



AFGHANISTAN: CHANGE IN REGIME AND PROSPECTS FOR PAKISTAN

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ARTICLE INFO

History of Article

Received: 14th January, 2022

Accepted: 20th January, 2022

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ABSTRACT

The United States of America and the Taliban concluded the two-decade long war in 2020, through a peace agreement names Doha agreement. As a result of which, the US and its NATO allies made a hasty military withdrawal from the Afghanistan, which left a vacuum in the country. The Taliban took the advantage of the situation and regained the momentum by capturing the Kabul, capital city of the Afghanistan, on the 15th of August 2021. Keeping the current multilateral engagement in mind, the Taliban takeovers have immense implication domestically as well as abroad. In the contemporary era, the interconnectedness, multilateral engagement, and economic integration are the major hallmarks of the world, because of inter-dependence, advanced technologies, metro and cosmopolitanism, which is overall called globalization. No state can remain isolate and ignored of the proceedings occurs in other states. Therefore, due to the emergence of Taliban as a major stakeholder in Afghanistan, a number of positive and negative impacts for the region and the neighbors of the war-suffered country have become inevitable. Pakistan, one of the major neighbors of Afghanistan, shares several cultural, religious and social identities with the latter. As a result of the recent Taliban's takeover, Pakistan faces a number of implications, of political, strategic and economic nature. This paper tends to uncover those implications in an organized way. Moreover, it highlights the suggestions for the Pakistan's foreign policy, in order to deal all those implications in a befitting way.

Keywords: United States of America, NATO, Taliban, Doha Agreement, Pakistan.

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How to cite the article?

Barkat Ullah and Asma Akbar, Afghanistan: Change in regime and prospects for Pakistan, ASIO Journal of Humanities, Management & Social Sciences Invention (ASIO-JHMSSI), 2022, 8(1): 01-04.

INTRODUCTION:

Everybody is aware of the fact that the international politics is self-centered, ruthless and anarchic. However, it is also a certainty in the international affairs and politics, that an event of a small duration greatly shapes the whole dimensions and structures of the international political environment. It may be an event of only few hours or hardly few days but it leaves its impacts beyond the imagination. One of the most ideal examples of such phenomena is the occurrence of 9/11. Almost two decades ago in 2002, few terrorists of al-

Qaeda launched several terrorist attacks on the one of the busiest economic hubs, world trade center and a number of other high profile buildings in the US city, New York. Al-Qaeda under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden claimed the responsibility of those attacks, which killed almost 3000 people and left several thousand injured. [1]

Although it was only a single event occurred in the time span of only few hours yet it left immense impacts on the international politics. Almost 20 years have gone, but still it has a major role in the international relations. The international community still faces aftershocks of

that event in one or another shape. Those days, the Afghanistan was governed by the hard core religiously motivated Taliban. The Taliban was accused by the international community for providing the safe grounds to the leadership of Al-Qaeda, that was responsible for the 9/11, thus the United States of America invaded Afghanistan, followed by the Iraq invasion in 2003. As a result of 9/11 tragedy, the US with the assistance of its NATO allies, launched a global war on terror. [2]

The United States of America fought in Afghanistan for almost two decades. Although it was able in ousting the Taliban from the government in Afghanistan, installing its desired governments in shape of Hamid Karzai and later on Ashraf Ghani, yet it failed to completely eliminate the Taliban's resistance and existence from the Afghanistan. The Taliban fighters continued their struggles throughout these years which not only produced great hurdles to the government of Afghanistan, but gave major blows to the US Strategic interests as well. [3]

The US and the Afghan Taliban concluded the prolong and tiresome war with a peace deal on the 29th of February, 2020, in the name of Doha agreement, named after the Qatar's capital, where the talks between the two parties occurred. As a result of which both sides guaranteed several commitments and few months ago, the United States withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. [4] The hasty move of the US not only stunned already struggling Ghani's regime but further made it vulnerable. Thus, the Taliban intensified its armed campaign, which made them able to take the control of Kabul on the 15th of August, 2021.

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has a number of implications, both short term and long term. Similarly, it will have several significant impacts not only inside Afghanistan but on the whole region as well. [5] For instance, after the fall of Kabul by the hands of Taliban, the United States of America and the other western states have not only frozen the Afghanistan's assets in the central bank but also decided to not give any further economic assistance. These developments have proved as a disaster for the new regime of Afghanistan, and economic crisis, inflation, hunger and health issues are on its peak in the Taliban controlled Afghanistan. [6]

Moreover, in the contemporary era, the interconnectedness, multilateral engagement, and economic integration are the major hallmarks of the world, because of inter-dependence, advanced technologies, metro and cosmopolitanism, which is overall called globalization. No state can remain isolate and ignored of the proceedings occurs in other states. [7]

Therefore, due to the emergence of the Taliban as a major stakeholder in Afghanistan, a number of positive and negative impacts for the region and the neighbors of the war-suffered country have become inevitable.

Some of these consequences, the region is facing currently, while some may be faced by it in the coming future. Pakistan is one of the most important countries in the region because of its geostrategic location and historic political role in the cold war era. It has to face several significant consequences due to the recent Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan. This paper tends to highlight all those prospects occurring in the aftermath of Taliban's takeover, in shape of both challenges and opportunities, which will be faced by the Pakistan in the coming future. The Taliban' regime in Afghanistan will have distinct implications on Pakistan's economic, strategic and security interests.

Pakistan and the Taliban's Regime:

Despite the cultural, social and religious similarities between the both, Pakistan and Afghanistan have never enjoyed a long-lasting and sustainable friendly relations, that otherwise could have been existed. There are a number of reasons responsible for such constraints relations between the two neighbors. Pakistan has concerns from the very first day regarding the Afghanistan attitude of rigidness about the demarcation of the colonial-era, Durand line between the two states, despite the fact that it is internationally recognized border between the two countries. Similarly, over the years the various governments in the Afghanistan used to blame Pakistan for exporting the terrorists to their soil. In other words, the authorities in Afghanistan often blame Pakistan for the instability in their domestic environment. [8]

On the 15th of August 2021, the Taliban took the control of Afghanistan which has brought a number of positive and negative consequences for Pakistan. The international stakeholders and anti-Taliban actors in Afghanistan has always accused Pakistan for supporting Taliban. If one considers Pakistan's perspective, it is quite distinct that every state looks for securing its own interests. In case of Pakistan, it has remained in close ties with the insurgent group over the years, due to a number of factors. For instance, in the Afghanistan, there are a number of ethnicities like Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara etc. During the cold war, Pakistan allied itself with the United States of America instead of Russia, the then USSR. The USSR had close ties with the non-Pashtun ethnicities of Afghanistan; therefore Pakistan supported Mujahedeen, majority of which comprised of the Pashtun people. These Pashtuns later on started the Taliban movement in the 1990s, that's why remained in a close relation with the Pakistan. [9]

The Tahreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Factor:

Pakistan has always reservations that India uses the soil of Afghanistan against it. Pakistan shares a long boarder with the Afghanistan; therefore stability on its pence is

greatly important for the stability in Pakistan. In the past, the India had close relations with the various governments in Afghanistan, which had made the situations strained between Pakistan and Afghanistan. [10] Moreover, the nexus of Afghanistan government and India sponsored the escaped terrorists of Tahreek Taliban Pakistan, TTP on Afghanistan soil, which produced serious tensions to the Pakistan through cross boarder insurgency over the years. [11]

In Pakistan, the terrorist insurgencies raised in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and FATA region due to which Pakistan had to launch military operations against certain groups of those terrorists. So, from 2004 to 2014, Pakistan launched several high profile military operations in Swat, both of Waziristan, Bajour and Malakand division etc, to eliminate those terrorists. As a result of military operations like Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat and Zarb-e-Azab, the networks of the terrorists under the banner of TTP were completely destroyed. Majority of the terrorists were either killed or captured, while the remaining escaped to Afghanistan. [12] These terrorists under the command of Maulana Fazalullah of Swat, KKP province (Killed by the US drone attack in 2018) and Noor Wali Mehsod of Waziristan became a constant threat for Pakistan.

The governments of Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai Never bothered to satisfy Pakistan on the matter of these escaped terrorists of TTP. Due to the cross border insurgencies over the years, Pakistan greatly suffered. The Pakistan not only faced numerous attacks on the border, but a number of serious terrorist attacks in the settled areas as well that were planned in Afghanistan. For instance, in 2014, the Army Public school attack in Peshawar and the Jinnah Airport attack in Karachi are some of the major examples in this regard. [13]

Keeping the mentioned facts, the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan has a positive impact for Pakistan in this regard. The government of Pakistan can take measures with the help of Afghanistan's government to control the cross-border insurgencies. The Taliban government in Afghanistan, faces several economic crisis and has been isolated. Under such circumstances, it cannot afford the Pakistan's grievance, so will definitely help Pakistan in dealing TTP. In this regard, Pakistan has initiated talks with various factions of the TTP, with the help of mediation of the afghan Taliban. Although, there is a deadlock in these talks for few weeks, but it is hoped that the Taliban government and Pakistan will soon reach on an effective conclusion over the TTP in the coming months.

India; A bone of contention between Pakistan and Afghanistan:

In the past several years, the increased India's influence in the Afghanistan maximized the tensions for Pakistan.

For the last three years, Pakistan is in the hostile relations with the India because of its unilateral actions in Kashmir. The trade between the Pakistan and India has decreased to a larger extent and hostility has increased on the line of control. Under such circumstances, Pakistan cannot afford the tensions on both eastern and western border. [14]

In the past, the India has enjoyed very closed and strong relations with both of the Afghanistan governments, in the era of Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai. India not only directly invested in Afghanistan, but provided diplomatic, economic and other strategic support to the Afghanistan as well. Similarly, it helped in health and education sectors of the Afghanistan by providing hundreds of scholarships opportunities to the afghan students. [15] The India through such contributions towards the Afghanistan was able to influence the Kabul administration in its own favor and against Pakistan. That's why, the Pakistan and Afghanistan rarely witnessed healthy relations in those two tenures of Ghani and Karzai.

Now, the scenario has changed to a larger extent and the Taliban has come to power. The Taliban government in Afghanistan will have fruitful outcomes in this respective area. The Taliban greatly inclined towards Pakistan, and lacks healthy ties with India. In the recent months, the India has tried to smoothen its relations with the new regime of Afghanistan, yet it is clear that the new government of the Taliban will never allow India on its soil, to pursue its anti-Pakistan agenda. Therefore, it will be very difficult for the India to continue its old agenda on the Afghan soil. It is a good sign for the Pakistan and it will definitely tend to further its relations with the Taliban in terms of curbing India's anti-Pakistan presence on the Afghanistan soil.

Economic Challenges for Pakistan:

However, keeping all the above mentioned consequences for Pakistan, the latter is always blamed for differentiating Taliban into 'good' and 'bad' category. The western powers in general and the United States of America in particular, have been accusing Pakistan for its hidden sympathies with the insurgents in Afghanistan. [16] Pakistan is already listed on the grey in Financial Action Task Force FATF List, because of the alleged insufficient measures against terrorism and money laundering. [17] Keeping the current situations in mind, the already strained Pakistan's economy may further shrink in the coming future due to the uncertain situation of Afghanistan.

The international communities have isolated the conflicted and war-ravaged Afghanistan, after the Taliban takeover, a country that is greatly dependent on the foreign aid for its smooth running. In these winter days, the war-suffered country faces serious challenges

such as food shortage, lack of medicine and cloth stuffs. In such situations, the disastrous humanitarian crisis is building, which will definitely raise the influx of refugees in Pakistan, a country that is already hosting over 3.5 million Afghan refugees. Such circumstances will badly hurt the already struggling economy of the Pakistan. [18]

The Afghanistan imported from Pakistan by 15.6 and 11.2 percent in the years of 2019 and 2020 respectively. Currently, the Taliban government lacks sufficient money in its treasury for paying to the neighbors, especially to Pakistan in order to continue the bilateral trade. Moreover, the freezing of its economic assets and sanctions by the US and UN, the situations became extremely tough for the new-born Taliban regime. Such situations have decreased the bilateral trade to a greater extent, which is definitely hurting already strained Pakistan's economy. [19]

CONCLUSION:

The phenomena of increased globalization and interconnectedness have reduced the distances and the world has become a global village. No state can remain isolated, unaware and unaffected due to the developments of another one. In case of Pakistan and Afghanistan the fact becomes further clearer as both states not only share a lengthy border of 2640 KM, but have cultural, social and Religious similarities as well. Therefore, both the Pakistan and Afghanistan are extremely important for one another, and the stability in Pakistan is greatly dependant on that of the Afghanistan.

In the light of the mentioned facts in the paper, it is clear that the change in the government in Afghanistan has several major implications on Pakistan. It is a distinct reality that the friends or enemies may be changed, but one cannot change neighbors. Being the neighbor of Afghanistan, the Pakistan in this regard needs to adopt a proactive approach to avoid the negative impacts in a befitting manner, and avail the positive opportunities with both hands. Instead of dealing the Taliban's regime in hurry, Pakistan should engage the regional powers such as, China, Russia, Iran and the central Asian states over the mentioned matter.

Pakistan being the closed neighbor of Afghanistan, needs to frame a wide and comprehensive roadmap over the issue of Afghanistan, in order to make sure not only a smooth political environment in the region, but to deal the aftermath of the Taliban's regime in a smart way as well. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, OIC, extraordinary meeting in Dec 2021 over the Afghanistan issue, in Pakistan was a right step and the country needs more such efforts to tackle the uncertain situations.

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