



Taliban’s Relations with the Neighboring Countries in the post 2021 Afghanistan

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**Abstract**

The retake of Afghanistan by Taliban in 2021 was one of the most turning points in the history of Afghanistan. The retake has great symbolic significance for the neighboring countries, regional dynamics and global actors. The first era of Taliban’s Regime from 1996—2001 made the Afghan Taliban face with certain challenges and the US and allied partners had to fight against them for almost 20 years but the drawdown of the NATO Forces from Afghanistan, followed by the US-Taliban Peace Deal in 2018 and finally the rebirth of Taliban has been viewed as a victory of the latter. Today’s Taliban are different from the Taliban that ruled the country during the first era. They maintain good and friendly relations with the neighboring countries and want to move forward with trade, natural resources, investment, and dispute resolution, sending and receiving diplomatic ties with the world powers. Main objective of the study revolve around Taliban’s relations with the neighboring countries and the strategies adopted by Taliban to strengthen diplomatic and foreign relations.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Neighboring Countries, Strategy, Taliban

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## Introduction

Taliban that retook power in Afghanistan in September 2021 after a long fighting of 20-year against the allied forces, remains one of the world's poorest countries for the challenges faced by it. Trump's administration might be faced with financial and security issues to be resolved to avoid further implications for the major powers. The Taliban do not seem to face political or armed opposition representing serious threat to the ruling class at the moment. There may be rumors that dissensions have emerged within the Taliban circle but the Taliban have a history of effectively managing and over-coming the internal threat and conflicts. It is also important that no country has recognized the Taliban government although several embassies operate in Kabul (Clayton , 2025) . The United States does not recognize the Taliban in the country by saying that no US diplomatic or military personnel exist in Afghanistan despite the fact that it was the US that signed the peace deal on 29th February 2018 with the Taliban.

In 2020, by the end of Trump's first administration, the United States had agreed for the complete withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan in a February 2020 deal with the Taliban (Tariq, 2021). During this period, the US had to withdraw 2,500 troops from Afghanistan. In the wake of Taliban's territorial gains and continued fighting against the US troops, Biden's Administration confirmed in April 2021 that international forces would leave Afghanistan by autumn 2021. In the ensuing months, the Taliban faced no resistance or very little resistance from government forces in some areas. With the continued minimal fighting, Taliban soon took control of the country bringing about the end of Ashraf Ghani's government (Clayton , 2025). It is also a fact that President Ashraf Ghani whose seven year's tenure was characterized by the electoral crisis, corruption, and the gradual deterioration of Afghan military forces, fled the country on August 15, 2021 (Clayton , 2025).

## Taliban's Government

The Taliban, after regaining power on September 2021, announced a 'caretaker government in Afghanistan' by referring to the country as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Since the country has been ruled by Haibatullah Akhunzada, as the supreme leader of Taliban who holds power as the Taliban's leader since 2016 when his predecessor was killed in a US drone attack (Jazeera, 2022). The cabinet members of the Taliban government comprise only the male members, most of them are ethnic Pashtuns- the largest ethnic group in the country Clayton, 2025). (Reports have also been in the offing of being dissension among the Taliban's circles from various quarters but history of Taliban's management is much stronger and effective in dealing with such cases. Matters of tension have existed between the political wing and the military wing of the government (ANI, 2022).

The Taliban's retake of September 2021 does not have the popular massive support (Shadi Hamid, 2021) .As a matter of fact even the former government did not have the support of the entire stakeholders whereby Taliban were not given a chance of representation in the democratic set up of the country. Some elements in the Afghan society appear to view the Taliban with skepticism, fear, hostility, and sidetracking while some small number of the Afghans has observed peaceful demonstration advocating for their rights by showing opposition to the Taliban (The Taliban use stun guns, fire hoses and gunfire to break up Afghan women protesting beauty salon ban," , 2023;). Such peaceful demonstrations have been dealt with by the Taliban violently and have dispersed. Such protests have been

dispersed by the Taliban with efforts to stifle the dissenting voices. It is worth mentioning that despite such voices against the Taliban government no organized opposition has emerged on the scene as a result of the strong bond and coherence among the ruling class (Clayton, 2025).

## **Foreign Relations of Afghanistan**

Since August 2021, no country has recognized the Afghan Taliban Government in Afghanistan though during late 1990s three states did recognize their government (Clayton, 2025). . . Despite the issue of recognition, the Taliban had been trying to establish cordial relations with the neighboring countries and regional powers. Many countries operate diplomatic ties with Kabul and have even allowed the Taliban officials to operate diplomatic facilities abroad also (Clayton, 2025).

## **Pak- Afghan Relations**

Pakistan has played the most significant role in the domestic politics as well as its foreign relations for many decades. She has been very supportive of the Taliban regime during 1990s but at the same time have also do away its relations that emerged as a result of the 9/11 syndrome holding the Al-Qaeda network as responsible for the attacks on Pentagon. Many analysts also prognosticated the retake of Afghan Taliban 2021 as a triumph of Pakistan's regional policy citing some supportive statements from Pakistani leaders (Haqqani, 2021). Since August 2021, leaders of both the countries have held official meetings in Kabul and Islamabad for improving ties between the two countries (Husain Haqqani, 2021). Though the Taliban's return to power may be seen as more friendly and amicable towards Pakistan yet it has faced Pakistan with certain inherent challenges of security in some parts of the country (Ali, 2012). The areas mostly affected by the sense of insecurity include the areas of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and areas of Baluchistan (Khan, 2011) & (Sayed, 2023). Both the countries have again moved towards accusations and counter-accusations regarding the worsened law and order situations in their respective countries as caused by the insurgent groups (Reuters, 2023).

It is a matter of fact that relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have remained due to the blame game of accusation and counter-accusations. The former is of the view that the government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has not been able to overcome their control over the Tehreek-e-Taliban in Pakistan (Thomas, 2025). One of the main causes for the strained relations is the long and treacherous border between the two countries that creates ample space for terrorist activities and border infiltration and has been a source of skirmishes and is further fueled by the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan since the intervention of the Russian Forces in Afghanistan in 1979 (Clayton, 2025). The government of Pakistan has giving deadlines over deadlines for the evacuation of Pakistani soil but that too is opposed by the Afghan people residing over here in Pakistani territory.

## **Afghanistan's Relations with the Neighboring Countries**

Afghanistan has been trying to maintain cordial relations with the neighboring countries keeping in view its geopolitical and geostrategic location on the globe. The country has seen many ups and downs throughout the entire history and has always drawn the attention of the regional and international community for the presence of the multi-ethnic and diverse society.

## **Afghan-Iran Relations**

Iran shares with Afghanistan its western border but due to the religious matters of being Sunni and Shia. Relation's relation with Afghanistan have normally remained cordial

during democratic set ups but the Taliban's regime have always been opposed by the neighboring country (Clayton , 2025) . Even when the Taliban are in power Iran has been trying to maintain good relations with Afghanistan but still emphasize to give representation to all ethnic and religious groups having close ties with Iran (Clayton , 2025). Iran supports Tajiks, speaking a variant version of Persian and Hazara tribes who are normally Shia by religion (FPRI, 2024). Though both the Iranian government and the Taliban express different stance and opinion on many issues still the former remains concerned with safeguarding her interest in spite of Taliban's ideological stance (Boltuc, 2022) . Border challenges persists between the two countries but pragmatism in trade and commerce, cooperation in security apparatus, and infrastructure projects help in balancing eh restrained approach of the Iranian government (Boltuc, 2022).

Economic ties remains key in the two countries relations that help in the connectivity of the region, and economic growth. The Chahbahar Transit Project compels Afghanistan to rely more on the Iranian Port to the extent of bypassing Pakistan's routes. Integrating Afghanistan market with Iran through Joint Chamber of Commerce is another initiative promoting cross-border trade, with the aim of focusing on sectors as agriculture, transit and small scale industries. Moreover, the Khaf-Herat Railway Project between the two countries may be very fruitful for the trade, movement of goods across the two countries while giving strategic leverage to Iran over Afghanistan would be of great help (Boltuc, 2022) . Despite the fact that both the countries have religious and ideological differences and share border issues yet remain concerned with the trade and commerce agreement for the sake of their economic uplift and development.

During the invasion of Russian forces into Afghanistan in 1979, Iran has been facing the issue of migration and border security with Afghanistan where Afghan population of 3.8 to 5 million have migrated to Iran (Boltuc, 2022) . The issue of migration by the Afghan people to Iran has caused it a huge financial blow and shortage of resources (Tariq, 2018). To escalate tension alongside the border the migrant refugees and Iranian security need to work out a viable plan for coordinated efforts to move towards better relations and understanding security concerns (Boltuc, 2022). Water disputes between the two countries remain another area of concern since the dispute over Helmand River Water has deprived Iran of its specific allocation and share in water though the matter has been streamlined in 1973 through Helmand River Treaty (Boltuc, 2022).

## **Afghanistan Relations with Central Asian States**

Central Asian States try to maintain good relations with the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan being the neighboring countries. The regain of Afghanistan by Taliban in August 2021 has been viewed by both Turkmenistan and Tajikistan with positive measure and have held meetings with the Taliban leading towards trade and bringing stability as the top priority. The Central Asian States also emphasize on the facilitation of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline and its easy supply to the member states could be a fruitful step towards the improvement of relations between the states (Boltuc, 2022). Amongst these states, Turkmenistan is having ties and relations with Afghanistan but Tajikistan has been opposed to the retake of Afghanistan by Taliban and offers refuge to the anti-Taliban figures (Boltuc, 2022) , the reason being Tajikistan also struggles against the Islamic as well as ties with the Afghan Tajiks; the second largest ethnic group of the country (FPRI, 2024).



It is pertinent to mention that the Central Asian States tend to have a very pragmatic approach towards Afghanistan irrespective of who are in power (Report, 2025). Despite the fact some sections of people have ideological differences with the ruling class of Taliban but in the post US withdrawal scenario, the Central Asian States have been reestablishing their relations with the Taliban (Report, 2025). To foster good relations with the Taliban, the initiative was taken by Uzbekistan while Kazakhstan accepted diplomatic mission from the Taliban Regime and has extricated them from the list of the banned groups (Report, 2025). Kyrgyzstan has adopted the strategy of extricating the Taliban from the terrorist and banned network and wants to normalize relations with its neighboring country but the Pamir Kyrgyz in Afghanistan face s certain issues in its relations with the Taliban (Report, 2025).

The government of Tajikistan considers the Taliban Regime as a threat owing to the presence of large community of Tajik in Afghanistan and has been warning against the cross border infiltration, trafficking of drugs, and issues of radicalization of the Tajik group (Report, 2025). Despite the accusations and counter-accusations against each other of insurgency against each other through cross border infiltration, the government of Tajikistan tries to take a very pragmatic approach and keeps the supply of electricity going to Afghanistan (Report, 2025).

A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is a *sine qua non* for the regional security and stability and particularly for the neighboring countries. Maintaining good working relations with the Taliban should be the top priority of the Central Asian States. Besides, the border disputes coupled with the water disputes, cross border infiltration, and other issues of religious ideologies need to be addressed through table talks and negotiation. Both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that receive about 25% of the water of Qosh Tepa Canal also need to coordinate with the Taliban while ensuring the efficient construction of the canal (Report, 2025).

## **Afghanistan China Relations**

Since the Taliban's retake of Afghanistan in August 2021, Afghanistan's relations with the People's Republic of China has also remained quite harmonious and moves towards more stability partly owing to the geostrategic location of Afghanistan and partly due to the greater influence of China in the region (Report, 2025). China has raised its position to the world's largest economic giant and provides goods and supply to most of the countries of the world but at same time also wants to maintain cordial relations with the regional and neighboring countries in order to have a peaceful and stable region.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Taliban in the present set up are very active in maintaining their relations with all the regional and the international actors in a very conducive and harmonious way. During their first regime from 1996—2001 they embarked upon certain policies which were provocative to some of the states. Now, they are try their best to be in touch with the regional powers and the international community and are trying to provide opportunities of investment to other countries and do invest in other countries too. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan will cater to the stability of not only Afghanistan, Pakistan and neighboring countries but also of the regional and global security as well.

Moreover, the signing of US-Taliban Peace Deal in 2018 was the other important event that not provided a sort of recognition to the Afghan Taliban who were declared to be a globally terrorist network but had also fought against them for a long period of 20 years. The 20 years taught many lessons to the incumbent powers including the Taliban, the US, and Pakistan since they had to revise their security strategies and had to

reassess their domestic politics and foreign policies. The peace deal provided for withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan but the most crucial event in the history was 2021 when the Afghan Taliban took the reign of the country in a very short span of time without firing even a single bullet.

The rebirth of Taliban prognosticates an important lesson for the regional and international actors that their devotion and dedication compelled the great powers to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. Another important lesson taught by their rebirth was the strength of the great powers recognized them as stakeholder in the politics of the country a glaring example of which is their signing of Peace Deal with the Afghan Taliban. The current policies and strategies of the Taliban show that they rule the country with great wisdom and caution and leave no stone unburned in maintaining good relations with the regional powers.

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