

# Foreign Policy of Regional Powers Towards Afghanistan (2021-2024)

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate the Afghan policies of the regional powers after 2021 when the Taliban came to power. After coming to power in 2021, the Taliban abolished the previous government and decided to build their own. The whole world had to start their relationship with Afghanistan once again. As we know the geostrategic location of Afghanistan compels the regional and neighboring countries to keep their interaction intact. We have regional powers like China, Russia, and India having the world's top economies and larger influence both in the world and the region. This paper thus aims to understand their foreign policies towards Afghanistan after 2021. The paper argues that these states have stakes in Afghanistan, due to its strategic location and natural resources. These states are lured to be involved in Afghanistan without considering what the internal situation in Afghanistan is. It is either due to the geo-strategic location of Afghanistan or the natural resources or other economic potential which compel these states to remain in relation with any government in power.

This qualitative study takes help from both secondary and primary data. The study relies on the existing work on the responses of these regional powers, such as India, China, and Russia, to the Taliban. The study extends these individual studies to comparative analysis to understand how these states responded differently because of their global political stand, regional dynamics, and global power struggle. The mentioned powers stand at different positions in international politics. They have their regional issue as all of them have different geo-strategic dynamics and problems. Russia has been involved on the one hand, in Ukraine for the last two years and it wants to keep in control the Central Asian Republics (CARs). To realize the second objective, Russia needs Afghanistan to have a safe regional actor in its hands. Russia additionally, is involved in the global power politics with the West and United States as they stand behind Ukraine, making the conflict truly a global one. China is also involved in the East with the United States and its allies such as Japan. It is involved in the South China Sea and other territories as well. On the other hand, it is in a slight conflict with India on the borderlands and territories. It decides things related to Afghanistan by looking at these regional dynamics and the global struggle or the "New Cold WAR", with the United States. India's policy towards Afghanistan is largely influenced by the regional dynamics and the global stand it took in the last decade on the side of the United States against the growing power of China. It also takes into consideration Pakistan as an important regional player. All these states have different interests and compulsions to react to Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Regional Powers, Foreign Policy, Taliban, Political Changes

### **Taliban came to power**

People were surprised by the Taliban's sudden rise to power in 2021 and their ability to maintain control over Kabul. But even back in the early phases of the peace process they engaged in with the United States, which led to the Doha Peace Agreement in 2020, they were getting ready. The Afghan government's financial assets were blocked by the US following the Agreement to put them in a difficult situation. Nearly every state has "suspended" diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, and they have not officially acknowledged the Taliban's administration. The Taliban have worked extremely hard to persuade several nations to recognize their administration or at the very least normalize the situation since they came to power. They have been successful in the "normalization" efforts in the countries outside the strong influence of the United States.

The way that nations first reacted to the Taliban seizing power determined how those nations' ties with the Taliban would develop in the future. Iran, for instance, was soft. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi believes that the country has an opportunity to establish enduring peace as a result of the US's "military failure" in Afghanistan. He stated, "Iran invites all groups in Afghanistan to reach a national agreement and backs efforts to restore stability in Afghanistan as a neighbor and brother nation." China said that it is willing to assist with the country's recovery and that its embassy in Kabul will remain operational ([AlJazeera, 2021](#)). Iran, with which Afghanistan borders on the west, opposed the Taliban's rule in the 1990s but has since maintained relations with the group, emphasizing the significance of representation for the Iranian-affiliated ethnic and religious groups in Afghanistan: the Hazaras, who are primarily Shia Muslims, and the Tajiks, who speak a dialect of Persian. Official Taliban visits to Tehran were conducted before the group seized power in August 2021, and they have continued ever since. In January 2022, the Taliban's acting foreign minister visited Tehran. The envoy of the Kremlin to Afghanistan stated that Moscow would assess the legitimacy of the new Taliban administration based on its conduct (Muraviev, 2021). Additionally, Germany "is concerned about the fates of individual Afghans as well as the development of the entire country," German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated on Monday. According to UK [Defence](#) Secretary Ben Wallace, the Taliban's hold on Afghanistan is a "failure of the international community," implying that the West's involvement in the nation was only partially effective ([AlJazeera, 2021](#)). The United States of America constantly modifies its foreign policy toward Afghanistan in light of the country's domestic policies, its dominant position in the international system, the extent of its dominance geographically, and the influence of neighboring or rival countries (Yawar, 2023). The countries outside the influence of the United States such as Iran, Russia, and China responded in a soft and receiving manner. This study argues that these responses decided the future ties between these countries and the Taliban in the future.

In addition to the severe domestic consequences, the Taliban's comeback had a significant impact on Afghanistan's and its neighbors' foreign policy. Regional powers such as China and Russia have experienced a notable rise in prominence. They had all, in different ways, contributed to the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan long before the US left. However, for these two players, the Taliban's comeback also heightened concerns that Afghanistan might once more serve as a shelter for international terrorist groups ready to launch strikes on their territory. However, India was the nation most negatively impacted by the Taliban's comeback; its strategy of backing Kabul's elected government turned out to be ill-advised and resulted in New Delhi being reduced to a supporting role. This paper, in the next sections, looks at the foreign policies of the mentioned three regional powers towards the Taliban-run Afghanistan.

### Stakes of the regional powers in Afghanistan

This section discusses the stakes and interests of regional states in Afghanistan. These interests surpass who is in government in Afghanistan. They compel these countries to be involved in Afghanistan. The section focuses on the mentioned countries' regional, global, economic, geostrategic, or other interests which compel these states to consider Afghanistan in their foreign policies. China and Russia are slightly aligned in their foreign policies towards Afghanistan or they have about the same goals with the Taliban as compared to India. India is standing on the other pole from the Russian and Chinese stand because India has been (an informal) ally with or in the influence of the United States. All of the regional powers have either regional compulsions or global which compel them to normalize the situation with the Taliban.

Afghanistan's stability directly affects India's security environment, especially terrorism and extremism. India's strategic influence in Afghanistan stems from several primary goals that support stability, strengthen bilateral relations, and counteract regional dangers (Majeed, T., & Bashir, F, 2023). India provides substantial developmental assistance, such as infrastructure projects and capacity-building programs, to strengthen Afghanistan's democratic institutions. India is demonstrating its commitment to fighting terrorism and insurgency through security cooperation, such as providing military training for Afghan forces. India's strategic access to Central Asia is enhanced by its economic investments in projects such as the Chabahar port, which promote regional connectivity and lessen Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan. India fosters goodwill and strengthens historical relationships by conserving Afghan history and encouraging people-to-people contacts. India actively participates in regional fora to promote security and peace processes led by Afghanistan, therefore reaffirming its position as a vital ally in the country's efforts to achieve both. India has invested in Afghanistan's security forces and infrastructure to combat terrorism that threatens both countries (Gauttam, P., & Singh, B., 2023). India is involved in various economic projects in Afghanistan, such as building infrastructure (like roads and dams), providing humanitarian aid, and supporting development initiatives. Ultimately, these projects aim to strengthen bilateral ties and promote economic growth in Afghanistan. India views Afghanistan as an essential component of its regional strategy, particularly in countering Pakistan's influence. India has contributed to the development of the Chabahar port in Iran, which gives it access to markets in Central Asia through Afghanistan. With this connectivity, India's reliance on Pakistan for trade routes is lessened, and its regional economic integration is strengthened (Fair, 2022).

Russia is looking at the Taliban more feasibly. Stronger ties of Russia with the Taliban would benefit both parties, given Afghanistan's political and economic challenges as well as Western sanctions against Russia as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. In light of the US's inability to bring stability to Afghanistan, it seeks to position itself as the region's security supplier. Since the Soviet Union fought an armed campaign in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, Moscow views Central Asia as a historical interest. Concerns over the stability of the area, drug trafficking, and dangers from Islamist terrorism are also present, particularly in light of the most recent Isis-K attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall. Russia may leverage the partnerships it has previously established, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (a military alliance with Armenia), to strengthen its geopolitical and geo-economics influence in the area. 2002 saw the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union (an economic union including five post-Soviet republics) and Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Prospects for Afghanistan's incorporation into "the Eurasian space for cooperation" are included in Russia's foreign policy strategy for 2023 (Mamedov, 2024)

Russia's main objectives in Afghanistan are to stop terrorist strikes against Russia by Afghan-based militant groups and to stop instability from spreading from Afghanistan to neighboring Central Asian

republics. Russia's approach has been twofold to lessen the volatility that the first few months of the Taliban administration brought about: first, Moscow has interacted with the new Taliban leadership; second, it has improved ties with Pakistan. First, a Taliban envoy traveled to Moscow to allay Russian fears as the insurgent group's control looked near. The significance of tensions not "spreading beyond the country [Afghanistan]'s borders" was emphasized by Russia's envoy, Zamir Kabulov, during the meeting. He also claimed to have received assurances from the Taliban that they would not breach the borders of Central Asian states or permit the use of their territory for attacks against Russia (Times, 2021). Russia's primary goal in Afghanistan, as well as in Central Asia more broadly, is to protect its position as the dominant power in the area against threats from other would-be hegemonies, especially China. Since gaining independence with the fall of the Soviet Union thirty years ago, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) have developed ties with other nations and organizations within their area as well as with other states. They are still, however, under Russian influence. Security is still a problem since the Taliban are engaged in combat with the far more radical and dangerous Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), which wants to take over and destabilize Afghanistan (Kugelman, 2022)

China's stance towards the Taliban has been very soft. They have dealt Taliban in a positive way than any other country, except Pakistan. Both parties, China and the Taliban, can create a transactional relationship based on mutual self-interest, notwithstanding the lack of a common philosophy. While the Taliban consider Beijing as vital to their international legitimacy and as a much-needed prospective investor in Afghanistan, China, which is positioned to play a defining role in the area, sees the organization as an indisputable part of Afghanistan's political destiny. China's main worry is stability, especially its own. China's main concerns about Afghanistan are that extremist organizations with global aspirations, such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, are once again finding refuge there. Beijing is especially concerned about Uyghur terrorists who may cross China's 76-kilometer border with Afghanistan to pursue their goals in that country. For Chinese officials, preventing violence or mayhem from a possible power vacuum is of utmost importance. In addition to security concerns, Beijing has longer-term economic aspirations for the nation, as seen by the involvement of Chinese companies in the enormous Aynak copper mine and the Amu Darya oil field development. But for the time being, China wants to become closer to both parties and use that influence to pressure Kabul and the Taliban to find a political solution. In an attempt to get all parties to the bargaining table, Beijing is also teasing greater attempts to include Afghanistan in its Belt and Road Initiative and future investments (Standish, 2021).

Afghanistan's strategic location at the meeting point of Central and South Asia, together with an abundance of natural resources, are the driving forces for China's strong involvement in the country's affairs. China's "grand strategy" aims to achieve several objectives, such as defending its economic interests, gaining more clout internationally, and maintaining peace inside its borders and surrounding areas. A secure Afghanistan offers China a chance to align a neighbor with its overall strategic goals in the face of an ongoing conflict and changing regional circumstances. Beijing's attitude to the challenge of preserving regional stability is defined by the need to protect security within and surrounding Afghanistan. China's main strategy thus focuses on enhancing coordination with Pakistan and the Taliban while also looking to work with Afghan security forces to reduce possible threats. China is especially interested in the nation's substantial mineral reserves, which include copper, rare earth elements, and lithium (Mohammed Hussein and Mohammed Haddad, 2021). China, the world's largest user of raw materials, sees these resources as essential to advancing both its economic growth and technical advancement. However, China's security strategy faces significant obstacles as a result of the ongoing instability in Afghanistan, especially about

non-traditional transnational security concerns. A comprehensive infrastructure development initiative, China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seeks to promote connectivity across continents (ANI, 2023). Afghanistan might be a vital entry point connecting China with Central Asia and other regions due to its advantageous geographic position.

China wants to become a more dominant player in the area and increase its influence over it. China is attempting to establish diplomatic ties and engage with Afghanistan to use its soft power. By strengthening its relationships with its neighbors and expanding its influence overall, this calculated strategy seeks to establish China as a major player in regional affairs. China wants to be seen as a responsible global force that actively promotes peace and stability in the area. China hopes to establish itself as a trustworthy partner and bolster its reputation as a responsible actor in the international arena by actively supporting peace initiatives and actively participating in rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan.

### **Indian Policy towards Afghanistan after the Taliban**

From British colonial times until the US initiated its "War on Terror" in the early 2000s, Afghanistan has been a theater of great-power politics. India has a clear understanding of the threat posed by terrorism coming from the Central Asian Republic (CARs) because of its advantageous location spanning Iran, Pakistan, and other countries. The Indian response to the Taliban was slightly contradictory or vague. Things were very different for India. Since 2001, India's approach to Afghanistan has been based on two fundamental tenets: the US military's presence in the country and its backing of Kabul's democratic government. Both vanished within a few weeks. A prime example of India's constrained alternatives for policy in the current context is the circumstances surrounding the November 2021 "Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan," which New Delhi held. The summit, which was presided over by National Security Advisors (NSAs) from seven additional nations—Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—was attended by NSAs from India. China and Pakistan were the two nations that turned down India's invitation for various reasons. China's absence was noteworthy as Beijing had participated in the forum's two prior sessions (in 2018 and 2019), but in 2021 it was making a clear indication that it would no longer support initiatives on Afghanistan spearheaded by India. More crucially, the fact that no officials from Afghanistan were invited to the conference shows how little power India had over the Taliban leadership. Additionally, this stood in sharp contrast to the previously mentioned Troika Plus meeting, which was sponsored by the Chinese and attended by the temporary foreign minister of the Taliban. The necessity for a more inclusive administration that represents all facets of Afghan society was mentioned in the joint declaration that was released following the Delhi conference. It also highlighted common worries over radicalization, financing of terrorism, and terrorism originating in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in contrast to what we have observed in the case of Pakistan, the Ghani government continued to nominate Farid Mamundzay as the ambassador of Afghanistan to India. By providing medical help to the nation in the latter half of 2021, India began to close the political divide with the Taliban, to which the latter responded favorably. Spectators pointed out that this move indicated India's readiness to take a more measured approach to its relationship with the Taliban at a time when they appear to be the only viable opponent in the Afghan political arena (Boni, 2022).

After the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021, India was forced to reconsider its approach to its Western neighbor. With the fall of Kabul, India's UNSC chair put its envoy in a difficult situation. The international community had to move decisively to resolve the issue as the Taliban were consolidating their advantages in the nation. The UNSC Resolution asked the international community to make sure that



Afghanistan doesn't serve as a haven or a funding source for attacks against other nations. Additionally, it urged all sides to work toward a "political settlement that is inclusive, negotiated and involves women in a meaningful and full way" (Chaudhary, 2021). The resolution explicitly mentioned the terrorist organizations Lashkar-e-Taiyaba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), according to former Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla. The resolution, which aimed to forge an agreement between the international community and the regional players, served as the foundation for India's policy, "guiding the collective approach of the global community towards Afghanistan." At the October 2021 G20 Extraordinary Summit on Afghanistan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi encouraged the G20 nations to hold the Taliban accountable by Resolution 2593 (Chandra, 2021).

India closed its consulate in Kandahar, withdrew its diplomats and staff, and ceased operations at its consulates in Herat and Jalalabad in July and August as the war in Afghanistan grew more intense. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reacted quickly to the security issue even as it assessed how best to handle the impending political crisis. The Indian embassy in Kabul carried on with its operations for the first few days, offering consular services and automatically renewing the visas of some 4,557 Afghan citizens who were already in India and whose visas were heading toward expiration. As things worsened the embassy was briefly closed. There are four official components to India's development collaboration with Afghanistan: small- and community-based development projects, education and capacity-building efforts, humanitarian support, and infrastructural projects. In addition to giving medications through the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul and polio vaccinations through UNICEF, India distributes relief by collaborating with foreign organizations and specialized UN agencies. For New Delhi, help should be provided unconditionally, directly, and without any restrictions, regardless of how the political scenario in Kabul plays out. The Ministry of External Affairs allocated INR 200 crores (about USD 25 million) as help to the nation in the FY 2023–24 budget, which sparked fears from certain quarters that India was funding the Taliban (Rehbar, 2023). However, India's first focus has been making sure that help reaches the people who need it. India expressed agreement in principle with the UNSC resolution on granting a "humanitarian carve out" from the sanctions but expressed apprehensions about guaranteeing the money would not be exploited by the Taliban. As a result, India refrained from voting on the measure. There were rumors in June 2021 that India was establishing contact with some Taliban factions. India had stated at the time that it was "in touch with various stakeholders, including regional countries" in answer to inquiries about its intentions for dealing with the Taliban. A year later, in early June 2022, JP Singh, the Joint Secretary of the Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran Division, led New Delhi's first formal trip to Kabul. It appeared that the visit's objectives were to supervise the distribution of Indian aid and assess the nation's security state. In addition to meeting with Amir Khan Muttaqi, Shah Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, and Sirajuddin Haqqani, the delegation also visited with representatives of foreign humanitarian organizations and assessed the status of unfinished Indian projects (Laskar, 2023).

Despite the controversy inside India, the announcement of the launch of a "technical mission" in Kabul came after the June 2022 visit. This sparked rumors that New Delhi could recognize the Taliban government. To "closely monitor and coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance," diplomats were part of the mission. The MEA issued a warning against placing too much emphasis on the trip's recognition value and instead emphasized the need to prioritize maintaining the security and stability of the nation over the significance of nomenclature. Additionally, it disregarded the idea that the mission's existence indicates India's diplomatic presence in the nation. The EAM disclosed in August that India was dispatching more diplomats to the embassy in

Kabul, except the ambassador. Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a spokesman for the Taliban Foreign Ministry, praised India's move to enhance its diplomatic presence in Kabul and promised to protect the diplomats. However, ministry representatives were cited by the media as stating that they saw the Taliban's reaction as only a "matter of interpretation." (Wire, 2023)

India has been more elusive, while China, Russia, and Iran have all said openly that they are eager to work with the Taliban. This hesitancy can be linked to India's foreign policy calculus's conflicting realpolitik and philosophical considerations. Although the focus on morality and ideals has not entirely disappeared from New Delhi, it has been "tempered by a more pragmatic discourse." The MEA official said that India has always taken a "wait and watch" stance in the initial aftermath of Kabul's collapse, wanting to first assess the situation and how other nations are handling the problem. This is an expansion of the strategy it has been pursuing over the past few decades, during which New Delhi was impacted by shifting regional and global alignments in addition to making sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan maintain a strategic balance (Harsh V. Pant and Avinash Paliwa, 2022).

The Taliban asked India to let it deploy its envoy in New Delhi back in January 2023. According to reports, the organization has attempted about fourteen efforts to get the ambassador chosen by the Ghani government removed from the embassy. A new envoy to India was appointed, as stated by Suhail Shaheen, the Chief of the Political Office for the Taliban in Qatar, a few months later in May. Compared to Russia or China, New Delhi has been at a disadvantage since the start of the peace process in Afghanistan because of its reluctance to accept the necessity of speaking with the Taliban directly (Shekhawat, 2023). However, India was one of eleven nations that attended a "Regional Cooperative Initiative" summit in Kabul, which was arranged by the Taliban, in January 2024. This should be seen as a continuation of a pattern in which New Delhi has been interacting with the Taliban more frequently rather than as an isolated incident. The chargé d'affaires of the Afghan mission, Badruddin Haqqani, was invited to the Indian embassy in the United Arab Emirates a few days before their Republic Day festivities. According to New Delhi, the invitation was handled by "standard diplomatic procedures." (Shubhrajeev Konwer and Mallika Pegu, 2024).

Managing the inconsistencies that its policy brings up, both locally and globally, has made things more difficult for New Delhi. It is being criticized domestically for abandoning the Afghan people, but it is also being criticized for reaching out to the Taliban, which is seen as a betrayal of its values and goals. Globally, New Delhi recognizes the need to collaborate with nations in the area, particularly Russia, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics, in the fight against terrorism; nevertheless, its alliance with the US is up against an increasing anti-American attitude in the area. This makes it harder for New Delhi to adequately protect its interests. Although the conflict in Ukraine has tested India's relationship with Russia, it will need to cooperate with other regional players to protect its interests and gradually develop a less haphazard and more steady approach toward Kabul (Bacon, 2022).

Russia was once again posing a security danger to Washington, and the US and its allies were drawing closer in their struggle with China around the time of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Now since China and Russia are the two main actors in the area together with Iran, there are rumors that Beijing and Moscow want to take over Washington's position and increase their power. Both have been actively interacting with the Taliban since at least 2015 to further their "regional hegemonic goals" within the nation (Taneja, 2023). They have adopted a two-pronged approach: they have restricted interactions with the organization and avoid open criticism of them while acknowledging the terrorist threat the group represents and their pursuit of strategic influence in Central Asia. In the near term, China and Russia share the desire to reduce

the power of the US and its allies in the area, even though their long-term goals may differ (Ahmadzai, 2024). Countries in the region may unite around the danger of terrorism, but collaboration may be hampered by a variety of political and other issues. China and Russia both abstained from voting on Resolution 2593 during the UNSC debate. Moscow disagreed that the resolution's draft separated the terrorists between "ours and theirs" groups and left out the names of organizations like the East Turkestan Islamist Movement (ETIM). Russia also took issue with the expulsion of qualified experts who could have aided in the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Beijing and Moscow drew attention to the fact that there was no mention of the US embargo on the deposits held by the Afghan state bank after Kabul fell. They said the resolution was being crafted to place the Taliban on the receiving end of the blame for the instability of the past 20 years, rather than the US. China's security position worsened as a result of Washington's exit, underscoring the necessity for the international community to cooperate with the Taliban (Praveen Swami and Pia Krishnankutty, 2023).

### **Russian Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan**

Moscow is constructing an approach to the Taliban-run Afghanistan that serves its broader objectives in Central Asia. Even while Moscow has chosen not to formally acknowledge the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government, Moscow is now forging relationships with the city's new leaders. In the fall of 2022, news sources stated that negotiations were taking place between the two governments about the sale of Russian oil shipments in exchange for the Taliban selling "raisins, minerals, and medicinal herbs." Since then, both parties have decided to begin basic commercial negotiations. Russia's motivation for working with the Taliban while not officially recognizing their government is the newly recognized "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." Since recognizing the Taliban would not help Moscow realize its regional objectives in Central Asia, Moscow has not done so yet. Rather, Russia has pursued what may be called "muted diplomacy," a practical strategy toward the Taliban. However, the consequences of Russia's military escapade in Ukraine are undermining this strategy. Thus, it is critical to evaluate Russia's changing foreign policy about the Taliban from a broad perspective.

Moscow is now making use of years of informal contacts that it has established through backdoor routes with the Taliban in the hopes that these relationships may eventually lead to some kind of political and economic collaboration. The Taliban's desire to allow Russia to use Afghanistan's natural resources was cited by Dmitry Zhirnov, the Russian ambassador to Afghanistan, as proof of this. Second, Russia is stepping up its security cooperation with Pakistan in Afghanistan. President Vladimir Putin of Russia spoke with the Prime Minister of Pakistan over the phone in the days that followed the Taliban's comeback to power. It was decided to coordinate bilateral and multilateral measures to the Afghan situation, according to the official report (Korybko, 2021). Regarding the importance of this choice, experts referred to it as a «defining moment» in the history of ties between Russia and Pakistan, signifying the first-ever implicit admission that Russia has grown dependent on Pakistan to further its goals.

Since the Taliban took control of the Afghan embassy in Moscow in August 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has recognized the credentials of a Taliban ambassador. Lavrov has emphasized to other governments in the vicinity the significance of cooperating with the Taliban to forward the "encouraging steps" necessary for Kabul's new leadership to finally be acknowledged. According to Zamir Kabulov, the Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan, the Taliban must, as a "first step," fulfill Moscow's demand that they establish an "inclusive ethnopolitical government" (RoshanNoorzai, 2022). However, because the Taliban are still in power and continue to rule as they did in the late 1990s, Russia



has no interest in being the first state to recognize them. By enforcing their strict interpretation of Sharia law, the Taliban have essentially prevented Afghan females from attending secondary education, drove out a large number of Afghan women from labor, and began enforcing sanctions. The entire leadership of the temporary government's cabinet is male, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, who the US FBI has "a \$5 million bounty on his head." Russia seems to be supporting the Taliban administration to some level; take the country's awful humanitarian situation as an example, and place the blame on the West. During a recent UN Human Rights Council conference in Geneva, a Russian official underlined that the main reason the Afghan government has not been able to open schools for Afghan girls is because the West isolates the Taliban. Russia "supports the removal of asset freezes against the Taliban and has urged the international community to aid Afghanistan's reconstruction" because it fears that Afghanistan could experience another state collapse (Worden, 2023). China and Russia are spearheading several regional initiatives with the same objective of seeing the Taliban combat terrorist organizations and establish an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

### **Chinese policy towards Afghanistan**

China has a cautious and adaptable approach to its involvement in Afghanistan. China formulates its foreign policy with the aforementioned interests of the nation and area in mind. China has lately become much more involved in Afghanistan, especially after 2012. China's involvement in Afghanistan increased after it first kept a low profile because of worries about Central Asian instability and how it would affect the security of China's western provinces, particularly Xinjiang (Report, 2023). China understood that to safeguard its economic goals, particularly the accomplishment of the BRI and CPEC, it would have to handle its security concerns and maintain peace in Afghanistan. Beijing started interacting with Kabul by donating assistance, investing in infrastructure development and resource exploitation, and making peace efforts. China's low export capability and weak security situation in Afghanistan have, however, made its economic aspirations difficult to achieve. Furthermore, after the Taliban took power in August 2021, Chinese businesses have been making considerable foreign investments in Afghanistan. In January 2023, a Chinese company inked a noteworthy multimillion-dollar investment deal, which was the first of its kind in the nation. Some commentators feel that security concerns, rather than economic objectives, are the primary motivation behind China's participation in Afghanistan (Ruchi Kumar and Hikmat Noori, 2023). Afghanistan was administered by the Taliban as part of China's "New Neighborhood Diplomacy" (NND), a theoretical framework that includes a plan for Beijing to acquire Great Cohesive Power. A product of Xi Jinping's government, it reflects the Chinese leadership's understanding of their nation's ascent and adjustment in the regional tier of foreign policy while also, in practice, encompassing several new initiatives covering China's regional foreign policy. The NND's goal of improving ties with surrounding nations is one of its characteristics (Hamida Bibi, Muhammad Daniyal Khan, and Sana Saeed, 2024). Beijing's increased involvement with its surrounding areas and subregions is focused on two goals to become a "Great Cohesive Power" (GCP): China's policy officials are gradually realizing that as the country grows more powerful, it will inevitably become the center of political gravity on the world stage. The second is that since China's relations with its neighbors have a direct impact on its economy, politics, diplomacy, and security, its leadership has concluded that cultivating cordial relations with the states that border it is crucial because, first, they will create an atmosphere free from security concerns; and second, they will strengthen China's strategic position. Thirdly, China's diplomatic influence will strengthen and, in the end, widen the foundation of its influence on the international scene (Azhar Javed Siddiqui and

Sahima Naureen, 2024). China is developing its policy towards Afghanistan in this kind of background. It has developed its policy and engagement in Afghanistan according to its interests, and its global and regional position.

According to sources, China is funding an Afghan mountain brigade and building a military facility in the Badakhshan area, both of which indicate that its military presence in Afghanistan is growing (Chan, 2023). Eliminating the East Turkestan Islamic Movement's training sites in the Wakhan Corridor and preventing jihadist infiltration into Xinjiang are China's main objectives, despite its efforts to downplay its military participation and concentrate on capacity development and counterterrorism initiatives. The foreign ministers of China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan discussed the value of trilateral cooperation to create a stable, prosperous, and peaceful Afghanistan that benefits the whole region at the 5th China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, which took place in Islamabad on May 6. They reiterated their dedication to expanding CPEC by including Afghanistan and highlighted the importance of existing regional connectivity projects like CASA-1000, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, and the Trans-Afghan Railways for regional connectivity. They called for enhanced infrastructure, trade facilitation, and international support for Afghanistan's economic development and counter-narcotics efforts (Saher Liaqat and Abu Hurairah Abbasi, 2023).

Over \$1 trillion in investments in mineral extraction are part of China's economic engagement. An oil and gas agreement worth \$540 million was recently inked by the Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Company (CAPEIC). Additionally, the \$1 trillion lithium mining business in Afghanistan received an offer from the Chinese company Gochin to spend \$10 billion. China is staying out of Afghan politics and sticking to government-to-government talks. Chinese development plans and investment plans are well-positioned to produce capital assets, and local job opportunities, and empower the lowest economic stratum in Afghanistan's many economic sectors, all of which will support the advancement of peace and prosperity (Veena Ramachandran & Amit Kumar, 2024). As promised in September 2021, China provided emergency aid to Afghanistan for 250 million Yuan (US\$37.4 million) by July 2022. According to Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, China thus became "the largest, most substantial and fastest assistance (provider) to Afghanistan in disaster relief." Grain, winter supplies, medications, and three million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine were included in the emergency aid. Moreover, when on June 22, 2022, South-Eastern Afghanistan was struck by an earthquake killing 1000 and injuring 2000 people, China was the first country coming for the help Afghanistan pledging 50 million (7.5 million dollars) more in emergency aid (Rid, 2023).

China is also diplomatically involved in Afghanistan; on Tuesday, the Taliban government's envoy to Beijing, along with dozens of other diplomats, presented his credentials to Chinese President Xi Jinping. In January, China abstained from a UN Security Council vote that called for the appointment of a special envoy to Afghanistan, a move that was strongly opposed by the Taliban authorities. Afghanistan functions as a hub that connects Central Asia, South Asia, and Western Asia. Beijing has been closely monitoring the situation in this region to prevent another major power from using Afghanistan to constrain China. China's method - transferring ambassadors without official recognition — allows Beijing to retain connections while also breaking lines with the rest of the world (AFP, 2024).

## Conclusion

Afghanistan has always been, and today, one of the centers of global power politics. The global and regional powers' foreign policies are determined largely by their geo-strategic location. As every state

responds to its interests, the regional powers' foreign policy is also determined by their interests in Afghanistan. The study suggests that due to the international situation, great powers competition, or the "New Cold War" between China/Russia and the United States and its allies, including India, the regional powers are compelled to engage the Taliban after 2021. Every regional power pursues its regional ambitions by engaging with the Taliban. The Indian government is starting to engage the Taliban through economic assistance, developmental projects, and "informal" diplomatic outreach. Its foreign policy is driven by its economic and security interests to retain trade and other economic interactions and make Afghanistan a safe place for its investment or national security. The only compulsion they have in engaging the Taliban is the US government. It is under the influence of the United States because of its worries about the Chinese rise as a regional hegemon or great power to decide the region's fate. The Russian government is engaging the Taliban both economically and diplomatically. They understand that the Taliban needs, most importantly, economic stability and diplomatic recognition. They have handed over the Afghan embassy to the Taliban representatives and invited them to multilateral and bilateral conferences in Afghanistan. Their foreign policy is determined by their regional ambitions. On the one hand, Russia is facing a tough situation on its western border, as it is involved in a war with Ukraine. It is also facing economic sanctions from the US-led Western countries. On the other hand, Russia wants to keep intact its "sphere of influence" in Central Asia and for that it needs Afghanistan. Russia also has concerns about the security on the eastern front from groups like ISIS. These factors compel Russia to be part of the interaction, through "muted diplomacy", with the Taliban. The Chinese goals are both global and regional. They have engaged the Taliban since they came to power. They have visited China more than any other regional or global power since 2021. China is providing economic assistance, investments, and other aids to the Taliban government. Most importantly, China has been one of the powers to give diplomatic outreach to the Taliban. The Taliban have several times participated in regional conferences since they came to power. China is also satisfying the Taliban's most important needs of economic stability and diplomatic outreach. Its foreign policy is to put Afghanistan on its side against the eastern front, where it is facing the US presence in the South and East China Sea, and in a regional gamble with India and other US allies. It also wants to influence the CARs through Afghanistan. Secondly, China wants to exploit the natural resources of Afghanistan as Chinese companies have been investing in this sector since 2021. Chinese foreign policy is driven by its global competition with the US, on the one hand, and on the other hand, China wants to keep the region friendly for its economy and security.

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