

Unavoidable Symbiosis between Afghanistan and Regional States

The Taliban has been in power for a while now since its takeover in Afghanistan. Western countries, particularly the US and its allies expected that the Taliban would repeat the draconian authority of their previous rule in the war-torn country. Despite all the propaganda, these predictions have largely turned out to be the opposite. The group with its interim cabinet is intact in Afghanistan despite the fact that the US, in its revenge for its forced withdrawal, has frozen Afghan assets. The Taliban has slowly and steadily consolidated its power and has successfully dealt with challenges to its authority. The Taliban refers to its government as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, organized under an emir, a supreme leader that oversees the affairs of the state. Taliban security forces have successfully maintained law and order in the country; courts are normally issuing judgments and functioning smoothly under the Taliban's rule.

So far, the Taliban seems to be successful in its focus on rebuilding Afghanistan. The movement is efficient enough to create flexibility and cohesion in Afghan society with its history of ethnic tensions. The Taliban successfully replaced the local administration after the US withdrawal and gained significant population support. This time the Taliban professionally produce significant inroads by running the administration at all levels in Afghanistan. Since its takeover, the Taliban has shown that its members are capable of strategic planning adapt to reliable moves. It has efficient leadership and has learned a lot from its previous mistakes. The movement has successfully built an administration with nationwide logistics and influential networks. For the first time in the past half-century, the whole of Afghanistan is under one single authority.

“For the Taliban, it is a very big deal that their current government is the only regime in Afghanistan's past four-decade history that controls the entire country. The Taliban's territorial dominance will likely prevent a civil war like in the 1990s when armed rival Afghan factions...held ground in different parts of the country. Even after the Taliban prevailed in the civil war in 1996, it was unable to conquer all of Afghanistan before it was toppled from power after the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.”[\[1\]](#)

Afghanistan's neighboring countries are surprised at the Taliban's military capabilities, and these countries - including Pakistan, Iran, and India - are aware of the fact that any civil war in Afghanistan will not solve anything but will open up ways for more destruction to the country and beyond. There are a few armed groups opposed to the Taliban rule in different regions of the country, but they are weak, divided, and have no support from the general masses of Afghanistan. These small armed groups are no big threat to the existence and power of the Taliban regime. Besides, Afghanistan's neighbors and the global powers are least interested in igniting a large-scale civil war among opposing groups in the country. The neighbors are instead interested in having peaceful borders and the European governments prefer a stable enough administration in Kabul to deal with the post-war humanitarian crisis that could release a flood of refugees to Europe. This paves an even easier way for the Taliban to successfully and effectively overpower its opposition to its rule in different parts of Afghanistan.

Yet this is not to say that everything is a walk in the park for the Taliban and the entire of Afghanistan. Even before the Taliban's takeover, the economy in the country was ravaged by conflicts and wars. The US-backed government in Afghanistan had stopped spending on development projects and was spending more on security to halt the Taliban's expansion. Since the takeover, the US and European sanctions have badly impacted Afghanistan's economic and financial structure. These sanctions have raised the cost of imports, inflation, and living cost, pushing the Afghan public to struggle just to survive. Natural disasters like droughts, floods, and earthquakes only worsen the situation, as these disasters have hit the country's agriculture badly.

“Over the past year, Afghanistan's economy has been on life support. Crippling sanctions against senior Taliban leaders have paralyzed the banking sector and prevented Afghanistan from engaging with the international financial system and its institutions. The value of its currency, the afghani, has plummeted, raising the cost of imports and exacerbating inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. The civilian government institutions that were previously the country's largest employer are now unable to pay salaries even to the reduced number of remaining personnel.”[\[1\]](#)

The economic sanctions have resulted in an economic collapse, forcing more and more Afghans to severe levels of hunger and poverty. Though many humanitarian organizations have come to the rescue of the Afghan people, but the major responsibility lies on the parties that hit the sanctions, i.e the US and its allies. Yet despite all these challenges, the Taliban has effectively tried to overcome this situation. The Taliban administration responded by streamlining taxation and revenue collection which has been centralized following the takeover.

The current relations between the Taliban and its neighbors have remained stable, although the Taliban realized that neither recognition nor financial aid will come from them. Afghanistan's neighboring states are satisfied with the overall performance of the Taliban regime, as the Taliban has maintained tight security control across Afghanistan. Regional powers like Russia and China were happy to see the US go, but both states are not in a position to assist developmental projects in Afghanistan on a larger scale. Other countries in the region are more focused on stability over the elected democracy or constitutional developments in Afghanistan. As the Taliban publicly announced a ban on opium cultivation, regional countries like Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Russia uniformly breathed a sigh of relief, since they no longer have to suffer from the massive drug trafficking from the Afghan territory. Despite all these positive signs, the Taliban regime has not been recognized by any country in the region. These countries have pursued a pragmatic strategy of engagement. Most of these states are waiting for an incremental change before they recognize the Taliban's efforts. The Taliban administration has focused on maintaining its political and security control, which means a positive outcome for the country and region.

"The Taliban have expressed openness to international trade and connectivity, encouraging the long-stalled gas pipeline that would link Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India as well as power lines from Central Asia to Pakistan and road and rail links that would fit into China's Belt and Road regional infrastructure initiative. However, it remains to be seen whether international investors including China (and presumably excluding the World Bank or Asian Development Bank due to Western vetoes) will want to make multi-billion dollar bets on the Taliban's security control and political stability."^[iii]

All the countries in the region expect the Taliban to deliver its obligations. They have no choice but to seek greater alliances with the Taliban regime over time, which could only happen if they take the first step to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate administration of Afghanistan.

References:

[i] <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-one-year-later-solidify-power-internal-divisions/31988877.html>

[ii] <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/08/afghanistan-one-year-taliban-rule>

[iii] <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/you-cant-choose-your-neighbors-talibans-testy-regional-relationships>