

GEO-POLITICS OF AFGHANISTAN UNDER TALIBAN REGIME: PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Adam Saud* & Muaz Ullah Khan**

Abstract

Taliban seized power in Kabul on 15th August 2021 after the abrupt pulling out of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. Taliban assured international community about the human rights protection, women education, freedom of media, and no use of Afghan soil by terrorists against any other country. These assurances appraised international community not to oppose their regime. However, after more than a year has passed, future of Afghanistan is still uncertain. This study tries to analyse the geo-politics of Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul to Taliban. It tries to explore the reasons for non-confrontationist policies by the neighboring states as well as regional powers. Qualitative methodology with secondary sources has been used in this research. Findings of the research reveal that despite assurances by Taliban regime, Afghanistan is gradually plunging into the similar situation of 1990s. However, from regional integration perspective, there are high hopes that it can act as bridge between Central and South Asia and China with the Persian Gulf. Regional countries must contribute for the peace and development of Afghanistan by supporting the people of Afghanistan to decide their future. Afghanistan can either be a roundabout or a dead end street for the regional states that depends on the region's policies towards it.

Keywords: US Withdrawal, Taliban, Afghanistan, Economic Development, Regional, Central Asia, Pakistan, China, Russia

Introduction

The situation in Afghanistan is heart wrenching, even after spending \$2 trillion USD and external assistance, the country is still in crisis. The 20 years so called “War on Terror” launched by the US after 9/11 came to an

*Professor of International Relations, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: asaud.buic@bahria.edu.pk

** MS Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Bahria University, Islamabad. Email: muazullahkhan@gmail.com

end with abrupt pull out of US troops and its allies from Afghanistan. Taliban's takeover of Kabul has brought an end to the US backed government and two decades of American era in Afghanistan. As a result, President Ashraf Ghani fled from Afghanistan, leaving poor Afghanis at the mercy of chaos and anarchy. The situation which the world observed in the midst of August of 2021 at Hamid Karzai International Airport was a real mess and an example of statelessness.¹ After two decades of bitter experiences while fighting against the "foreign occupation forces" and being captive at Guantanamo Bay Prison, Taliban have shown relatively a softer side this time. Announcements in the first press conference, such as promise to ensure women's rights, freedom of media was considered as a good omen for peace and development in the war-ravaged country, but female students have been banned to Universities and colleges. Whereas giving general amnesty to everyone prevented chaos and bloodshed in the country.²

It is true that Taliban's government has emerged to be the first ever since 1973 to control almost the whole country. However, Taliban ascendance to power led to freezing of Afghanistan's assets by United States and halted aid by IMF and the World Bank. Since, Afghanistan's economy was primarily based on external aid and assistance for 20 years, Taliban are unable to manage the outcome of economic crisis. Weak economic conditions pose a great challenge not only to their government but also to the Afghan society.³ The region and countries close to Afghanistan are affected directly by the instability in Afghanistan and to avoid Afghanistan plunging into a battlefield once again, important regional actors like Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia and Central Asian states are advocating for stable Afghanistan at various multilateral platform. All have engaged Taliban leadership in negotiations as well.

After Taliban seizing power in Kabul, factions like "*Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan*" (TTP) resurfaced which is a matter of concern for Pakistan and can put China's long-term investment in the region at stake.⁴ Therefore, People's Republic of China is amongst the first to provide \$31 million of financial assistance to Taliban Regime. In addition to this Pakistan has also

¹David Zucchino, "Kabul's Sudden Fall to Taliban Ends U.S. Era in Afghanistan" *The New York Times*, (August 15, 2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-surrender.html>

² Thomas Ruttig, "*Have Taliban Changed?*" (Combating Terrorism Center, March 2021). <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/>

³ Catherine Putz, "Taliban Takeover: World Bank and IMF Halt Aid; US Freezes Afghan Assets" *The Diplomat*, (August 26, 2021). <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/taliban-takeover-world-bank-and-imf-halt-aid-us-freezes-afghan-assets/>

⁴ Abdul Sayed, "*The Evolution and Future of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan*", (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 21, 2021). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051>

provided relief goods to Afghanistan.⁵ On the other hand, Russia and Central Asia also ensured to help Afghanistan out of current difficulties because re-emergence of militant groups in Central Asian Republics will destabilize regimes of Central Asia and its connectivity with the energy hungry South Asia.⁶ Keeping aforementioned motives in view, these states have shown interest to fill the vacuum by harnessing the economic potential of South Asia and Central Asia through Afghanistan.⁷

Background

The word Taliban in Pashto means “students”, which emerged on the world stage in early 1990s after the withdrawal of USSR, which also led to the collapse of communist regime in Afghanistan and rise of civil disorder. Taliban arose as a small force of group in Afghanistan consisting religious scholars and its followers aiming to fight against crime and corruption. Since, most of the locals in Afghanistan found harmony under Islamic rhetoric by mujahideen and madrassahs in south of Afghanistan. These factions in late 1996 had an effective control over the two-thirds of Afghanistan and its capital Kabul by declaring Afghanistan as Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.⁸ Despite of Taliban’s punitive acts such as executing incumbent President “Muhammad Najeebullah”, implementation of *Pashtunwali*,⁹ marginalization of women in Afghanistan and instituting strict Islamic laws derived from interpretation of Quranic verses fit in to their beliefs, unforgiving punishments and suppression of political opponents by force, Kingdom of Saudi Arab, Pakistan and UAE recognized Taliban’s regime.¹⁰

Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were held responsible for 9/11. The US asked Taliban to handover Bin Laden, who had been hiding in Afghanistan,

⁵ Charlotte Greenfield, “Analysis: As West ponders aid for Afghanistan, China and Pakistan quick to provide” *Reuters*, (September 13, 2021). <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/west-ponders-aid-afghanistan-china-pakistan-quick-provide-relief-2021-09-12/>

⁶Country Report, “*Central Asia and Russia exposed to Afghanistan Instability*” (Economist Intelligence Unit N.A. Incorporated, July 19, 2021). <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.library.astate.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=akstateu1&id=GALE|A670324648&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon>

⁷“Pakistan hosts US, China, Russia to Discuss Afghanistan” *Aljazeera*, (November 11, 2021). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/11/pakistans-hosts-us-china-russia-to-discuss-afghanistan>

⁸ Fayaz Hussain, “Implications of the Enigmatic Rise of Taliban: A Historical Perspective” *Global Regional Review*, (2021). <https://www.grrjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rvIolA2LALJouq9hkR/9arnhiiFbU.pdf>

⁹**Pashtunwali** (Pashto: پښتونولي) is the traditional lifestyle and is best described as a code of honor of the Pashtun people, by which they live.

¹⁰ Clayton Thomas, “*Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress*” (Congressional Research Service, November 02, 2021). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46955>

but Taliban refused to hand him over. As a result, United States and its allies on October 7, 2001 started “Operation Enduring Freedom” to fight against Taliban and their supporters.¹¹ The United States successfully toppled Taliban’s regime and established transitional government. While United States and its allies were busy in reconstructing Afghanistan and focusing on preparing new constitution for Afghanistan, Taliban were regrouping and getting stronger. Taliban started to wage war against the established US backed government in Afghanistan while surviving against the NATO. These counterinsurgency operations have resulted in killing of more than 6000 US combatants, 1100 NATO soldiers, 47000 civilians, and more than 73000 Afghanistan’s military and paramilitary troops.¹²

The instability in Afghanistan had catastrophic impacts on the whole region resulting in growing Islamic fundamentalism, transnational terrorism, extremism, poverty in Afghanistan, flow of refugees into neighboring countries, increased drug trafficking, illicit trade affecting the trade and commerce which had adverse impact on growth rate of Afghanistan as well neighboring countries, hindering development projects, and above all detaching energy deprived South Asia from highly enriched Central Asia.¹³ Peace talks started under the Trump’s administration, and in 2020 under US-Taliban agreement, United States ensured to pull all of its forces from Afghanistan if Taliban fulfill its commitments including ending ties with terrorists organizations. Whereas, in August 2021, under Biden’s administration the abrupt pull out of US forces completed leaving Afghanistan muddled in economic and humanitarian crisis again.¹⁴

Afghanistan’s Geo-Strategic Importance

Afghanistan used to serve as natural corridor between Indian subcontinent and Persian Gulf and Central Asia. However, today it is termed as “Crossroad of Routes in Asia”.¹⁵ The foremost reason is because Afghanistan is situated at the epicenter of Middle East, South and Central Asia, including China. The country also possesses highly remunerative raw

¹¹ Ben Smith and Thorp Arabella, “*The legal basis for the invasion of Afghanistan*” (House Of Commons Library, February 26, 2010). <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05340/SN05340.pdf>

¹² Lindsay Maizland, “*The Taliban in Afghanistan*” (Council on Foreign Relations, September 15, 2021). <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>

¹³ Raj Verma, “Instability in Afghanistan and Non-Traditional Security Threats: A Public Good Problem?” *Global Policy*, March 11, 2022. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.13044>

¹⁴ Lindsay Maizland, “*The Taliban in Afghanistan*” (Council on Foreign Relations, September 15, 2021). <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>

¹⁵ “*Geopolitical Analysis of Afghanistan*” (Spanish Institute For Strategic Studies, April 2011). Retrieved https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA12-2011_Geopolitica_AFganistan_GBBallesteros_ENGLISH.pdf

materials such as copper and lithium. Additionally, Afghanistan is located at the junction of states aiming to be regional hegemon such as, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and Russia. These regional leaders bestow great attention to Afghanistan keeping its geopolitical as well as geostrategic significance.¹⁶ However, the significant factor in term of regional framework is the US withdrawal and Taliban rise to power in Afghanistan.

Keeping the current situation in view, incorporation of Afghanistan into regional economic process is essential requirement for regional peace, security and connectivity. It is important to highlight that instability in Afghanistan not only threatens the region but also challenges global security as it did in 1990s.¹⁷ The abrupt withdrawal of United States has jeopardized the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan once again is in a condition where economy is crippled and security is paralyzed, the naive Taliban's government without any expertise is running the country. Afghanistan, despite being the landlocked country has geostrategic significance, chaos and instability in Afghanistan would have far stretched impacts across the region. Therefore, it is not wrong to mention that it has become regional states responsibility to formulate state policies towards Afghanistan in order to maintain peace and achieve regional connectivity.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is used in this research to analyse the data for better understanding of the context, opinions and experiences. The research relies on the data from secondary sources available since there is non-availability of primary source data and official state documents. Internationally known journals, online analysts' articles and newspaper reports are utilized instead of primary state sources as there is a control of the regime over the published writings and a biased point of view is noticeable. However, about half of the data incorporated is extracted from the internationally recognized newspaper reports; hence these can be categorized as primary and secondary source as well. This consideration of perceiving it as primary and secondary source depends upon the inference made by the scholar going through the research article.

Literature Review

Naz and Jaspal have assessed how Trump's policy towards Afghanistan is giving rise to problems in Afghanistan. They observed the growing influence of Afghanistan's neighboring countries and great powers

¹⁶ Dr. Julian Voje, "Afghanistan Geopolitical Hotspot", *Munich Security Conference*, August 24, 2021. <https://securityconference.org/en/media/msc-blog/article/afghanistan-geopolitical-hotspot/>

¹⁷ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "The Emerging Regional Geo-Political and Geo-Economic Scenario In Central Asia", *National Herald Tribune*, (June 15, 2022). <https://dailynt.com/news/story/94498>

interference in Afghanistan affairs to achieve their prior objectives. They are convinced to believe that all actors want to eradicate terrorism from Afghanistan but have opposing policies keeping their interests in view.¹⁸ As a result, Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) failed to prevent the rise of Taliban. As mentioned by Cordesman and Hwang, despite of United States efforts Afghan forces are still weak to sustain in peace and conflict without US presence.¹⁹ As it was noted by Shahrani during Karzai regime that in the absence of international troops, Taliban are expected to rise again and will try replace Karzai thugocracy with Taliban's theocracy.²⁰ For Safi, this raised anxiety amongst the people of Afghanistan because in her opinion, this will strengthen terrorist organizations therefore, for Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) sustainability, international support is necessary to bring stability in Afghanistan.²¹ Before Taliban assuming power in Afghanistan, the state was already undergoing economic crisis and political instability. According to World Bank data, derailing security situation, third wave of COVID-19 and climate change have affected agricultural production and reduced economic growth to August 2021²² but as prophesied by Max Boot, complete US withdrawal would allow Taliban to overthrow Afghanistan's government and threatens the people of Afghan society especially the women who are not willing to live under Taliban's regime.²³

Regional scholars apprehended situation in Afghanistan with noting the changing dynamics of the region. While taking geostrategic location of Afghanistan into account, Nasreen considered Pakistan as a significant neighboring country of Afghanistan. According to her, Afghanistan's war hindered regional development and jeopardize regional security.²⁴ The rise

¹⁸ Samra Naz, Nawaz Jaspal Zafar, "Afghanistan in The Snare of External Power Struggle", (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Autumn 2018). https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2-SS_Samra_naz_and_Zafar_Nawaz_Jaspal_No-3_2018.pdf

¹⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Hwang Grace, "Afghan National Defense and Security Forces That Are Not ready to Stand Alone- In War or Peace" (CSIS, July 07, 2020). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25320.9>

²⁰ Nazif M. Shahrani, "The Impact of the 2014 U.S.-NATO Withdrawal on the Internal Politics of Afghanistan: Karzai-style Thugocracy or Taliban Theocracy?" *Asian Survey*, (March/April 2015). <https://online.ucpress.edu/as/article-abstract/55/2/273/24792/The-Impact-of-the-2014-U-S-NATO-Withdrawal-on-the?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

²¹ Mariam Safi, "Afghanistan, US And The Peace Process: A Deal With The Taliban in 2014?", (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. January 28, 2014). http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4275

²² "Afghanistan", *World Bank*, accessed on January 1, 2022, October 08, 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

²³ Max Boot, "Biden's 9/11 Withdrawal from Afghanistan: What to Know", (Council on Foreign Relations, April 5, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31147>

²⁴ Nasreen Akhtar, "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban", *International Journal on World Peace*, (December 2008). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20752859>

of ISIS in the midst of war has been another challenge for regional states, while taking Afghanistan, Pakistan, South and Central Asia into consideration, for Kashif Afghanistan being the war-torn state with fragile economy and poor governance made the risk of ISIS expansion comparatively more genuine.²⁵ Similarly, Bobokulov viewed Islamic State (IS) and Taliban presence in Afghanistan as a threat to Afghanistan's complex security situation which led to "hybrid war" and considered immediate threat to neighboring Central Asian states.²⁶ Thomas Kunze, Michail Logvinov and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung viewed ISAF troop withdrawal from Afghanistan as an opportunity for Central Asian Republics. Owing to fragile security and expansion of terrorist groups, they were of the view that Central Asian republics would enhance cooperation through an organization like SCO, CSTO and NATO.²⁷ In addition to this, Trenin and Malashenko have observed the prevailing "Afghan syndrome" in Moscow before engaging with Afghanistan.²⁸ Whereas, Ahmad Majidyar and Ali Alfoneh noted how Iran played Afghan refugee card as an instrument to mold Afghanistan policies in favour of Tehran at the expense of US. In their opinion, Tehran has been destabilizing the region by such policies and halting US led efforts in Afghanistan.²⁹ This is because Tehran approach towards Afghanistan is entirely security centric and any deterioration of US influence in Afghanistan is considered as success for Iran.³⁰ Reckoning Beijing's security and economic concerns, Zhao Hong has examined China's readiness to demonstrate its responsibility in the world affair through its "March West Strategy" which he believed to yield positive outcomes and establish new kind of Sino-US relationship based on cooperation and

²⁵ Kashif Mumtaz, "ISIS: Assessment of the Threat for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia", (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2016). http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/1-kashfi_mumtaz_SS_Vol_36_No.1_2016.pdf

²⁶ Ivan Safranchuk, "Security Threats For the Central Asian Neighbors of Afghanistan: A Reality Check", (Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2017). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23168.6>

²⁷ Thomas Kunze, Logvinov Michail, "Central Asia facing ISAF Withdrawal from Afghanistan", (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2013). <https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/zentralasien-vor-dem-isaf-abzug-aus-afghanistan1>

²⁸ Dmitri Trenin, Malashenko Alexei, "Russia's Policies in Support of its Own Interests", (Carnegie Moscow Center, 2010). https://carnegieendowment.org/files/trenin_afghan_final.pdf

²⁹ Ahmad Majidyar, Alfoneh Ali, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Refugees as Political Instrument", (American Enterprise Institute, November 08, 2010). <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/iranian-influence-in-afghanistan-2/>

³⁰ Alex vatanka, "Iran's Bottom Line in Afghanistan", (Atlantic Council, November 09, 2017). <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/iran-s-bottom-line-in-afghanistan/>

balanced approach in Afghanistan.³¹ Since then, Zaho Huasheng has undertaken Afghanistan prominent position in Chinese foreign policy under new neighbourhood diplomacy initiated by Xi Jinping in 2013 keeping NATO withdrawal and BRI project in view.³² According to Zhu Yongbiao, China is more actively involved in Afghanistan and believed to have cooperation between Sino and United States on Afghanistan.³³

Adhering to the recent developments in Afghanistan, Saxena outlines Indian position after the fall of Kabul, according to her Taliban's takeover has shattering impact on geostrategic interest of India and this might leads India to reshape its policies according to the changing regional dynamics.³⁴ Iftekharul Bashar explains how Taliban's takeover has a far stretched security implications for Bangladesh, according to him, Taliban's rise will empower extremism with whom they have ideological and religious association. Therefore, proactive check on flow of people, effective surveillance and strong border security is required.³⁵ But heeding to Afghanistan's civil economic condition, the state has disrupted United States efforts.³⁶ Furthermore, Raffaello Pantucci and Abdul Basit considers Taliban's success as the success of Al-Qaeda and its interpretation of Jihad, the authors also reiterates on the complex landscape existing threats, according to them, the focus is more now on region and they have drawn the jihadist landscapes of South Asia, Southeast and Central Asia, also in Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.³⁷ However, according to Elizabeth Threlkeld and Grace Easterly, future stability in Afghanistan depends on the bilateral relation of Afghanistan-Pakistan and United States

³¹ Zhao Hong, "China's Afghan Policy: The Forming of The "March West" Strategy?", *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, (Fall/Winter 2013). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23722399>

³² Zhao Huasheng, "Afghanistan and China's New Neighbourhood Diplomacy", (Royal Institute of International Affairs, July 2016). http://ciss.tsinghua.edu.cn/upload_files/atta/1626330706550_FB.pdf

³³ Zhu Yongbiao, "China's Afghanistan Policy Since 9/11", *Asian Survey*, (March/April 2018). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26494047>

³⁴ Chayanika Saxena, "The American Exit, the Fall of Afghanistan and the Indian Dilemmas" (International Centre For Political Violence And Terrorism Research, September, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618777>

³⁵ Iftekharul Bashar, "Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan: Security Implications for Bangladesh" (International Centre For Political Violence And Terrorism Research, September, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48618779>

³⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, "A Failed State Created a Failed Economy", (CSIS, August 09, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep33746.6.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Adb7d8c85729d7fe0bb978462cdd9ce8>

³⁷ Raffaello Pantucci and Basit Abdul, "Post-Taliban Takeover: How the Global Jihadist Terror Threat May Evolve" (International Centre For Political Violence and Terrorism Research, September, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618776>

engagement to formulate suitable outcome.³⁸ But this research tries to explore how peace and economic development in Afghanistan can be achieved under the Taliban regime.

Theoretical Framework

In the wake of globalized world, the word “dependence” and “interdependence” is more often used by scholars, researchers and political analysts. The actors in international system realized that principles of attaining actual power are something beyond hard power, which entails stable economic system and technological advancement. As a result, scholars from Liberal and Realist schools of thoughts came up with contradictory arguments to influence each other’s point of view.³⁹

Considering prevailing global trends, Complex Interdependence Theory proposed by Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in 1970s, became a central constituent to understand the behaviour of states vis-à-vis transnational actors. It is inductive clarification of Liberalism and Realism to explain the international structure where policies of one actor are determined by actions of other actors and vice-versa.⁴⁰ This means that actors are dependent on each other in a complex interdependent world.

Keohane and Nye explains why states willingly enter into alliance or cooperate with each other by emphasizing on global political economy, relations between transnational actors’ visa-a-vis transnational governments, and upholding cooperation at international level. Consequently, in the contemporary world complex relations amongst countries and their interests is evident. This theory also includes non-state actors as a significant actor of international system. It also entails to add social welfare of the society on international political agenda.⁴¹

Liberalism and Realism, being the traditional theories having its prior focus on the states have ignored to observe the agency of individuals especially elites (leaders and influential citizens) in the Post-Cold War era. In this regard, Constructivism argues that the states consist of actors, mainly

³⁸ Elizabeth Threlkeld and Easterly Grace, “*Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties and Future Stability in Afghanistan*”, (US Institute Of Peace, August 01, 2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep34025.7>

³⁹ Huseyin Isiksal, “To What Extend Interdependence Theorists Challenge to Structural Realist School of International Relations”, *Alternatives*, (Summers & Falls 2004). https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/tjir/v3n2_3/tjir_v3n2_3ish01.html

⁴⁰ Robert O. Keohane, S, Nye Joseph, “*Power and Interdependence* (Second Edition)”, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989): 3-39,58 <https://hostnezt.com/cssfiles/internationalrelations/Power%20and%20Interdependency%20Keohane%20and%20Nye.pdf>

⁴¹ Robert O. Keohane, S, Nye Joseph, “*Power and Interdependence* (Second Edition)”, pp.3-39,58 Harper Collins Publishers New York, 1989. <https://hostnezt.com/cssfiles/internationalrelations/Power%20and%20Interdependency%20Keohane%20and%20Nye.pdf>

powerful elites, and they are continuously shaping the international system in which they interact with other actors.⁴² Nicholas Onuf, being the prominent figure in Constructivism School of thought has observed that the world is socially constructed.

In addition to this, Alexander Wendt argues that identity is also socially constructed based on ideational structure not material structure. According to Constructivism agency (powerful elites and leaders in decision making) and international structure are mutually constituted based on how they perceive the actions of other actors whether in terms of animosity or goodwill gesture.⁴³ Hence, anarchy is also socially constructed, and it is what agency make of it. Therefore, states have multiple identities. From this perspective, it can be noted that the states in proximity to Afghanistan may use humanitarian challenges posing to be negative by the new regime as an opportunity; followed by help in constructing a balanced image of a prospering Afghanistan which offers advantages and peace to the region itself.

Similarly, Taking Complex Interdependence and Constructive Schools of thoughts into consideration, Afghanistan is positioned at the epicenter of Middle East, Central and South Asia. Policies or actions from Afghanistan have profound impacts on the regional states adjacent to Afghanistan. As the region has witnessed instability caused by the “War on Terror”, counterinsurgency and again the rise of Taliban, leading to refugee crisis, drugs trafficking, security crisis etc. Studying Afghanistan through the lens of Complex Interdependence and

Constructivism theoretical framework provides a clear vision that why regional actors like China, Pakistan, Iran, Russia and Central Asian states are more concerned of bringing peace in Afghanistan as compared to the western allies which left the country without giving a future plan. For example, Pakistan hosts 1.4 million Afghan refugees according to UNHCR statistics.⁴⁴ Pakistan has suffered from many terrorist attacks and has lost more than 70,000 people already. Iran also hosts 780,000 Afghan refugees.⁴⁵ As it is a burden on their economy as well, Tehran fears the infiltrating of Islamic State Khorasan Province as refugees into Iran. Beijing is more vigilant to secure vested interest in the region as compared to 1990s where China did not recognize Taliban regime. This has increased Chinese

⁴² Sarina Theys, “Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory”, *E-International Relations*, February 18, 2018. <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/>

⁴³ Ian Hurd, “*Constructivism*”, (Oxford University Press, 2008): 298-313 https://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/ihu355/Home_files/17-Smit-Snidal-c17.pdf

⁴⁴ UNHCR, “*Pakistan*” accessed on 21 December, 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/pakistan.html>

⁴⁵ UNHCR, “*Iran*” accessed on 21 December, 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/>

concerns about cross-border terrorism because they cannot afford instability in Afghanistan as it has direct impact and spill over impact into Xinjiang.⁴⁶ Russia which fought in Afghanistan during 1979-89 is also cognizant of the spillover effect of the instability in the region which can damage its interest. Apart from this, Russia is also concerned about infiltration of Islamic extremism in the Central Asia which they faced during the Cold War.⁴⁷

The Central Asian States also faced extremism and terrorism with respect to the instability in Afghanistan as many of the terrorist organizations have close linkages across the regions.⁴⁸ In addition to this, constructivism argues about the identity is what leaders or elites makes of it similarly Afghanistan under Taliban regime despite of its harsh domestic policies and socio-economic crisis regional actors stance is considerably different because they believe Afghanistan being at the Center, their policies have far-stretched consequences on the social, political and economic policies of the states in the region.

Leaders from China, Russia, Central Asian States and even Iran refrained to recognize Taliban's previous regimes are indulging Taliban in negotiations keeping their interest in view. For them, Afghanistan's new identity of this new decade in the 21st century depends on how Taliban interact with them because the core objective of Taliban regime is survival and regional actors have their own core interests keeping Afghanistan's geopolitics in view. In this regard, Complex Interdependence and Constructivism provides an adequate explanation of this contemporary Taliban rise.

The Fall of Kabul and Emerging Challenges

In the year 2018, the confidential report by United States intelligence revealed that the abrupt pull out of forces might lead to the revival of Taliban and civil war but President Trump stressed on negotiating with Taliban in return of cutting off ties with all terrorist organizations in future.⁴⁹ The United States concluded war under Biden's administration, considering it as unnecessary burden. However, President Biden assumed Afghan forces are well trained to confront Taliban but it failed to prevent the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban. Since, President Biden was unable to

⁴⁶ Andrew Scobell, "China and the U.S Exit from Afghanistan: Not a Zero-Sum Outcome" (United States Institute Of Peace, September 22, 2021). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/china-and-us-exit-afghanistan-not-zero-sum-outcome>

⁴⁷ Paul Stronski "What Does the Kremlin Really Think About Afghanistan?" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 30, 2021). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/30/forget-schadenfreude.-what-does-kremlin-really-think-about-afghanistan-pub-85230>

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Dion Nissenbaum, Gurdon Lubold, "Military Believes Trump's Afghan War Plan Is Working but Spy Agencies Are Pessimistic" *The Wall Street Journal*, (August 31, 2018). <http://on.wsj.com/3xOoAHX>

manage the outcome; this led to the evacuation of US embassy staff with the assistance of 3000 US troops on August 12, 2021. On the other hand, Taliban forces seized the opportunity to gain complete control of Kabul on August 15, 2021.⁵⁰ The fall of Kabul in 2021 is considered as a major historical failure for the United States and its allies till date.

Moreover, the sudden departure of President Ghani from the country, who continuously vowed to “fight till the end”, caused disarray amongst politicians and its people. This created a power vacuum; as a result Taliban took over *Arg*, Kabul and assumed the authority of the state. Soon after realizing Taliban’s rise to power in Kabul, the United States, Germany and Western allies suspended their aid to Afghanistan. This led to most formidable economic crisis because as per World Bank statistics 40% of Afghanistan’s GDP (\$4.284 billion) was dependent on foreign aid and assistance.⁵¹ In addition to this, foreign exchange reserves amounting \$9.5 billion, as per IMF statistics, were frozen by United States Federal Reserves which has led to the condition where Afghanistan’s Central Bank is no more capable of handling the exchange rate leading to a collapse of local currency and steady rise in inflation. IMF’s Spokesperson, Gerry Rice, on August 18, 2021 announced that looking at the prevailing situation of Afghanistan; the country is unable to access IMF resources (known as Special Drawing Rights). SDR included \$450 million share from the global IMF quota⁵² SDR would have resolved the problems like balance of payments and helpful in managing the fresh government. The donors such as Germany, France and World Bank halted all of their disbursements. Due to these challenges, Taliban’s government found it difficult to meet the basic needs of Afghan people. Taliban government is unable to combat these internal and external challenges by its own. Hence, Taliban regime is desperately looking for foreign engagements.

The Reincarnation of Taliban and Afghanistan in 21st Century

The rise and fall of Taliban to the reincarnation of Taliban regime in Kabul is termed as Taliban 2.0. Taliban 2.0 with seizing quick victory has stunned the world. Though numerous views the past trajectory record of Taliban reign (1996-2001) as wicked and immoral. However, assuming the future policies of Taliban would be the same as they were implementing before their regime was toppled in 2001 is a matter of concern for everyone. To address this, Taliban today are not the same as they used to be mid-1990s. Similarly, Afghanistan today has changed too. The infrastructure of

⁵⁰“*The U.S War in Afghanistan:1999-2021*”, (The Council of Foreign Relations), <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>

⁵¹World Bank, *GDP Afghanistan 2020*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?locations=AF>

⁵² IMF, *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*”, (August 18, 2021). <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/AFG>

Afghanistan is more developed as compared to the infrastructure back in 1996. For example, USAID has maintained the current infrastructure which allows people to move easily. Afghanistan has Tarakhil Power Plant built by USAID in 2009 has a capacity of providing reliable electricity to 660,000 residents in Kabul.⁵³ Kandahar Helmand Power Project under USAID ensured power load accommodation in Afghanistan's Southern Electric Power System (SEPS) to overcome the problem of low-voltage disruption system and also upgraded Kajaki's control systems to provide affordable electric energy supply to locals, governmental and private sector offices in the province of Helmand and Kandahar.⁵⁴

The Ashraf Ghani government in 2017 inaugurated transmission projects which was aim to provide direct access of imported electricity to the people living in Ghazni with capacity of 220 KV transmission lines under North East Power System (NEPS) -South East Power System (SEPS) interconnection Projects as a part of larger Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity (PTEC), PTEC was sponsored by USAID and Asian Development Bank.⁵⁵ In addition to this, Afghanistan today is blessed with its solar plant installed in Kandahar that is providing clean drinking water to 75,000 people.⁵⁶ The roads are constructed and upgraded (more than 2,000km) which links the populous provinces of Afghanistan. These roads are linking, facilitating commerce and movement of people across the country.⁵⁷ Apart from this, during the first reign of Taliban (1996-2001) people remained aloof of the emerging trends and modern concepts but today Afghanistan is connected with the outer world and is aware of the happenings around the globe through internet.

Taliban themselves lacked recognition, so in 2005 they launched an official website named "*Al-Emaraha*" headed by Zabiullah Mujahid. Currently, Zaibiullah Mujahid has more than 371,000 followers on Twitter. They have learned the art of staying connected with the world. The adaption of social media platforms and its techniques have proven to be successful in swift ascent and diplomatic legitimacy.⁵⁸ In short, they have learnt the tactics of information warfare which is being used by them to project their point of view locally and internationally. Once in power, Taliban promised to ensure

⁵³ USAID, "*Tarakhil Power Plant*", (May 07, 2019). <https://www.usaid.gov/node/51751>

⁵⁴ USAID, "*Kandahar Helmand Power Project*", (USAID, May 07, 2019). <https://www.usaid.gov/node/51621>

⁵⁵ "Afghanistan Network Extended to Link National Grid to Ghazni", *Global Transmission Report*, (January 11, 2018). <https://www.globaltransmission.info/archive.php?id=32089>

⁵⁶ USAID, "*Afghanistan Infrastructure*" (USAID, November 19, 2021). <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/infrastructure>

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Emerson T. Brooking, "Before the Taliban took Afghanistan, it took the internet" *New Atlanticist*, (August 26, 2021). <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/before-the-taliban-took-afghanistan-it-took-the-internet/>

women's right, freedom of media, and supporting NGO's. They willingly showed more political openness as compared to their previous regime. General amnesty to everyone has proven that they are now determined to settle the disputes by table talks and open diplomacy but their ban on women education has raised the alarms across the whole world. The two decades ousted Taliban from Power and had maintained contact with tribes other than Pashtuns, this have also instilled the dire need to develop a form of governance which includes other tribes as well.⁵⁹

But unfortunately, it's been one year to the fall of Kabul, Taliban regime has yet to formulate its formal structure of government, the state is still governed by the interim cabinet established back in August 2021.⁶⁰ Despite of their pledges to uphold women rights, treat minority equally, not to suppress freedom of voice, they have imposed harsh interpretation of Islamic laws again. Meanwhile, United Nations has observed several violations of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban's regime.⁶¹ For example, they have delimited press freedom, journalists are detained, protestors who stood against their policies gone missing, Women are obstructed to work and go out without their men, women's right to education has been rolled out just as "Human Rights Watch" has noted closure of many secondary schools and Universities for girls. In addition to this, no women are included in Taliban's cabinet and no ministries are given to the group outside Taliban. The tolls of Child marriage are also higher under their regime, Afghanistan is still a safe haven for terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda, TTP and ISKP. Unpardonably, as per Human Rights Watch report Taliban intimidated, detained and even executed members of former government and ex-members of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).⁶² This has wrecked Taliban's image domestically and internationally as well. Taliban must acknowledge their lessons from their downfall in 2001 to understand that they cannot rule the country dwelled in crisis without external assistance and engagement. Furthermore, to avoid confrontation it is ostensibly clear that they cannot rule by just imposing policies of banning and prohibitions only, but they must establish a government which is capable of providing services and facilities to its people.

⁵⁹ Thomas Ruttig, "Have the Taliban Changed?" *CTC sentinel* 14(13), (Combating Terrorism Center, March 2021). <https://ctc.usma.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/>

⁶⁰ Andrew Walkins, "One Year Later: Taliban Reprise Repressive Rule, but Struggle to Build a State", (United States Institute of Peace, August 17, 2022). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/one-year-later-taliban-reprise-repressive-rule-struggle-build-state>

⁶¹ Lindsay Maizland, "The Taliban in Afghanistan", *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 17, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/background/taliban-afghanistan>

⁶² "Afghanistan Event of 2021", *Human Rights Watch*, Report assessed on August 23, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/afghanistan>

Understandable Concerns: Stable Afghanistan as Top Regional Priority

Two decades of failed American era and leaving the country without formulating future plan has raised many questions on US global leadership role. However, the vacuum has to be filled by other powers. In this regard the important regional actors have shown understandable concerns regarding stability in Afghanistan. Taking Afghanistan's new identity in consideration, the 20th SCO summit held in Tajikistan on 16-17 September, 2021 the main agenda of discussion was the management of situation in Afghanistan and to encourage regional support towards the war affected country.⁶³ On October 6, 2021 during Iranian delegation's visit in Pakistan headed by the deputy foreign minister of Iran, the two neighboring countries of Afghanistan; Iran and Pakistan pledged to coordinate as well as cooperate to bring stability in Afghanistan at bilateral and regional forums.⁶⁴ On October 20, 2021 important talks were held in Moscow specifically focused to protect country from economic breakdown and humanitarian calamity. The regional actors (China, India, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asian states) urged UN to organize conference at earliest to address the rebuilding of country as soon as possible. In these talks, Russia calls for an international aid and warned that instability in Afghanistan can spillover from Kabul across the whole region.⁶⁵ Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) acknowledged as the collective voice of the Muslim World has called 17th Emergency Meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers which was held in Islamabad on 19th December 2021. Kingdom of Saudi Arab was the biggest donor for this arrangement and conference. The main agenda of this conference was to discuss and find a way out for humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This was the need of time when the whole region is dealing with post conflict Afghanistan after US withdrawal.⁶⁶ The summit is important for all the stake holders in the region and across. As it included delegations from the P5+ 1 group of United Nations Security Council and

⁶³ South Asia Center, "Expert react: 2021 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tajikistan", *ATLANTIC COUNCIL*, September 22, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/experts-react-2021-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-sco-summit-in-tajikistan/>

⁶⁴ APP, "Pakistan, Iran agree on close coordination for Afghan Peace, Stability" *THE NEWS*, October 6, 2021. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/897988-pakistan-iran-agree-on-close-coordination-for-afghan-peace-stability>

⁶⁵ "Regional powers back aid for Afghanistan as Russia hosts Taliban", *ALJAZEERA*, October 20, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/20/russia-hosts-taliban-for-talks-but-warns-no-recognition-for-now>

⁶⁶ "OIC Countries Pledge fund to stave off Afghanistan 'chaos' *ARAB NEWS*, December 20, 2021. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1989621/world>

European Union.⁶⁷ On the same day, Indian government arranged conference with Central Asian states on Afghanistan issue. Since, Peace and Stability of the region is directly proportional to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Therefore, stability in Afghanistan has become top regional priority after considering the paramount importance of stable Afghanistan.

Unlocking Opportunities through Afghanistan

Afghanistan that is positioned in the middle of South and Central Asian region, can harness its potential as the “Heart of Asia” by connecting these regions. As the region of Central Asia has been isolated for decades by the war ravaged and instability in Afghanistan, from east by the inaccessible terrains of mountains and to the west by Iran. Afghanistan is the natural bridge between Central and South Asia. Connecting both the regions, besides stability, will enhance economic integration and develop infrastructure across Afghanistan.⁶⁸ If Taliban’s government and regional actors succeeds to achieve the desire goal of bringing stability in Afghanistan, it has a potential to unlock many opportunities. Simultaneously, it can recover its ailing economy.

Afghanistan as the “Heart of Asia” can enable both regions to increase economic engagements and explore new markets. This can enhance trade, movement of masses and flow of different ideas between South and Central Asian regions. By harnessing this potential through Afghanistan can create new jobs opportunities for the people especially youth from both regions and decrease dependencies on remittance.⁶⁹ Keeping the landlocked nature of Central Asia and presence of two superpowers: China and Russia aiming to dominate the region as per “New Great Game”, looking towards South Asian region through stable Afghanistan which states within the region are striving to achieve can enable and create new opportunities for Central Asian states. As Afghanistan has the potential to provide land corridors which will give access to Iran, Pakistan, India and Indo-pacific region. This can decrease its dependency on Russia and China. For Pakistan, stable Afghanistan has potential of providing efficient and appropriate alternative direct route to Central Asia through land which can give access of new market for Pakistan and connect with its Muslim Majority neighbors.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Kamran Yousuf, “OIC-CFM: Over 24 FMs, P5 envoys confirm participation” *TRIBUNE*, December 17, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2334341/oic-cfm-over-24-fms-p5-envoys-confirm-participation>

⁶⁸ Masom Jan Masomy, “Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities” *Electronic Journal Of Social And Strategic Studies*, May 2, 2021. https://www.ejsss.net.in/article_html.php?did=97110&issueno=0

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Emily Carll, “An Afghanistan at peace could connect South and Central Asia” *ATLANTIC COUNCIL SOUTH ASIA CENTER*, May 18, 2021.

Additionally, Afghanistan being at the center of three regions is a home to diversified population residing within. In the North is Central Asia where ethnic Uzbek, Tajiks, Turkmen reside, in the North East is China which has ancient cultural linkages, towards East and South is Pakistan where Pashtuns and Sunni majority exist in large number, whereas towards West, Persian and Shiite community resides.⁷¹⁷² Taking Afghanistan's diversified population into account, Afghanistan and its neighboring countries can utilize this aspect as an opportunity to build constructive relations based on mutual respect and shared culture which can contribute towards a diverse common future for revived Afghanistan under Taliban regime and has potential to resolve security concerns too. But it demands to be looked from practical point of view rather than theoretical to achieve regional connectivity.

Significance of Regional Cooperation and Connectivity for Afghanistan

Cooperation and connectivity among the states of any region is essential for strengthening economic, social and cultural ties. Afghanistan's incumbent regime motive to earn the trust of its neighboring countries must be its top priority as it will play significant role at unprecedented level. This cooperation has been unable to achieve due to the derailing security situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is ranked as the world's least peaceful country (163 ranked) as per Global Peace Index 2021.⁷³ The new Taliban government must be cognizant of the fact that to overcome these rising security challenges, which leads to economic and humanitarian crisis, requires a great deal of effort. So, concept of regional cooperation requires establishment of developing priorities through continuous coordination among the member states.⁷⁴ In case of Afghanistan, connectivity and earning support from regional countries can unlock many productive activities which

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/an-afghanistan-at-peace-could-connect-south-and-central-asia/>

⁷¹ Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Afghanistan and its Neighbors" *United States Institute Of Peace*, June 2006. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr162.pdf>

⁷² "Geopolitical Analysis of Afghanistan, *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, April 2011. https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA12-2011_Geopolitica_AFganistan_GBBallesteros_ENGLISH.pdf

⁷³ "2021 Global Peace Index 15th Edition" *Institute for Economics And Peace*, June 17, 2021. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GPI-2021-A3-map-poster-1.pdf>

⁷⁴ Bjorn Hettne and Soderbaum, "Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges" *Goteborg University, Sweden*, accessed on December 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fredrik-Soederbaum/publication/259702507_Regional_Cooperation_A_Tool_for_Addressing_Regional_and_Global_Challenges/links/0c96052d64488eb31c000000/Regional-Cooperation-A-Tool-for-Addressing-Regional-and-Global-Challenges.pdf

can overcome the prevailing economic and humanitarian crisis in country through cooperation and coordination.⁷⁵ This can be done if Taliban regime pledge and coordinate to complete energy projects like TAPI, CASA 1000, TAP-500, transport networks like BRI, Five Nation Railway Corridor, Trans-Afghan Railway line and focus on trade and transit facilities like Special Economic Zones, Multimodal Transport and Logistics Facilities, Regional Customs and Border Management Cooperation etc. But unfortunately, Taliban's skeptical leadership and its recognition by the regional actors has remained ambiguous and has delayed the completion of these projects. If regional connectivity is achieved, it can pave for Afghanistan to have access to the region's largest market in India. It is worth mentioning that Chinese stakes and interests in Afghanistan are more as compared to Pakistan because China is asserting to expand its influence beyond the region through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Furthermore, Stable Afghanistan is pre-requisite for Chinese long-term investment in the region because Chinese economic growth and development demands energy. Afghanistan provides the shortest route for trading Middle Eastern oil specifically Iranian oil to China.⁷⁶ If this trade is hindered it can put Chinese strategic long-term goals at risk too. In addition to this, Beijing wants to secure its position in the region but Taliban regime is unable to handle the emerging crisis. That is why China has announced \$31 million aid for Afghanistan.⁷⁷ Beijing also provided 200,000 US dollars to the Afghan Red Crescent Society with 18 tons of goods for the victims of Earthquake.⁷⁸ Russia and Taliban's government has officially signed oil, gas and wheat deal at a very low price to help Afghanistan out of the humanitarian and

⁷⁵ Bjorn Hettne and Soderbaum, "Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges" *Goteborg University, Sweden*, accessed on December 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fredrik-Soederbaum/publication/259702507_Regional_Cooperation_A_Tool_for_Addressng_Regional_and_Global_Challenges/links/0c96052d64488eb31c000000/Regional-Cooperation-A-Tool-for-Addressing-Regional-and-Global-Challenges.pdf

⁷⁶ Sharon Cho, Chen Sarah, "China Gorges on Cheap, Sanctioned Oil From Iran, Venezuela", *Bloomberg*, January 10, 2022. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/china-buys-more-sanctioned-oil-from-iran-venezuela-at-a-bargain>

⁷⁷ Farooq Yousaf and Jabarkhail Moheb, "US withdrawal and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan: Future Policy Directions" *POLICY BRIEF*, September 7, 2021. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PB_5_2021_US-withdrawal-and-the-Taliban-regime-in-Afghanistan.pdf

⁷⁸ "China donated 18 Tons of Items and 200,000 US Dollars to the Afghan red Crescent Society To Help The Earthquake Victims!" *ARSCS*, July 04, 2022. <https://arcs.af/index.php/en/china-donated-18-tons-items-and-200000-us-dollars-afghan-red-crescent-society-help-earthquake>

economic crisis.⁷⁹ Pakistan on the other hand, strives to attain peace with the new leadership of Afghanistan. Since September, 2021 Pakistan provided almost 14,945 tons of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan under the umbrella of Pak-Afghan Cooperation Forum. In addition to this, Pakistan has also opened its South Waziristan border following the recent Earthquake in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been providing medical facilities and online training facilities through Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University.⁸⁰ According to Ruchira Kamboj (Permanent Representative of India to United Nations) India has delivered 40,000 metric of wheat, 36 tons of medicines, almost 500,000 doses of COVID vaccines and 28 tons of relief packages for Afghan society.⁸¹ Kingdom of Saudi Arab granted \$30 million to Afghanistan additionally in June 2022, Additionally, Qatar and Kuwait also commit to provide aid and communication to Afghanistan.⁸² It is pertinent to mention; Afghanistan's new leadership has not only been receiving aids form regional actors but also international community. According to European Commission Report assessed on December 15, 2022, European Union aid program emphasis to address food security, health and educational sector. In report, EU has more than €174 million as humanitarian support to the organizations functioning in Afghanistan and the region.⁸³ International donors, donated \$2.4 billion to Afghanistan to prevent humanitarian collapse. Right after when United Nations appealed to urgency of crisis in Afghanistan, Germany provided \$218 million and Japan donated \$109 million as assistance.⁸⁴ Whereas, since August 2021, United States has provided more than \$1.1 billion as humanitarian assistance and nearly \$812 million from USAID with additional \$320 million from the State Department.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Ali Khara, "Taliban Signs 'Preliminary' Deal with Russia for Oil, Gas, Wheat" *Aljazeera*, September 28, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/28/taliban-signs-preliminary-deal-with-russia-to-buy-gas-wheat>

⁸⁰ "Pakistan Spends \$1b for rebuilding of war-hit Afghanistan", *Tribune*, August 03, 2022. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2369273/pakistan-spends-1b-for-rebuilding-of-war-hit-afghanistan>

⁸¹ "Afghanistan's Future Depends on Taliban's Engagement with World, But Restrictions on Women Signal Lack of International Commitments, Briefer Warns Security Council" *UNSC*, September 27, 2022. <HTTPS://PRESS.UN.ORG/EN/2022/SC15038.DOC.HTM>

⁸² "Qatar, Kuwait Commit to Afghanistan Aid" *ARAB News*, November 12, 2022. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2198561/middle-east>

⁸³ "Afghanistan Factsheet" *European Commission*, assessed on December 15, 2022. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/asia-and-pacific/afghanistan_en

⁸⁴ Lisa Schlein, Besheer Margaret, "Donors Pledge \$2.4 Billion for Afghan Relief" *VOA News*, March 31, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/donors-pledge-2-4-billion-for-afghan-relief-/6510150.html>

⁸⁵ "The United States Has Provided More Than \$1.1 Billion To Respond To The Humanitarian Crisis In Afghanistan Since August 2021" *USAID*, September 23, 2022.

These recent engagements reveal that the Afghan people are not forgotten. Taliban government on the other hand, must acknowledge the fact that Afghanistan cannot expect to be recognized as a legitimate international community member until they provide the rights to the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, it is imperative to review the geostrategic importance of Afghanistan and how it can offer a novel pathway for growth in the field of economic, security, political and cultural domains. This will contribute to enhance growth and stability within a region. Afghanistan's new government must turn adversities into opportunities by engaging herself in wellness activities through connectivity and cooperation with regional actors. The Taliban, regional actors and international community must ensure the most basic rights for everyone living in Afghanistan: Right to live.

Conclusion

United States, after spending \$2 trillion, failed to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. The abrupt American exit after two decades and complete takeover of Taliban has given rise to alarming multi-faceted economic and humanitarian crisis. The naive government of Taliban is anxious to overcome these challenges after freezing of Afghanistan's \$9.8 billion assets by United States. Either it be Pakistan, China, Iran or be it Russia and Central Asian states, instability in Afghanistan has far stretched bearings across the region.

It is evident that regional actors don't want to see Afghanistan descending into long extended conflict again and bringing stability in Afghanistan even before officially recognizing Taliban's regime has become top regional priority. Therefore, important regional actors like Pakistan, Russia, China, and Central Asian states are reiterating and organizing conferences, summits to raise awareness of the emerging crisis if not dealt properly. On the other hand, the Taliban 2.0 identity is a challenge brought forward by the regional actors as they are responsible to present an induced constructed identity which is different from Taliban 1.0. Therefore, these states have been engaging and providing humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan. But not to forget, Taliban today must know, they cannot rule by just marginalizing women, imposing bans and prohibitions; they must keep in consideration that they cannot get out of the prevailing condition without external assistance. Hence, they must win the trust of regional states.

Harnessing the economic potential of the region through Afghanistan can resolve its economic and humanitarian crisis. Stable Afghanistan provides

<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-23-2022-united-states-provided-more-11-billion-humanitarian-assistance-afghanistan#:~:text=This%20additional%20funding%20brings%20U.S.,million%20from%20the%20State%20Department.>

prospects for peace and economic development not only for Afghanistan but for the region as well, because the changing aspects of regional cooperation and coordination play a vital role in bringing peace and development in the region. This is worth mentioning that regional actors are playing its part, peace and development can be achieved by collective multilateralism. Hence, active regional participation through coordination can address and resolve the recent challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, and pave ways to reinforce the economic development and stability which regional actors and Taliban is striving to achieve.

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