

# Psychological bludgeoning: Insuperable terra and the resurgence of Taliban; A melody of conflict or peace?

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## ABSTRACT:

Since the dawn of human civilization various lands have remained, either a source of conflict or being brutally muzzled amid other contesting powers. Both situations are equally lethal and lead towards desolation. War is the most widespread currency in international relations. Humans, right from their inception are somehow in conflict with each other over various interests. These interests might be to increase influence, build strength, to defend sovereignty or all of them with a motive of an overall dominance. The thing, which is very much common among these struggles and conflicts is the significance of geography. These overarching events have always happened over those fault lines, junctures and terrains which are of an utmost importance. Just for instance: the events like, religious wars of 17th century, two world wars and the cold war of 20th century were mainly fought on mainland Europe, Mediterranean and south Asia. Just like these regions, Afghanistan has remained a grass under various fighting mammoths for centuries. There are multiple factors which have tremendously contributed while increasing the fragility and instability of this land. The ferocious invasions, inter-ethnic tussles, civil wars, illiteracy and foreign interventions are among those factors which never allowed this land to experience a tantalizing environment. This piece of research will mainly be focusing on the recent withdrawal of foreign forces and the lightening takeover of Taliban over whole country. The discussion will subsequently be followed by those possible challenges that might arouse after this sudden power shift. The paper also attempts to analyze the psychological and strategical impact of this staggering development over the region and what can be the possible role of major stakeholders which are strongly tied with this land in strategic-knot.

## Keywords:

Afghanistan, Taliban, foreign intervention, peace and prosperity, the US, stakeholders, fragility.

## INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is one of those very few lands of modern history which are still conceiving their huge potentials under a veil. Despite of its violent and ravaging history, a huge untouched resources which worth trillions of dollars and its unique strategic location has provided an appropriate reason for number of major powers to try their luck. An inter-ethnic tussles, the collision of warlords, terrific uprisings, fall of governments and the tremble of foreign invasions are those primordial stirrings which are abundantly found in its chronicle. The brawl among these actors might be of different in nature. It can be of territorial struggle or just to increase influence over others. Honestly, that does not matters at all. The motives have now been changed, the pawns have been readjusted and the rules of game have been redefined. Now actors, communities, nations, and civilizations as a whole want to dominate each other in every dimension of their domestic and international fabric. This desire to rise and dominate is very well define by Arnold j. Toynbee in his monumental work "A study of history" (12 volume study of history 1934-

1961). After analyzing a case of 26 civilizations, he put forward his "philosophy of history", that there is a cyclic rise and decline of civilizations. Just like these recurring changes, the history of Afghanistan has also undergone a huge change. The shocks of these paradigm shifts have affected this land in multiple orders and dimensions. During these transitions new actors also emerged who caused further fragility and bloody chaos most of the times.

Afghanistan is the eighth most mountainous country of the world with an average altitude of 6,180m above mean sea level (Most Mountainous Countries 2021). It has a total land area of 652,860 square km with a population of 38.93 million (Population, Total - Afghanistan, 2021). The culture and diversity of this land has not only provided Afghanistan a distinct and outstanding feature but also acted as a road bump towards its prosperity and progress. Geographically, it is located in a very strategic location. It is an amalgamating core and a cross-road of major geographical regions like: Indian subcontinent in South East, Central Asia at above, and Persian Plateau in a south. Another most important and decisive factor

of this terrain is its connection with a rising Himalayan power which has a confounding potential to transform the whole region by forming a stupendous Sino-club. Wakhan-Corridor which is also called as a tongue of Afghanistan had historically remained the most strategic part of its mainland territory. It is also considered as gateway to Central Asia for South Asian countries like Pakistan and India mainly. Geography might not be the solitary factor defining the fate of nations; but in the case of Afghanistan it remained the most striking factor for more than thousand years (Barfield, 2010).

Being a melting pot among various cultures and civilizations, Afghanistan had also acted as a “gateway for Invaders spilling out to Iran, Central Asia, and India (Barfield, 2010).” This land is relentlessly ravaged by the footprints of Cyrus II, Alexander, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane etc. Historically, Afghanistan has never remained a stable place to live on. Ruled by multiple Empires, juddered by ferocious assailants, and the quivers of inter-ethnic conflicts are those prominent factors which have jeopardized its peace, prosperity, sustainable uplift and development as a whole. During a great power tussle of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century between Russian and British Empire, the country had been crushed as grass under these two pugnacious mammoths.

After multiple wars, the country officially declared its independence in 1919 when there was signed a “Treaty of Rawalpindi” which put an end to “third Anglo-Afghan war (Country profile: Afghanistan, 2008). Despite of this all, Afghanistan did not sided with anyone and remained neutral during the brutal episodes of World War one and two. Nonetheless, it faced a civil unrest during 1929 which was triggered by social and cultural reforms introduced by Amanullah a son of Habibullah. Amanullah was more decline towards the Western style of government and ideas. It was for the first time when women were allowed to travel freely. They were given the rights of employment, education and freedom of speech (“International Intervention and State-Building in Afghanistan,” 2009). In simple words, a wave of reforms, feminism, emancipation and westernization shook the foundations of Afghanistan’s centuries-old culture, which is even older than the spread of Islam itself. The rise of resistance movements aired by the religious personalities was so violent that it ended the rule of Amanullah in a short span of time and its government fell like a sand castle.

By the mid of 20<sup>th</sup> century the country was once again brought under the hammer of cold war that reached its climax with Soviet intervention and its collapse afterwards in early 90s. After victory of US, the world completely ignored the flimsiness of this land, which subsequently plunged into another civil war, giving rise to a power heretofore unknown to mankind. This

was the point when world witnessed the rule of Taliban for the first time ever. This was not an end of chronicle, the event of 9/11 which was followed by US-led invasion to topple the Taliban’s government is the juncture, where history took a turn and followed a course which changed the world, we previously know.

### **Indomitable land: A triad of culture, religion and geography**

Strength of Afghanistan lies deep in the heart of its mountains. Terrain is the biggest asset of this land. It is a shield against those storms that collide periodically with its frontiers. The Eastern part of country is full of sky kissing mountains. Hindu Kush range that goes deep inside this land has an enormous peaks of above 20,000 feet. The settlements are mainly near some fertile lands, mostly surrounding the river banks. Rest of Afghanistan consists of deserts, so the routes of invasion are very limited. This geographic factor has not only made this land insuperable against foreign invasions, but it also has created divisions amongst Afghan nation itself (Tanner, 2009).

The bisection of country is naturally carried out in such a manner that neither foreign nor domestic power has ever remained capable of maintaining his hold for long enough. Another catalyst is culture and ethnical divisions which have nothing to do with the modern demarcations of country. The ethnical and ancestral boundaries within country are more protruding than its contemporary defined cities and provinces. The influence of war and instability which is quivering this land for more than a millennia is now assimilated in the blood of Afghans. Back in 1809, a British diplomat went to Afghanistan on a mission to convince the tribal leaders of the benefits of central government. The response which was given by one of those leaders is enough to understand that why this land never bowed to foreign visitors. He uttered that: “we are content with discord, we are content with alarms, we are content with blood, but we will never be content with a master.”

The Winston Churchill also wrote when he was in North-West Frontier Province that “A continual state of feud and strife prevails throughout the land. Tribes war with tribes. The people of one Valley fight with those of the next. To the quarrels of communities are added the combats of individual. Every man's hand is against each, and all against the stranger.” So in the situation like this, the concept of centralized government with a motive of mastery will be just a mirage. The third and the most crucial factor of this land is religion. Islam has provided a direction and motive to these communities which has further nourished their culture. The people of this land are not only the strong believers but hard warriors as well. The concept of jihad provided people with the motive to fight and thwart foreign invaders. The enormity of this

ideology became very much prominent during Soviet intervention in 1979.

These all three factors: Geography, culture and religion can be considered as a triad of defence. This shield has saved this land from a list of alien invaders. The storms they thwarted ranges from the superpower like Persian Empire, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Great Britain, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, and United States with number of others now; but the cost they paid is truly staggering.

### **NATO's withdrawal and the resurgence of Taliban: A lightening maneuver**

9/11 fell like a calamity on US. It was for the first time in US history when its mainland was being attacked and its sovereignty was utterly compromised. The sensation of threat was soon changed to an emotion of revenge. The public opinion in US forced the most powerful state to take action, which they took ruthlessly. US immediately invoked an article 5 of "Washington Treaty" which says that an attack on one member of NATO will be considered as an attack on all (Collective Defence - Article 5, 2021). Following this, US soon unleashed its horses on Afghanistan along with its allies. The first attack was carried out on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001, by deploying 1300 troops; but at the pinnacle of deployment this number climbed to 130,000 max. Afghanistan which has a nickname "land of bones" was proved a kiln for foreign forces. The coalition faced a plethora of an overarching issues like: environment, terrain, militancy and psychological burden of war which is above all.

Currently, the dynamics of Afghanistan has changed. The land has once again proved its resilience. Alien forces have fled; and country is once again taken over by Taliban with a lightning maneuver. Observing the recent panic withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan the first question that can propound in any rational mind will be that: why now, and not before?

In answer to this intriguing question, there are certain things which requires attention. The policy of US is seemed to be changing for nearly a decade. US in past has also some showed his interest in ending this long conflict. But as a major power and having a hegemonic ambitions; dignity and security remained a biggest road bump for US to conclude this overstretched episode. In past, multiple efforts have also been made by US and other stakeholders in this regard. The main motive of these talks and meetings were to break an ice which became very rigid due to multiple reasons like the flawed policies of U.S.

Subsequently, an apricity of Doha talks succeeded in melting a Frost little. U.S and its allied forces met with Taliban in Doha, Qatar to conclude a solid agreement. This historic deal was finalized on February 29, 2020 in which both parties decided their future stance. The agreement concluded that US will withdraw all of its

military personnel, non-diplomatic civilians, contractors, trainers, and advisors, within 14 months following the announcement of this agreement. On the other side Taliban agreed to enforce all mechanisms to ensure that Afghanistan's soil will not be used against US and any NATO members as a whole. Moreover, an "intra Afghan dialogue and negotiations" will be carried out for the future formation of government, but complete and permanent cease fire will be a prerequisite. (Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, 2020) US has also showed his interest to support the socio-economic and democratic norms throughout the country (Saldana, 2021).

After an extension of deadline to 11th September 2021, U.S and its allies started pulling out their forces with a confused strategy. Instead of formal transfer they left everything in chaos. The major bases like Bagram were left over nightly and the majority of equipment were either destroyed or being malfunction by leaving troops. Following the withdrawal of foreign forces Taliban carried out a rapid and striking offensive throughout a country. Just a days before August 31, a self-imposed deadline; Taliban reached the environs of Kabul without much resistance. The collapse of government was so miraculous and prompt that it stunned the whole world. Furthermore, the departure of Ashraf Ghani to UAE further paved the way for Taliban to consolidate their hold.

Now after of the weeks of rapid control, Taliban who came this time with a whole new version, as commonly called as "Taliban 2.0" announced their caretaker government on 7 September 2021. Mullah Mohammed Hasan Akhund is declared as a new head of Afghanistan's caretaker government. Several other names are also floated by a group like: Mullah Abdul Ghani Bradar, an acting Prime Minister; Mullah Mohammed Yaqoob, an acting Defence Minister; and so on. The most shocking unfold is the nomination of Sirajuddin Haqqani who will be working as an acting minister of interior. This is the same person who is a son of Jalaluddin Haqqani who was considered as the founder of Haqqani network. It is also present on the top of FBI's most wanted list. Another thing which can become problematic for Taliban is their non-inclusiveness. The majority of names designated mainly belong to Pashtun, so this might undermine an ethnic diversity of this land which remained a major source of fragility and chaos throughout a history.

Now analyzing all of the scenario, it became very clear that current situation is a failure for West and Western forces. It is a complete turning point in international relations where all powerful countries have withdrawn their forces from Afghanistan. In an interview the high representative and Vice President of European Union expressed his views as "This is primarily a catastrophe for the Afghans; a failure for the West, and a turning point for international relations. But is it the end of the

war? It is the end of the Western military presence in Afghanistan (Fubini, 2021).” It is very much clear that NATO members will continue to support democratic norms, women empowerment, liberal values and other aspects which relates to the social and cultural values of modern democratic norms. NATO forces are the largest and strongest in the whole world. So focusing this fact, it can also be concluded that this withdrawal is humiliation for the NATO and western states that remained 20 years in Afghanistan, but now going without any solid achievement back their homes. Now the question is: Will NATO forces be united as they were in past? Answer can be confusing as Defense Minister of UK ‘Ben Wallace’ has said in an interview that “It is obvious that Britain is not a superpower, but a superpower that is also not prepared to stick at something isn’t probably a superpower either. It is certainly not a global force, it’s just a big power (Sabbagh & Wintour, 2021).” The voices started raising up and the raisers are none other than the best military ally and a closest friend, who utterly raised a question on the hegemony of US.

#### **A possible hiccup for an emerging Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has been there as a central hub for all major powers throughout a history. Now in modern era, when whole world is focused on technology, education, and new ways of living; Afghanistan is still a place where war, fragility and chaos are the dominant factors. After new power shift and a swift takeover of Taliban over whole country in couple of days, this land is again under a hefty clouds of confusion. There are multiple challenges that might surface and will give a hard time to newly formed regime. Taliban in the past were not been supported by western and key actors of the world, but things are unveiling differently this time. Although, new Taliban government is not in a mood to fully cooperate with western liberal standards, they are not even willing to follow the basic requirements of government as advocated by west; but their behavior is more flexible this time. They have consolidated their command and now the thing they have to do is to look for the chances of development for which Afghanistan is poor historically. Ironically, there are great number of emerging menaces and problems. The question which worth million dollars is that: How will be they solved? Lack of education, medical and health issues, lack of infrastructure, security concerns, law and order ruckus, and human right issues are the key challenges for Afghanistan. Women right is itself a different topic that is being discussed in the whole world now a days. When a common man living in west listens about a current power-shift, women rights is the first thing which propounds in a mind. As per widespread western public opinion Taliban are again trying to impose a “draconian Sunni Sharia law” as they did in

the past while their first rule. Human and especially women rights was also another reason for which US attacked Afghanistan back in 2001. In a statement president George W. Bush said that “The central goal of the terrorists is the brutal oppression of women and not only the women of Afghanistan (Kirby, 2021).” It is clear that Taliban are not going to tolerate women rights as per their western definition. They have their own rights which are clearly defined by sharia law; and they will impose them under their right of sovereignty. Now the thing which is under debate is that that: whether Taliban are going to repeat the acts of their first regime or there would be some changes? The world is looking on their actions very anxiously, as speaker of US House of Representatives said “The President is to be commended for the clarity of purpose of his statement on Afghanistan and his action. The Taliban must know that the world is watching their actions. We are concerned about reports regarding the Taliban’s brutal treatment of all Afghans, especially women and girls (Kirby, 2021).” The return of Taliban has created some serious threats for the future of education in Afghanistan as well. After fall of Taliban’s 1<sup>st</sup> regime some developments were made in the educational realm. Numbers of schools increased up to 500%. School going students reached 9.2 million and out of them 39% were females (Pherali, 2021). Now currently the picture is not clear yet because at pixel level Taliban has allowed women to pursue their education but while taking care of their dignity and hijab.

After taking control of Kabul by Taliban the economy emerged as another issue that can create whirl in the country. Soon after their control, US along with some other countries suspended their foreign aid to the Afghanistan. International monetary fund (IMF) also froze the bail amount that was meant to deliver to ex-Afghan Government (Nagesh, 2021).

Currently, Taliban appeared in a good mood especially regarding the security situation that immediately surfaced after their takeover. While addressing the public and world media the way of expression and their gesture is positive. On his first media briefing Taliban’s spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said “Global community should rest assured that we’re committed that you will not be harmed anyway from our soil (Taliban Promise Afghan Soil Won’t Be Used to Harm Other Countries, 2021).” This statement is very heart soothing for all neighboring countries, especially Central Asian republics that are highly dependent on Afghanistan’s security situation. Afghanistan is a strategic knot and an important country which is a center of discussion for the whole world. All major powers tried to maintain their influence over this land but they failed miserably. Central Asian republics are already disturbed because of their multiple issues, so they are very concerned for



peaceful Afghanistan. On other hand China, Iran and Pakistan are important neighbors and they also have their own concerns that needs to be addressed intelligently because domestic issues can have their regional and global projections when things are intermingled strategically.

### **Afghanistan in a regional cross-current: The major stakeholders**

The strategic location of Afghanistan and its position as a crossroad linking with the Central Asian republics, South Asian region and Persian plateau encourages the major powers to take their interest in this land. This creates a way of making Afghanistan a battlefield for various major actors. A continued wars and chaos in the country raised the complex security situation in the region. After the fall of Kabul recently, the regional stakeholders have rushed to heal the wound. The economic gateway to Central Asian region is inviting multiple economic powers to make their bid. It will also be fruitful for all those countries who want to get their access to the maritime routs of Indian Ocean and to East Europe as well, but peace in Afghanistan is imperative.

The countries of this whole region are tied with each other in a strategic knot. They have same historical, cultural, and political linkages somehow. So due to this great complexity, the dynamics of any state of this region cannot be understood in isolation. The “theory of regional security complex” which is espoused by Barry Buzan and Ole weaver in their book “regions and powers: the structure of international security” handsomely defines the current situation of this region. As per this theory the states who share a same geographical region should be analyzed from a regional perspective. There are given four types of classifications by Barry Buzan and ole weaver which includes: regional security complex, mini security complex, unstructured security complex and an insulator. Now taking Afghanistan into consideration it is located in South Asia which is a major security complex but alongside this, it also has its borders with Central Asia which is an insulator and a mini security complex. This dual affiliation provides this land with a special status. So the disturbance in Afghanistan can emit its quake waves in all directions. Moreover, there are number of stakeholders who have their direct interest and concerns regarding Afghanistan which includes china, CARs, Iran, India, and Pakistan above all.

### **China**

China is an emerging power in 21<sup>st</sup> century and has some core interests in Afghanistan. Their main interest is regarding security and BRI initiative which is considered to be as a game changer for the whole region. China holds a clear mandate, but relatively low

profile position on Afghanistan. While staying largely with the mainstream international community on the current issues, china also maintains an independent policy that reflects an eccentricity of Chinese interests, concerns and priorities regarding this dynamic land. Among the core interests, her policy on Afghanistan is encouraged by the maintenance of stability and security of Xinjiang province by halting the terrorist infiltration (Scobell, 2015). Chinses Foreign Minister said “We hope the new Afghan Government will disassociate itself from terrorist organizations”.

As China faces an inclusive test while dealing with Taliban, their policy towards Afghanistan will be a main focus of international realm. The People of China must understand that it is in china’s advantage as Taliban have showed good gesture towards them. This is the result of their insistence on sagacious and steady foreign policy and as well as their powerful national strength (China Won’t Fall into “trap” in Afghan Ties, 2021). China’s willingness and goodwill towards Afghan Taliban is a pragmatic move but relations could be tricky considering Beijing’s strategic interests. The spokesperson Hua Chunying said “Beijing welcomed the Taliban’s statements about their desire to build sound relations with China”. The last government of Afghanistan had signed MOU with the Chinese government under the umbrella of BRI to build economic ties which will mainly be focused towards energy sector. China is going to continue that projects with new Afghan Government which are of very much importance for the development and an upheaval of war-torn country. After the withdrawal of U.S and NATO forces, new Taliban’s government is taking keen interest to construct the economic and security relation with china. BRI is the mega project which has the potential to broadly assist Afghanistan in developing a sustainable economy and social structure broadly.

Although hope is of bright morning but in spite security concerns still exist. The assurance by the new Afghan government demands the practical measures which should be taken strongly against the militant and terrorist groups. These steps are inevitable for the Taliban’s government to construct good economic and geopolitical ties with China; because without them the wind of distrust will strongly erode their bilateral relations.

### **Pakistan**

The Afghanistan share its longest border with Pakistan than any of its neighboring country. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan’s ethnic, cultural and religious similarities make their connections even stronger with each other. Above all the economy of Afghanistan is rigorously tied with its immediate neighbor (Ahmad, 2021). In past the foreign invasions and their installed governments in Afghanistan had also created a rift

between both countries. More specifically, the terrorists groups are activated on both sides. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the most brutal terror attacks that were very common throughout the history of both countries. Now currently after the withdrawal of foreign forces, the reservation on security still exists. Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan appears to have acquired progressive posture with an objective of ensuring peace and mutual co-existence in the region. In response to a foreign media the spokesperson of Afghan Taliban SohailShaheen categorically said that "In Taliban's regime the Afghan Land will not be used against any country (Won't Allow Anyone to Use Afghan Soil against another Country: Taliban, 2021)."

The statements like these are very trust assuring because Peace in Pakistan is directly associated with harmony in Afghanistan. Both countries need not only geopolitical ties but also a geo-economic bonding as well. Nonetheless, being a landlocked country, Afghanistan need quick access to the hot waters of an Indian Ocean. And luckily, for that purpose CPEC can provide an attractive route for Afghanistan to Gwadar port but all of this is tied with a peaceful gestures and practicality of Taliban's government which will bring peace and stability in not only Pakistan but in the region as a whole.

### **Central Asian Region (CARs)**

Central Asia is a landlocked region whose boundaries stretches from South Asia to East Europe. Due to the cultural and religious similarities, central Asian region has its strong connections with Afghanistan. Central Asian Republics have serious security concerns regarding their dynamic neighborhood. After an invasion of Afghanistan by U.S and NATO forces the Central Asian States have adopted a very complex attitude. They have serious concerns regarding those militant groups which were activated before the foreign invasion of Afghanistan. Tajikistan is one of those states from Central Asia that have their direct border affiliation with Afghanistan; it is the longest border of any central Asian country. Some of the Tajik tribes also lives in Afghanistan, who have strong ethnic and religious bonding with their parent country (Tajikistan). So these affiliations and concerns will play their linchpin role while defining the future relations between Taliban and Tajikistan.

Turkmenistan is among those central Asian republic who also share its long border with Afghanistan. After the U.S invasion, Turkmenistan's concern regarding security was been increased. Moreover, being tied in a security complex their every affair is interlinked, which cannot be dealt in isolation. Other Central Asian countries have not their direct physical affiliation with Afghanistan but that does not spare them in tranquility. The shock waves and tremors in Afghanistan had

remained so violent throughout its history that they possess a plethora of issue for these republics.

Although, the countries of Central Asia are concerned about their security, they are also hopeful and have their expectations from the Asian economic powers which are interested to enhance their economic ties with the Central Asian Countries via Afghanistan. The two central Asian states bordering South Asia are more interested in mega economic projects like Belt and Road initiative, but the thing they consider imperative is the prevalence of legitimate peace in their neighborhood (Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects | SIPRI, 2014). Now currently after the fall of Kabul before Taliban, they have opened their arms for Central Asian Countries. Taliban's interim government is also showing its benevolent gestures towards its neighboring countries and this might be a twilight before a shiny day ahead.

### **Russia**

Russia is one of the important stakeholders in Asian continent where Afghanistan exists as well. Over the past few years Russia has been establishing its relations with China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its attitude has dramatically changed towards Afghanistan. Now they view Afghanistan with a prism of security threats and their concerns are obvious. Due to the changing dynamics of world's politics Russia has also shifted its foreign policy from ferociousness to softness towards the regional countries (Sangar, 2016). "Russian political elite believe that international politics is guided by geopolitical perspectives and therefore they consider the struggle around Afghanistan and Central Asia in geopolitical terms (Rynda, 2021). On the other side, Afghanistan which is the gateway between the central Asia and South Asia is a great economic and trade opportunity. They can get an easy access to the maritime routs of an Indian Ocean through Afghanistan to Gwadar port in Pakistan. Despite its closer relations with Afghan Taliban, Moscow is for now staying pragmatic. President Putin said that Taliban must work on their promises to restore order. It is imperative not to allow terrorists to spill into neighboring countries. Peace in Afghanistan provides and secure these opportunities, while fragility can do the opposite. So in this regard regional actors must play their essential role to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan which is also imperative for the brighter future of the region as a whole.

### **Iran**

Iran is another neighboring country of Afghanistan having its strong economic, cultural, and religious ties. Since 2001, Iran has extended its influence amongst various afghan stakeholders. Iran exerts its soft power

in Afghanistan by spending huge amount of money to reconstruct the war torn country. The ethnic affinity with some afghan groups also encourages Iran to extend its ties with them. The current geopolitical scenario has changed the Iranian policy towards Afghanistan. The president of Iran Ebrahim Raisi said "It has welcomed the departure of U.S forces and we are pledged to work with Taliban's government. America's military defeat must become an opportunity to restore life, security, and durable peace in Afghanistan (Takeyh, 2021)."

### India

Although India has no border with Afghanistan, but it is one of the important regional countries. After the U.S invasion India has played an importing role in Afghanistan. Their bilateral relations fall into three significant areas like: economy, politics and security. Over the years India has made huge investments in Afghanistan (The Economist, 2021). Following the fall of Kabul, for India the house of cards collapsed. They have lost all of their investments in fallen secular Afghanistan, which has changed the geopolitical and geo-strategic dynamics of the Asian region. Moreover, India has also been isolated in the region amid those countries who are willing to form their strong ties with newly shaped Taliban regime. This isolation is risky, and India could become a new threat because there would be very limited options available. Following the current situation, India's deliberated silence is inapprehensible mainly after the Taliban's statement about Kashmir. Their government is apparently at an edge and their one decision about Taliban's regime might change the whole political and strategic scenario in the region.

### Emerging Afghanistan: A psychological ripple

The most important trait of this whole region is its religious and cultural similarities. This attribute is well enough epoxy to tie the masses of this whole region together. Their norms, folklores, traditions and even their clan's heritage is same somehow. The people of this whole region which includes: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central-Asia, and Persian plateau are also strongly tied with each other in a psychological knot along with the security one. If we take the case of Iranian revolution of 1979; we can easily create a trope that a development in any country of this region can easily create a rumbling roar across a political, social, and psychological axis of this land. The saying of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini that "Islam has no boundaries" had created a ripple all across Central Asia and USSR back after the great revolution. So keeping these attributes, bonds and strong psychological impacts in mind, we can easily conclude that this recent takeover by Taliban over Afghanistan with swift maneuver will definitely be pouring its

burgeoning ideological impact across all of its borders. The recent example of this psychological implication was seen in Pakistan when Taliban's flags were hoisted over "Jamia Hafsa Madrassa" located in the capital territory Islamabad. Although these flags were immediately be pulled down; but the message they gave is very loud and sound.

Moreover, there are present various groups as well who can give a hard time to established governments of this region under the veil of their so-called Islamic interpretations. These groups are not synchronized with the majority of elites who are mainly the advocates of western idels and agendas. So paramount clash can happen, but the things which must be dealt with an iron hand are: foreign interferences, aggression, terrorism and extremism of all types whether it is regarding western ideals or eastern one. Lastly, there is a dire need of stability in this region which has been remained fragile for centuries. This instability and colossal stirrings are the main cause of rising human insecurities which are bulldozing this whole region with their full pace. So in order to bring peace, prosperity and sustainable development in this region; cooperation and trust are the two main keys which can only work if at-hand locks are not rusted with psychological-agony, hatred, ill-will and the motive of absolute dominance over the whole region.

### Conclusion

The recent withdrawal of U.S and NATO forces from Afghanistan in such an abrupt manner has given rise to multiple questions. The challenges that emerged and can possibly surface in future might have so much potential that they can shook the political, economic, and security, landscape of the whole region. Taliban overcame the whole country with a lightning maneuver which stunned the whole world. They have also formed an interim government with couple of names on the list, who are declared as terrorists by western countries. There are multiple developments that are happening but the core questions that can possibly propound are that: what will be the future of Afghanistan? What will be the possible cost; people Afghanistan still have to pay? And how regional actors are going to tackle an emerging situation while safeguarding their own security and sovereignty alongside? The answers to these question are sprouting gradually on day-to-day basis; but the ambiguity is still staggering. Taliban are not fully compelling with all of the western concerns. Especially when it comes to the sharia law, human rights, and woman empowerment; the definitions of these concepts a very different on both sides. Taliban, from the first day ever are very firm on their stance. Waheedullah Hashmi who is a senior commander of Taliban categorically gave a statement that "we have fought for almost 40 years to bring the Sharia law system to Afghanistan." He also

told an interviewer that “Sharia does not allow men and women to get together or sit together under one roof. But alongside this stance, Taliban are not against an overall work of women. They have allowed women to join various sectors. After the days following Kabul’s fall; Zabihullah Mujahid told media that “woman are an important part of the community and they would work in different sectors. We will of-course need women, for example in medical and in education. We will have separate Institutions for them, separate hospitals, separate universities may be, separate schools, separate Madrasas.” The statements like these are showing the flexible attitude of Taliban as compared to their first rule; but the clarity would come with practicality. Afghan people have their full right to establish what form of government they want. They are sovereign and have complete right to take their own decisions.

Regionally, this new development has changed the cards. Multiple actors and stakeholders are rushing to fill the lacuna created by “the west.” The countries like Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, and India have to play their productive and mature role; but all of this is dependent on the policies of newly formed government in Afghanistan. China is a new emerging power and has an astonishing capability to transform the country which was plunged in the quagmire of war for decades. These are all the possibilities that can yield a para-mounting benefits for Afghan nation which was deprived for centuries but hence not bowed or collapsed, because after all it is a “Graveyard of great Empires.” This is an overall image of contemporary situation and the things can be placed in order by inclusiveness, non-interference, by respecting Sovereignty, and doing a collective collaboration above all.

### Recommendations

Analyzing the emerging situation, there are few recommendations which are very crucial to cope with an overarching situation which is surfacing in Afghanistan. Their practicality and implementation would decide that whether this novel development is a melody of peace and stability for world; or a silent message of gargantuan freshet which is moving swiftly to crumble the Regional tranquility and balance. These suggestions are:

- Economy is an emerging weapon and its use can deteriorate the situation anywhere. The acts like freezing their billions of foreign reserves abroad can further marginalize the people of Afghanistan. So in order to bring peace and stability in region and Afghanistan, global actors must show their mature gesture and help the war torn nation instead.
- Pakistan, China, Russia are important countries and have their major stakes in Afghanistan’s

peace. Taliban should give assurance to their concerns and work inclusively which can lead them towards developed and new Afghanistan.

- To overcome the challenges new Taliban Government must treat women and opposition groups in a more flexible way.
- The rights like freedom of religion, speech and education must be given. Safety and the safeguard of religious minorities is a core obligation on ruler under Sharia law, so force conversions must be dealt with an iron hand.
- New Taliban Government must work with the Global Institutions. The isolation from outside world will further deprive and ostracize the afghan nation.
- Regional Countries must communicate positively in Afghanistan’s case. If they want to prosper collectively, they must try to strengthen their relations with newly formed Afghan government
- U.S and other major countries should cooperate with Afghan public and new government, to ensure the prosperity and development of Afghanistan.
- Newly formed Taliban government should maintain the equilibrium of power. They must consider the ethnic diversity of this land which can become their biggest hurdle otherwise.
- States should open their economy gates for Afghanistan. The stable trade can bring prosperity to not only this land but to the region as a whole.
- The land of Afghanistan has long been resonated with the cradle of terrorists. Scapegraces are everywhere but solid measures are necessary in order to halt the terror infiltration. There is an utter need of concrete steps to ensure the peace and stability and it is also a prerequisite for future collaboration by regional states who are tied with this land in strategic knot.
- Afghan Taliban and their rule is an intelligible reality. They have consolidated their hold. Now the only peaceful option world has is table; because war, interventions, and invasions have not proven to be a viable currencies for this piece of land.

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