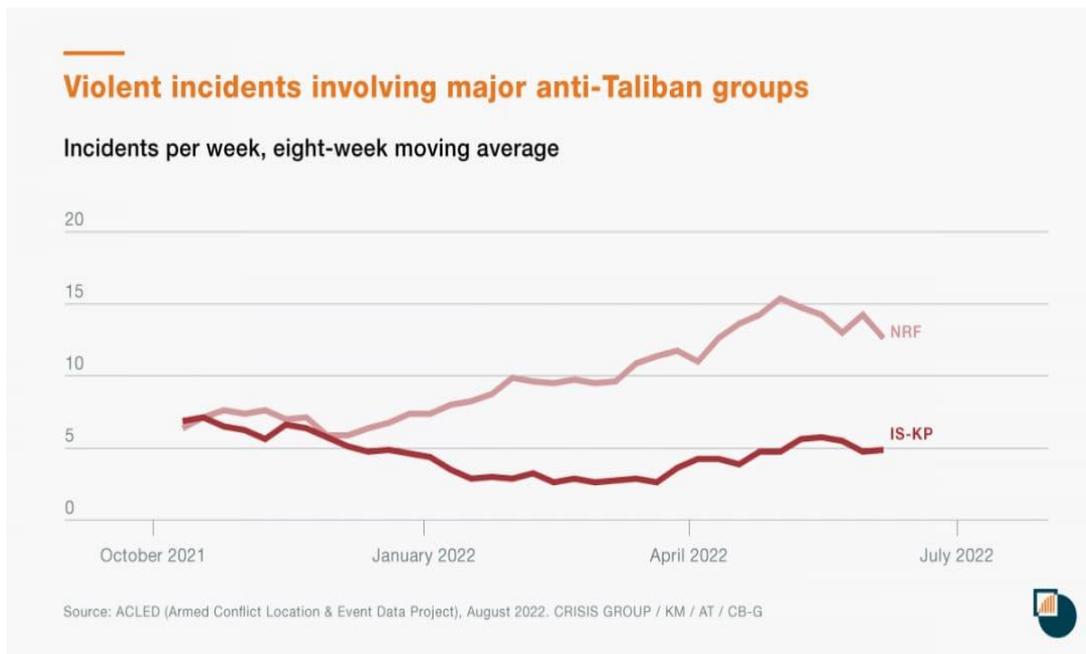


Figure 2. Violent incidents involving major anti-Taliban groups
 Source: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghanistans-security-challenges-under-taliban>

Other small national insurgents' groups are also active like Afghanistan Freedom Front led by former chief of the staff general Muhammad Yasin Zia, The Afghanistan Islamic National and Liberation Movement and Unknown Soldiers of Hazaristan. Various international armed groups give direction to the security dynamics of Afghanistan like Al Qaeda, Jamaat Ansarullah, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Uighur fighter and Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Due to strategic location, interests and influence in the country, various regional players involved which further complicated the security dynamics of Afghanistan. These regional players supporting various factions and proxy groups based on interest, ethnic or sectarian affinity. Regional players contributed to a complex web of alliances and rivalries, which peace become a wish.

Pakistan Role and Engagement with New Regime

Pakistan has long played a significant role in the Afghan conflict, and its relationship with the Taliban has been a subject of international scrutiny. With the rise of the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Pakistan's role and engagement take on heightened importance. The fragmented Taliban and their leadership were reorganized like in Quetta Shura and they began to carry out attacks after 2005.

However, Pakistan itself has many problems with the Afghan Taliban. First, the Afghan Taliban is no longer as dependent on Pakistan as it used to be, and the Taliban has been engaged in self-talk for some years with various state without Pakistan involvement. In this way, Pakistan has not played a major role and many of its enemies like India are gaining a foothold in Afghanistan (Bibi, et. al. 2023). Even the Defense Minister of the Afghan Taliban Mullah Yaqub has said in a statement that the Taliban want to send their troops to India for training. While giving an interview to India's News 18 TV, when asked whether he would send the officer to India, he replied "Yes, we don't see any issue with it. Afghan-India relations get strengthened and set the ground for this. There will be no issues with it,"

The second issue is the Pakistan-Afghanistan border Durand Line, on which Pakistan started the fencing work from March 2017, which is now almost complete. In

April 2023, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General of Pakistan, Ahmed Sharif said in a statement that "Fencing along the 2,611 km border along the Pak-Afghan frontier is 98 per cent complete,". On the other hand, the Afghan government and people do not recognize Durand line as an international border. For this reason, there have been many clashes between the Pakistani security forces and the Afghan Taliban in the last two years. On December 18, 2021, the Taliban prevented Pakistani soldiers from erecting a border fence and on January 25, 2022, the Taliban tried to remove a various section of fencing. Clashes took place on the two main borders of Chaman-Spin Boldak and Torkham, with losses on both sides. The third problem is Afghan Taliban not acting against Tahreek -e-Taliban Pakistan and they used this group as a foreign policy tool. In the past, it used to be that if Pakistan government had any problem with the Ghani government, it would support the Taliban and used them as a pressure group. Now the opposite happens, when the Afghan Taliban have a problem with Pakistan, they use the TTP as a pressure group.

The Afghan Taliban want the dialogue between Pakistan and the TTP to end this war and have played a role in the ceasefire several times. Whereas the Taliban cannot act against the TTP based on two major reasons. The first reason is that when the US and coalition forces were fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the TTP gave them safe havens in Pakistan and fought alongside them in Afghanistan. While after 9/11, TTP also pledged allegiance to Amirul Munin of Afghan Taliban. According to Pakistan senior security official "they are two faces of the same coin". The second reason is that even if the Taliban wants to, can they act against the TTP? There are already many groups in Afghanistan that are fighting against the Taliban and if they acted against TTP, this would create another enemy which will be a huge challenge to the Taliban government. After the Taliban came to power, there has been a 56% increase in terrorist activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan becomes a haven for TTP fighter. After 9/11 the fundamental change occurred in security of South Asia. Pakistan inclined towards China and the rise of Pak-China cooperation after CPEC as Pakistan is the gateway to Eurasia and land bridge for future economic enhancements, push USA towards India et. al., 2020; Khizar & Ahmad, 2021).

India Interest and Afghanistan Policy

India has a long-standing strategic, security and economic interest in Afghanistan and a relationship based on historical and cultural links. The security vacuum created in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of foreign troops have significant implications on India because the defacto ruler a not a democratically elected group but captured government with gun power. India had historically supported the opposite groups of Taliban and have sour relations in the past. India always wants a stable, free and independent Afghanistan from foreign interference particularly from Pakistan. India has no history of military intervention in Afghanistan and have good people to people contact.

India supported anti-Taliban groups in 90s due to strategic compulsion and due to Taliban offensives in Kashmir. But now India has good relations with Taliban 2.0 and have a soft spot in Taliban leadership for India like Abbas Stanakzai. In interview of Taliban defense minister Mullah Yaqoob said to India's News 18 TV channel when asked about sending Afghan army officer to India for training, he responded "Yes, we don't see any issue with it. Afghan-India relations get strengthened and set the ground for this. There will be no issues with it,"

After 9/11, India was one of the main development partners of Afghanistan and have completed various education projects and institutions, training of Afghan army officers, construction of dams, roads and even new parliament house building of Afghanistan.

The pragmatic foreign policy of India towards Afghanistan new defacto ruler making its best and created space for themselves. Initially India deployed technical team at the embassy to re-establish diplomatic gesture and humanitarian assistance. India also supplied 40000 MT wheat through Pakistan and 20000 MT through Iran. Taliban leadership also pledges that Afghan soil will not be used for terrorist activities. Afghanistan peace, stability and independent foreign policy has several importance for India due to multiple reasons. The most important reason is that Pakistan has a long-standing border with Afghanistan and having historically influence on Taliban. India fearing that Pakistan may be used Taliban to create disturbance in India occupied Kashmir or use Afghan soil as a base to attack like happened in the past. Second reason is the important strategic location of Afghanistan at the crossroad of Central Asia, South Asia and Middle East. It is a major transit route for connectivity with these energy resources rich regions. India needs energy resources and wanted a direct route to Central Asia through Afghanistan-Iran. The third reason is that India has more than 170 million Muslims population and Afghanistan as a Muslim majority state has deep religion relations and is important for India internal harmony (Wani, N. U. H., & Latif, L. 2022).

China and Russia's Increasing Involvement and Occupying the Power Vacuum

Russia and China have been increasing their involvement in global affairs and played active role in regional politics. This role, mediation and involvement has been particularly in the regions where US played role traditionally or important for them strategically such as Central Asia and Middle East. One of the main reasons of this increase involvement is regionalism and the perception that the US failed in its global commitments and withdrawing from global affairs. The perception is due to multiple reasons like destructive role of US in regional conflicts, revival of Russia and rising of China, growing economic and political challenges faced by the United State.

Due to reactive foreign policy of USA and in hurry withdrawal from the region, China and Russia have moved to fill the vacuum. China used her soft power and one of the major investors in the region while Russia also increased its military presence. The withdrawal of US les allied troops from Afghanistan create another opportunity for Russia and China to fill. They filled the vacuum and increased their involvement and influence due to multiple reasons. The first reason for both states to involve in Afghan affairs is security issue and fear of possible spillover of terrorism into their territories and sphere of influence. China's share a 74km long border with Afghanistan and are very sensitive to terrorism and separatism. Various terrorist groups like East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Uighur are involved in multiple attack in mainland China. Although Russia don't share any direct border with Afghanistan but worried about Central Asia security because it is a "near border" region for them. Russia also deployed over 8000 troops in Tajikistan for security and want to increase influence in Central Asia. The second reason is that Afghan soil should not be used for international terrorism and groups like ISKP and Al Qaeda. Both states fear that such groups can conduct cross border terrorism and malign activities on their mainland. Terrorist attacks from Afghan soil or being used in such activities created geopolitical weakness for both states like after 9/11 when US led coalition attacked on Afghanistan as a reactive foreign policy step and set on the border of China and Russia. The third common objective of both states are the curbing of drugs trafficking and transiting to their countries. The fourth objective of both states are economic interest. China wants to expand BRI projects into Afghanistan and did investment in the economically poor but resources rich state. For Russia energy resources particularly oil, Afghanistan is also a tiny market but a huge transit route.

There might be a possibility of a new great game between Russia, China, and various regional states in Afghanistan like that in Central Asia. China's role is crucial due to its historical nonintervention policy, utilizing soft power and strong relations with Pakistan (which in turn has influence on Taliban leadership). Russia also expanded its

influence but not recovered completely from the past traumatic memories of "Afghan Syndrome". Russia facilitated Taliban dialogue, improved relations with Pakistan to use its influence but she focused most on security prospects than economics. However, various factors will shape the new great game in Afghanistan like Beijing-Moscow bilateral relation and Washington element, role and policies of Taliban, interest, and role of other regional powers like Pakistan, India and Iran.

Conclusion

Lately, the security developments in Afghanistan have promoted rebalancing that indicates the similarity in the security concern of regional states in countering terrorism and eliminating the extremists. It is important that such endeavor is done collectively to help bring stability and foster peace in the area. Secondly, there is now great attention to the economic consideration as there is a realization that security entails development and economic prosperity in the long run. Another important issue is refugees and migration, as cooperation at the regional level can assist in solving the humanitarian problems and create a better situation for people who have been forced to move. Finally, diplomacy and conflict management are in the focus of this process, where regional states are searching for the ways to bring stability into the region and enable Afghanistan's neighbors to build the more stable and conflict-free future. That said, the process of convergence may be explained with the help of the theoretic framework established by Barry Buzan known as the regional security complex theory. Buzan, in his analysis of regional security makes the assertion that security in the region is structural since the security of states within a region cannot be determined separately from the security of other states in the region. In Afghanistan's case, countries bordering the country come to appreciate the fact that their security is indeed mutual, thus promoting cooperation. This integration is particularly manifested in works undertaken within diplomatic frameworks and cooperation with regard to conflict management and the formation of a stable security environment in a given region. Therefore, these states should be able to improve the geopolitical situation in this region by countering threats that risk the stability of their countries and developing opportunities that can improve the situation worldwide.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations

- Regional States should collaborate to create a comprehensive security framework to counter terrorism and extremism made possible by establishing proper mechanism of intelligence sharing and joint operations.
- The economic development initiatives should be made to enhance regional cooperation and interdependence to deal with the security reservations collectively.
- Strengthen diplomatic ties and establish conflict resolution mechanism. Regular diplomatic dialogues and conflict mediation efforts can help address regional disputes and foster a cooperative security environment.
- Focus on non-traditional areas of interests such as cultural exchange, environmental sustainability, and technological collaboration to foster regional convergence. These areas can serve as additional platforms for building trust and cooperation among regional states.

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