

Taliban rule in Afghanistan: A South-Asian Perspective

"[T]here exist in the world certain places that have for mankind a strange and fatal existence, in that they give directions to his conquests. In these places victories are decisive and defeats mark the consummation of national ruin. These places are the doorways through which nations come and go; sometimes arches of triumph; sometimes those narrow exits through which nations, like men, pass to return no more. Herat is one of these places, Kabul another."

(Homer Lea, 1876-1912)

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Afghanistan lies on the heart of the Asian continent, connecting South and Central Asia. A landlocked country surrounded by the Hindu Kush mountains, these mountains have shaped the political, economic, and social life of the Afghans. History shows how these mountains have protected them from numerous invaders but also hindered the growth and prosperity of the nation. Most notable, the Hindu Kush mountains have allowed Afghanistan to be used as a breeding ground of extremist ideologies.

The fall of Kabul to the hands of the Taliban and their subsequent rise to power, call into question the ability of the West to assert sustainable dominance in the region. The balance of power has once again shifted in this highly volatile region of geopolitical significance. This shift is already affecting South-Asia and the continent as a whole.

The geopolitical realignment has put pressure on south Asian countries to reconfigure their interest and priorities in the region, nations are hurriedly evacuated their diplomats and citizens, leaving behind two decades of work and investments.

To make matters complicated, Taliban rule is under threat of the Northern Alliance, who are putting up resistance to the regime. Whether or not Taliban will hold on to power, or for how long is anyone's guess.

Recognition of Taliban Regime

Since seizing power this August, the Taliban have often voiced their desire that the international community will recognize their authorities as the new government of Afghanistan, and have taken a number of procedural efforts to that end. However, the Taliban has done

nothing to show that it is willing to accept the demands of Western powers and certain regional governments.

Much of the Taliban's attempts to get international recognition appear to be motivated by the regime's urgent financial requirements, as well as a desire to see assets unfrozen and different sorts of aid supplied.

Pakistan is the only state to openly call for Taliban recognition stating humanitarian concerns, but when it comes to Afghan policy, Pakistan does not stimulate a lot of trust, with their history of support for the Taliban, the Haqqani faction, and tolerance of terrorism as a whole. Though Pakistan itself hasn't recognized the Taliban rule, probably due to pressure from the U.S., this has caused friction between the two neighbors.

Bangladesh is playing its cards close to its chest, analyzing the situation and waiting for more developments before taking any steps in the matter. Foreign Minister Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen laid out the principles that would determine Bangladesh's recognition of Taliban government. A "people's government" that comes through a political and a democratic process where the people's will and desires are reflected will have Dhaka's full support, Momen said.

A similar stance is taken by the Sri Lankan and Nepalese governments. These two nations are expected to maintain a neutral position regarding recognition of the Taliban regime.

Among the few available mechanisms by which the US and other nations may apply pressure on the Taliban leadership is international recognition. Therefore, the more countries agree on how to utilize that lever, the more powerful it becomes.

Recognition of the Taliban regime by Afghanistan's closest neighbors would provide the Taliban a certain

level of legitimacy and open them up to much-needed financial resources — but it would also significantly reduce the United States' power and influence to press the Taliban on the most pressing issues of humanitarian access, freedom of movement for Afghan refugees, and not to mention the wider priorities of inclusive governance, protection of human rights, and counter-terrorism assurances.

Terrorism and Supporting Activities

Afghanistan has never been on the best of terms with their neighbors, and the Taliban rule isn't making them any more friends either. Several anxieties of terrorism have resurfaced on the minds of South Asian nations because of close links of Taliban to various terror groups both inside and outside of Afghanistan and their incapability to govern the whole area of the country. This is bound to provide safe havens to terrorist and opportunity for them to carry out their activities. This inevitably acts against the national interests and integrity of the smaller South Asian nations.

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an anti-Pakistan terrorist group have resumed their campaign of terror inside Pakistan, mostly against Pakistani state interests. In its brutality against Pakistan, the TTP has undoubtedly been empowered by the Taliban's return to power.

Sri Lanka will be cautious of the Taliban regime, because the last time the Taliban were in power, they traded weapons with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam



(LTTE), popularly known as the Tamil Tigers. Thus, the Taliban's reappearance with more modern weaponry and drug supplies, at a time when Sri Lanka is seeing an uptick in Islamic terror, Sinhala-Muslim tensions, and rumors of resurgent Tamil separatism, has sparked widespread concern.

Conclusion

Historical analysis shows, the region has a lot to gain, or lose, from what transpires in Afghanistan. In the globalized world, a continuance of the Afghan conflict, in whatever shape it takes, will not be restricted to Afghanistan, but would most likely extend and consume the whole region. A zero-sum approach by regional countries to the Afghan conflict will only exacerbate Afghan suffering while impeding regional progress and development due to spillover effects.

Regardless of how the region develops: Afghanistan will remain a security and geostrategic hot spot in the future. In the words of Homer Lea: Afghanistan will stay a "doorway through which nations come and go; sometimes arches of triumph; sometimes those narrow exits through which nations, like men, pass to return no more."

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