

Taliban's Foreign Policy and US Assistance to Afghanistan: An Analysis

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Abstract

The twenty years long history of the United States and its allied partners in Afghanistan bears a great imprint on the political and security history of the country. The rebirth of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan in the post-US withdrawal from the country is testimony to the fact that the Taliban are a great force and retook the power in the country despite the fact the US and the allied partners had to fight for two decades against them. The strength of the Taliban lies in the maintenance of cordial relations with the neighboring countries. The focus of this study is to analyze the foreign policy of Taliban and US assistance to Afghanistan. Main findings of the study include Taliban's strategy of maintaining friendly relations with the neighboring countries, strong hold at the domestic politics and their strength as a unified force in the country.

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Introduction

The end of the 20-year long military operation of the United States in Afghanistan ended in August 2021 when the Taliban retook the country back. Despite installing democratic set up in Afghanistan during the internecine period and ignoring the Taliban, as a stakeholder in the domestic politics of the country, no political stability could be achieved while leaving the space for power vacuum, political instability, weak structure of democratic norms and lack of consensus amongst the various stakeholders led to the rebirth of the Taliban (Thomas, 2026). The US withdrawal from Afghanistan was a continuation of the drawdown scenario from Afghanistan launched in 2014 by the US and the allied partners as part of their objectives being accomplished in Afghanistan. But the interest of the US did not end with the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan but still remains concerned with the democratic norms, education of girls and women and inclusive government in the country for which it provides financial aids and assistance in various forms. Trump administration has been characterized by the reversals of the post-2021 US efforts to provide assistance to the people of Afghanistan with an effort to resettle the Afghans who worked for the US and the former US-backed government (Thomas, 2026).

The recent government of the Afghan Taliban has preceded the precious 1996-2001 rule in length and has been trying to surpass in internal control and the de facto international acceptance (Thomas, 2026). The Taliban manage the affairs of the government in a tactful and diplomatic way that does not provide an opportunity to the rival group to stand against the government and raise their hand in open confrontation (Thomas, 2026). Due to strict control of the Taliban in the country and lack of consensus amongst the various stakeholders and the power vacuum, the Taliban don't appear to face political or armed opposition representing a serious threat to the group or the authoritarian regime (Thomas, 2026). Since Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country where different strata of the people reside in the country with no consensus-based government as in most of the cases the federal form of government can better resolve the issues of multi-ethnic groups and the society, the issue of opposition or difference of opinion cannot be overruled at all.

Some groups in the country try to stand in opposition to the Afghan Taliban and their authoritarian regime in the country. But since the strict observance of the Islamic law by the Taliban leave very little space for opposition and resistance. Even signs of dissensions have been observed within the ranks and file of the Taliban regime but since the Taliban has a history of effectively managing the internal disputes, no open opposition has been able to defeat them. The tactful handling of the diplomatic ties and maintaining strong relations with the neighboring countries particularly Russia, has officially recognized the Taliban regime in the country. The official recognition of the Afghan government by Russia has strengthened the position of the Taliban in the country and has even added further strength to the allies of the country. Besides, dozens of other countries operate embassies in Kabul or have also allowed the Taliban government to staff Afghan diplomatic facilities abroad (Thomas, 2026). The United States does not recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan though after the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, the Taliban gave a safe passage to all the foreigners including the US and allied partners. The US neither recognizes any entity or the Taliban as a ruling class in the country nor does allow any diplomatic mission or military personnel in the country.

Taliban Rule in Afghanistan

The Taliban rule the country in a self-styled way and want to maintain friendly relations with the neighboring countries and regional dynamics. During the first tenure of the Afghan

Taliban in 1996-2001, they imposed strict laws that sought the vengeance of the international community and human rights organizations. Besides maintaining diplomatic ties and missions in parts of the world, the Taliban want to rule the country without any support to a particular country particularly Pakistan. The pivotal center of the Taliban government remains focused over some of the key areas including the strict ban on the education of girls and women and barring them from the employment opportunities. The Taliban only allows for the education of girls and women up to primary level and imposes restrictions on their higher education and job opportunities at public places. The US opposition of the Taliban regime has provided the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda to enter into partnership against the any entity that could harm their interest.

Revival of Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan

The second tenure of the Trump administration has introduced some reforms with regard to the foreign assistance and the immigration policies towards Afghanistan. The US has been providing huge amount of the economic and the financial assistance to Afghanistan in the wake of the US withdrawal from the country. Afghanistan has received over \$3.8 billion humanitarian aid and development assistance soon after the retake of Taliban in 2021 (Thomas, 2026) . As of mid-2025, the Trump administration “has terminated all foreign assistance awards with activities in Afghanistan” as per the reports of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which itself terminated in January 2026 (Thomas, 2026).

Relocation and Resettlement of the Afghan Allies

The relocation of the resettlement of the Afghan allies is also another area of great concern for the US and the international community. After the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, the US provided for and facilitated the relocation of the Afghan allies and the facilitators who worked for the US during their stay in Afghanistan, where about 190, 000 Afghans were accommodated in the US between August 2021 and mid-2025 (Thomas, 2026) . US President, Donald Trump, brought an end to these relocation efforts and closed the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for the Afghan Relocation Efforts (Thomas, 2026). The stoppage of the US funds and the financial assistance to the Afghan people on behalf of their support to the US while in Afghanistan, would add further to the worries and problems of the people who have facilitated the US during their stay. Since the US focused on Iran on February 28, 2026, the Trump administration had to face many other issues of price-hike, resistance at the domestic level over the ongoing US-Iran war, the closure of the Strati of Hormuz and the stiff resistance by Iran made the US concerned on some grounds. Moreover, the national security concerns following the shooting of the two National Guard members in November 2025 by an Afghan national and the resultant decision by the Trump administration to suspend the processing of all visas to Afghan national, including Special Immigration Visas (SIVs) (Thomas, 2026).

Foreign Policy of the Afghan Taliban

The Taliban soon after their retake of the country in August 2021 had to revisit their foreign policy in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Taliban’s takeover of the country does not appear to in either the 2025 National Security Strategy or the 2026 National Defense Strategy (Thomas, 2026) . An official of the State Department in the US while talking about the review of the US policy toward Afghanistan stated that it “is an ongoing process” and committed to letting the Congress know when they reach some sort of consensus. The retake of Afghanistan by Taliban in August 2021 did not receive much applause from the various circles of the country and the civil society. During the long stay of the US and the allied partners in the country and the resultant military operations against the Al-Qaeda and the

Taliban and also their exclusion from the sphere of the government as stakeholders developed a sense of frustration and revenge against the US and those who supported them during the stated period (Thomas, 2026).

Many people of the Afghan society and particularly people in the urban areas view the Taliban with skepticism, fear, hostility, while a small number of the Afghan people appeared to have a peaceful demonstration against the Afghan Taliban upon their takeover of the country in August 2021 (Thomas, 2026). The aim of the demonstration was to show opposition to the ascendancy of the Taliban to power but the Taliban government reacted very actively and harshly while dispersing these protests and sought to stifle disseminating the voices. Despite all the protests and small number of opposition against the Taliban in the country, no organized opposition has emerged so far till now (Thomas, 2026). The absence of the opposition against the Taliban's authoritarian regime is testimony to the fact that the Taliban have strength enough to thwart any opposition and maintain peace and unity at their level.

Foreign Relations

To maintain themselves in power, the Taliban needs to establish friendly relations with all the neighboring countries and the regional dynamics. They have tried to develop good relations as compared to their previous regime during 1996-2001. With this end, Russian became the first country to formally recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Besides, the Taliban operate 42 representative offices abroad while 28 foreign missions and international organizations have their representations in Kabul (Thomas, 2026). The US withdrawal from Afghanistan was not an event of sudden withdrawal but was a result of the drawdown scenario initiated in 2014 passing through different tranches and to be completed in 2020 (Tariq, 2020). The drawdown was also a consequence of the US-Afghan Talks, setting the agenda for the US withdrawal from the country to be followed by the intra-Afghan talks providing the opportunity to the Afghan government to sign peace parleys with the Taliban. Anyhow, the withdrawal gave another opportunity to the Afghan Taliban to rise to power, which they did achieve within a period of a week's time (Tariq, 2020).

Relations with Pakistan

Though Pakistan has played a very active role in the domestic politics of Afghanistan from time to time yet it has also been criticized for its involvement in the internal affairs of Afghanistan particularly in the wake of the post-9/11 scenario. Pakistan's role has been criticized for decades, including its support to the Taliban government during 1990s (Coll, 2018). Some analysts even regarded the Taliban takeover as the triumph of Pakistan's regional policy (Tharoor & Haqqani, 2021). An analysis of the Taliban regime during 1990s and the retake of Afghanistan in 2021 have some divergence towards Pakistan in their foreign policy. The current regime has a different policy towards Pakistan despite the fact that the Taliban were believed to have friendly relations with Pakistan. Soon after the retake of the country by the Taliban, Pakistani officials held numerous meetings with the new Taliban government, both in Kabul and Islamabad since August (Thomas, 2026). The long, windy and porous Pak-Afghan border drew the attention of the entire world for its being used by the insurgents and the terrorists and the militants. Pakistan had to deploy security personnel on its western border in such a great number owing to the greater need for security from this border (Tariq, Khan, & Khan, 2020). The tribal belt has also served as the hub of economic activities between the two countries for many reasons; the Pashtun common culture, inter-marriages across both sides of the border and cross border terrorism (Tariq, Malik, & Afridi, 2020).

But the Taliban's rebirth has faced Pakistan with several challenges and issues giving birth to the resurgence of terrorist activities and incidents of insurgency in Pakistan. Not only this,

even both Pakistan and Afghanistan have stood face to face against each other in open confrontation resulting in the death of many casualties and injuries besides loss to the infrastructure (Sayed & Hamming, 2023). The open confrontation of Pakistan and Afghanistan has been followed by efforts from the regional dynamics but no substantial and fruitful result has been achieved between the parties (REUTERS, 2023). During the confrontation, the Iranian government offered to mediate between the two countries but the situation took a more serious turn when Iran was struck by the United States and Israel on 28th February 2026 (Lutz Kilian, 2026). China that counts itself to be friendly to both Pakistan and Afghanistan called for a ceasefire with the foreign ministry spokesman Mao Ning urging them to “remain calm and exercise restraint” (Aleks Phillips, 2026). While Foreign Secretary of the UK Yvette Cooper echoed calls for both sides to engage in mediated dialogues, adding that the two should “take immediate steps toward de-escalation” and ‘avoid further harm to civilians” (Aleks Phillips, 2026). In the post-9/11 scenario, made the US and the NATO to launch military operations against the terrorist networks in Afghanistan. But the presence of the long and porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan made the people suffer along both sides of the border due to the infiltration of terrorists and the outlaws (Threkkled & Easterly, 2021).

Relations with Iran

The western neighboring country of Afghanistan is Iran and has great strategic importance in the regional and global politics. Since 1979, Iran’s relationship with Afghanistan has fluctuated along with changes in Afghanistan’s domestic situation (Song & Tian, 2025). This shows a key component of Iran’s dual track diplomacy prioritizing the national security of the country. Under this diplomatic policy, Iran strived to support the local armed groups in its unstable neighboring regions under the banner of the Islamic movement (Song & Tian, 2025). This has resulted in creating spheres of influence, buffer zones, and the formal or informal underground organizations. The Taliban’s regime in 1990s was opposed by the government of Iran but has also maintained friendly relations with the group while emphasizing the need for representation for Afghanistan’s ethnic and religious groups (Thomas, 2026). Iran enjoys close ties with the Tajiks, who speak a variant of the Persian language and Hazaras, who are mostly Shias but has close relations with the Irani brethren of the Shia population (UNAMA, 2026). The repatriation of the Afghan refugees was not only emphasized by the Pakistani government but also the Irani government took stringent measures for the repatriation of the Afghan refugees to their country. The Irani government sent about 1.9 million Afghans from Iran to Afghanistan as a result of the “Iran’s intensified deportations of the undocumented migrants” (UNAMA, 2026). It is also important to mention that since the US-Iran war may change the shape and structure of the regional and global dynamics bringing about regime change in the affected countries as well as the regional countries. Regime change may lead to alter the entire edifice of the relations in the neighboring countries particularly the Afghanistan-Iran relations.

Relations with Central Asian Republics

Afghanistan also wants to maintain good and friendly relations with the neighboring countries of the Central Asian Republics (CARs). These countries have taken a different and varied approach to the Taliban government in the region depending on the nature of their ideological and religious affiliations. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan appear to be more prioritizing towards stability and economic ties, including the long-planned Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline and have had official engagements with the Taliban (Thomas, 2026). Tajikistan on the other hand does not enjoy good relations with the Taliban and has rather opposed their government in the country. Moreover, the Tajik government is also said to have offered shelter to the anti-Taliban figures, a consequence both Tajikistan’s own fighting against

the Islamist militancy as well as its ties with the Afghan Tajiks (Thomas, 2026). Pertinent to mention here that clashes at the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border escalated in 2025 while the construction of a canal by the Taliban at Amu Darya River to divert its water could spark tensions with its other Central Asian neighbors thus causing security concerns for the neighboring states (Umarov, 2025).

Relations with China

China has grown to be a greater power in the global politics and its prospects of becoming the greater People's Republic of China (PRC) coupled with its influence and the activity in Afghanistan has attracted some congressional attention since the takeover of the Taliban in August 2021. The Taliban government tries to establish cordial relations with the neighboring countries that can help them maintain in power. China has played a relatively limited role in Afghanistan under the former government, the period from 2001 to 2021 when democratic regimes ruled the country under various presidents. The reason may be the over-influence of the US and the allied partners in the democratic set up of the country. Some of the Chinese based firms made some economic investments in Afghanistan prior to the takeover of the Taliban, but the mega projects did not achieve their stated objectives due to political instability, lack of infrastructure, and other limitations (Siddique, 2023). Despite the fact that the Taliban are ruling the country but China has embraced the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In recognition of the Taliban regime, the Chinese government has accepted the credentials of a Taliban ambassador in Beijing in June 2024 and sent its foreign minister to Kabul in August 2025.

Discussion and Conclusion

The twenty years long history of the Afghan Taliban ended in August 2021 with the rebirth of the Afghan Taliban who took the control of the entire country. The US withdrawal was not something accidental but was a result of the drawdown scenario that initiated in 2014 when the US and allied partners decided to reduce the strength of their NATO forces slowly and gradually leading towards total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan. The installation of the democratic set up in Afghanistan during the period from 2001 to 2021 could not bring political stability and security in the country though many presidents rule the country through democratic process. One of the major flaws in the Afghanistan governments has been the exclusion of the stakeholders from time to time. During the 1996 -2001 the Taliban did not include any political figure or stakeholder in the governmental set up while the democratic set up that followed and ruled the country from 2001 to 2001 also excluded the Taliban from the political sphere and decision making power of the country.

The Taliban are governing Afghanistan very tactfully and effectively and tries to maintain friendly relations with all the regional and the international dynamics. Their strategy is different from their previous strategy which they adopted during 1990s that wrought the vengeance of the international community on account of their strict policies. Their current regime appears more calculated and defined in so far as their relations with the neighboring countries are concerned. Their length of ruling the country has been more than the previous one and wants to maintain relations with India, Russia, China, and the Central Asian States. The Taliban try to keep all the stakeholders of the country in confidence by giving no opportunity to any class of the people for opposition and resistance. This shows the spirit of statesmanship and political acumen by the Afghan Taliban since being inclined to a particular group of people or class of people may face them with more problems of internal and external security issues. But since Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society, it would be in the best interest of the country to have a federal form of government which is inclusive of all the political and religious stakeholders that can guarantee political stability and security in the country.

The US has been providing financial aids and facilities to those Afghan people who helped them while in their stay in the country from 2001 to 2021. In the spot- US withdrawal scenario in 2021, the US tried to facilitate them through reallocation and resettlement in the US as a sign of their loyalty and sympathy. During the period from August 2021 to mid-2025 the US accommodated round about 190, 000 Afghan people in the US. The US could help the people of Afghanistan for approximately four years but even the aid and assistance by the US stopped in mid-2025 since the Trump administration had to reconsider their Afghan policy. Though the discontinuation of the foreign aid aimed at facilitating a particular class of people yet the Taliban regime has a greater interest and wants to facilitate the whole country through their own system of government and governance. With this aim in mind, they have been operating 42 representative offices in abroad while 28 foreign missions and international organizations have their representations in Kabul.

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