

Transitioning Afghanistan

A Year After Taliban and Way Forward

Seminar Report

Executive Summary

In 2021, Afghanistan was a country scarred by over four decades of war and conflicts and plagued with numerous issues. In such circumstances, the fall of Kabul to the Taliban and an unexpected and rapid regime change brought with it a wave of uncertainty and panic, as demonstrated by the flight of people from the capital in August 2021.

Just before the Taliban takeover, two different narratives had surfaced. On one hand, people believed that the Taliban lack the capacity to take over the entire country. Others considered that if at all the Taliban manage to take Kabul, they will not be able to sustain their rule because of a multitude of challenges and their inexperience in matters of government.

It has been over a year since the Taliban took control of Kabul. During this time, they have continued to grapple with unprecedented challenges, including humanitarian and financial crises. However, despite many domestic, regional and international challenges, the Taliban administration has somewhat sustained itself.

The Taliban government is facing multifaceted challenges on three fronts – domestic chaos and vulnerabilities, regional challenges, and international setbacks. On the domestic front, the country's fragile economy, insecurity, poor governance, war-torn infrastructure, and inadequate health and education facilities portray a bleak picture. The Taliban are also struggling to overcome organizational differences in the formation of the government and in the domains of governance, finance, and security. These challenges are a clear test for the Taliban.

Besides the domestic vulnerabilities, the Taliban are also confronting regional challenges in the realm of security and diplomacy. It has been a challenge for the Taliban to gain regional support, or rather regional consensus, based on clearly defined “redlines”, including a commitment by all regional players to maintain the sustainability and long-term success of Afghan peace deal.

Internationally, recognition and acceptance by the world is still awaited. This is important because legitimacy and recognition serve as important factors for any government to operate independently and participate in the international system.

In this situation, the Taliban takeover is arguably more critical for Pakistan as the sudden regime change in Afghanistan is likely to change the security dynamics in Pakistan, especially in the context of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as they may get a stronger foothold, creating insecurity and instability in the country.

In this backdrop, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) felt the need to evaluate the evolving situation in Afghanistan. Therefore, in order to seek clarity on the subject matter, a roundtable was organized titled, ‘Transitioning Afghanistan – A Year After Taliban and Way Forward’ on August 26, 2022. Following the Chatham House Rule, the practitioners and experts participating in the roundtable enlightened the audience

with their field experiences. They also pointed out the loopholes in the US foreign policy, the structural gaps in Pakistan's policy, and the nonchalance of the international community that have made the situation grimmer. They urged that Afghanistan must be given a space in the international system through continuous engagement.



Proceedings of the Roundtable

Introduction

In August 2021, the world saw the chaos at the airports of Afghanistan as thousands of people attempted to fly out of the country because of sudden and uncertain political regime change. And that happened at the same time when the USA along with its forces left the country in turmoil.

Therefore, the world had mixed sentiments for this government. Some viewed the Taliban as a guerilla force with no experience in ruling a country, while others were optimistic about the establishment of an independent government in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the international community also raised questions over the economic, political, and human rights issues, and the possibility of substantial development in these realms after transition.

Having said that, it is pertinent to shed light on the context of this transition and its background factors, including the US policy for Afghanistan, as well as subsequent challenges and opportunities after transition for the Taliban and the world.

Takeaways from the Roundtable

Q. In the context of current transition in Afghanistan, what factors that unfolded in Afghanistan in last two decades have played significant role?

Afghanistan saw significant changes in last two decades, particularly after 9/11. In the context of transition in Afghanistan and formation of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), there are three prominent changeovers that now impact the patterns of life in the country: political changes, social changes, and the ethno-social structural changes.

In the political domain, Afghanistan had the chance to develop its own electoral system and the country witnessed a political transition with its first elections on October 9, 2004, which pushed the nation on the path of democracy, the establishment of political parties, and electoral system.

Regarding the social change, a shift in the mindset of youth and the role of women is important. Due to globalization in the era of social media, the populace is more socially aware and has an urge to change the social setting of Afghanistan. Moreover, a greater emphasis and development efforts can be seen for gender equality and the issue of girls' education and employment. Over the past two decades, women as well have become more aware, more vocal, and empowered, and have started claiming their roles and rights in society.

Over the last twenty years, prominent changes have been induced in the ethno-social structure and actors in Afghanistan. Previously, the ethnically Pashtun elite enjoyed dominance and ruled without any opposing ethnic entity. But now, the Pashtun domination has decreased to a significant extent as other communities, like the Hazaras, have emerged as important players of the society with a prominence in every sphere of life. This depicts an increased exposure of people, changing patterns of Afghan society, and an evolved sense of awareness in Afghanistan society.

Q. Why did August 15, 2021, create a wave of panic and despair in the Afghan society?

Despite apparent changes brought over the span of twenty years, there are fundamental differences at the foundation of their fulfillment. The sudden fall of Kabul, US withdrawal, and people attempting to leave the country clearly indicates how most of the changes differ and contrast with their ground implications.

In the political domain, despite the electoral developments, neither democracy nor the institutional development, which was the need of the society, actually flourished in the Karzai and Ghani's era. Both heliborne leaders, Ghani in particular, were centralist with an emperor-like disposition and just interested in retaining their positions of power while giving no regard to country's problems and people's needs. This was exhibited clearly when Ghani fled the country, leaving thousands of his people behind in despair. Moreover, the two decades were just a one-man show, where democracy remained at a standstill with no inclusivity. The failure to flourish democratic politics and institutional development in a tribal country like Afghanistan induced a fallout in the form of problems and malpractices like corruption, crime and personality-driven politics, a situation further aggravated by the ethnic fault lines.



Scenes at Kabul Airport as Afghans attempted to flee the country.

In the social setting, despite being a potential asset, the absence of any mechanism to channel the youth bulge made them a liability. This manifested itself in August 2021 when thousands of young people were desperately trying to leave Afghanistan as they were uncertain about their future and liberties under the Taliban rule, who came really unprepared. In addition to this, there remained a settled apprehension that the economic stagnation would worsen and the government in power would not be aligned with the society's needs and people's views and narratives.

Regarding ethno-social changes, although the ethnic domination was shifting as a result of increased exposure and awareness, there was still an ethnic divide in Afghanistan that led to a major crisis.

Another reason that kicked in the panic at that time was the sudden developments that happened against the US-Taliban agreement. In the agreement, it was specified that the Taliban will not enter Kabul before August 29. Also, in the Intra-Afghan Peace Dialogue, it was already agreed by the parties that an inclusive government will be formed consisting of 50% Taliban and 50% non-Taliban participation. However, this provision of the deal and inclusivity was dependent on Ghani. But on August 15, as soon as the Afghan government and Ghani fled Kabul, these articles of the agreement became ineffective. This gave the full hold of Afghanistan to the Taliban, who established a government with 100% Taliban leadership consisting of people who, for obvious reasons, lacked proper governance rules and norms. Afghans knew that this government came without any preparation. Thus, nobody was ready for such a transition and this resulted in panic not only in Afghan society but also on regional and international levels.

Q. What was the US policy on Afghanistan during the two decades of war?

Afghanistan has a history of exhausting the external powers. The US was there in one form or another since long. But today, the US is an exhausted player because of its negligence to adopt and formulate enduring policies for Afghanistan, which was on its canvas for two decades. The US played out with every changing situation in Afghanistan.

During the two decades of war, the US policies for Afghanistan largely remained short-sighted, flawed, inconsistent, exclusive, and temporary. The country saw swift policy changes, some policy shifts even took place within a day. As a result, no policy worked out for establishment of democracy, social construction, economy, and durable social structure in Afghanistan. This created uncertainty, hindered the economic progress, and affected many other domains of Afghanistan, making the US lose its geostrategic space.

While the main drivers of the US foreign policy are the think tanks, they generally lack on-ground knowledge and on-field experience in Afghanistan. Another aspect of this policy failure revolves around the difference between the knowledge and policy understanding of the on-ground US armed forces and the US leadership.

The soldiers were unaware of the purpose they were fighting for on Afghan land. They were unaware of what the actual aspirations of the US leadership were with regards to Afghanistan. The same was exhibited during Iraq war, when the US military was just fulfilling the orders of the government without knowing what America would do afterwards with Iraq. Such policies imply that wars can be won by force, which later proved wrong in both cases.

On one hand, the forces' withdrawal from Afghan land and establishment of new regime presents a liability to Afghanistan as well as the entire world. While, on the other hand, the independence gained by Afghanistan has also opened a path of opportunities for engagement for regional and international players.

Q. What opportunities and/or liabilities did the transition in Afghanistan create for regional and international players?

Afghanistan, as the backyard of every state, holds certain liabilities and/or opportunities for regional as well as international stakeholders including Pakistan, India, Iran, China, Russia, Central Asian Republics, the USA, and the international community as a whole. A brief outlook of the stakes and roles of these players and emerging opportunities and liabilities is given below.

➤ ***Pakistan***

The Pak-Afghan relationship goes a long way back with certain highs and lows. Pakistan wants a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan but it is now faced with difficult challenges in shaping policy toward Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Though Pakistan continues to support Afghanistan, the Taliban's military takeover and subsequent diplomatic and economic isolation is exerting pressure on Pakistan to deal with new government as an asset.

Furthermore, for Pakistan, the most precarious dilemma is that it will have to face the consequences whether it takes any action in Afghanistan or remains idle. Additionally, for Pakistan, the growing instability and economic hardship in Afghanistan could drive impoverished Afghans into Pakistan to seek shelter.

Most importantly, the Taliban's failure to take action against Pakistani militants TTP operating from Afghan territory could endanger Pakistan's internal security. The general lack of trust in Pakistan and its relatively unfavorable perception in Afghanistan, based on accusations for wielding too much influence over the Taliban and their actions, is also a liability for Pakistan. Although this perception is merely a cliché, as Pakistan has now no actual influence in Afghanistan's affairs or decision-making. Moreover, Islamabad's alliance with the Taliban could also strain Pakistan's relationship with the US and other western countries.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that both the countries share multiple cultural and religious values with a history of interdependence. The transition represents an opportunity for Pakistan to facilitate the desired transformation in Afghanistan through a dynamic, persistent, and symbiotic engagement at multiple levels.

➤ ***India***

India and Afghanistan share a history of bloodshed, but over time India developed diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and even considers it a partner. However, the India-Afghanistan friendship does not hold any meaningful impression. India's ties and its role in Afghanistan is often seen pivoted to balance Pakistan. Despite the unfolded scenarios and unfavorable perceptions against Pakistan in Afghanistan, India has no significant influence in the country. The situation does not present any substantial liabilities for India but certain opportunities for India in the future.

➤ ***Iran***

Iran has cultural, societal and linguistic connections with Afghanistan. It has a very deep-rooted role in Afghanistan and its influence will not end despite having liabilities such as bitter feeling against Iran in

Afghanistan for having an influence over its affairs.

At the same time, Iran also has the opportunity to strengthen its ties by recognizing the Taliban government. Iran can avail this opportunity through its multi-layered policy structure, which serves as its strength because it makes the end goal vague and unclear. This refers to Iran's approach to reflect parallel yet different policies at different levels, among different actors, to achieve the policy objective while keeping it all ambiguous.¹

➤ **China**

China, as a major player in the region, has occupied the space left by the US and has adopted a calculated engagement in Afghanistan. Being an ancient country with a history of more than 5,000 years, China has the experience and develops durable policies. In the case of Afghanistan as well, China has an opportunity to engage with Afghanistan with an effective and durable strategy as its influence has increased manifold.

➤ **Russia**

Russia, considered a re-emerging actor, wields a candid diplomacy. The withdrawal of the foreign forces has served Russia an opportunity to engage with Afghanistan and Moscow has actually started engaging in a very positive manner. It has revived old links and established new links with various players in Afghanistan including the Taliban as well as Uzbeks and Tajiks and is trying to build points of convergence between these ethnic groups.

➤ **CARs**

Regarding the Central Asian Republics, the situation is confusing. There are more Tajiks in Afghanistan than in Tajikistan. Likewise, Uzbeks are present in a huge number. CARs have cultural, linguistic and ethnic linkages but nobody has been able to capitalize on them. Though the CARs want to engage, they have capacity issues because of destabilizing factors within their societies.

➤ **The US and 'International Community'**

The US came to Afghanistan to fulfil its geostrategic and other stakes, but it left after being played out. It had come to watch Russia, China, Iran and even Pakistan because its presence in Afghanistan means having the ability to fiddle with other countries. After its failure to maintain a 'controlled chaos,' Afghanistan has emerged as an independent Islamic country, a state which would not allow any foreign interference by the US and international players.

The international community has not been able to understand the ground realities and backdrop of the prevailing situation in Afghanistan. Thus, they have developed some problematic narratives. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has turned into an elephant of the old story where everyone is blindfolded and each one is looking at it from their corner so that a tusk looks like a spear, the tail looks like a rope and so on and so forth.

The global players and the international community under the US leaderships wanted to have a "managed chaos" in Afghanistan. Even today, these actors might think that there is a chance to maintain this managed chaos to retain a grip over the country while not letting it spread on a large scale. Meanwhile, it is an opportunity for them to realize their wrong-doing and accept their responsibilities for the future. But, keeping in view the US and global players' aspirations with regards to Afghanistan, the question arises, "is the international community ready for such responsibility?"

¹ Vali Golmohammadi, "The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Prospects for Change and Continuity," *All Azimuth* V8, no. 1 (2019), 100.

Q. What are the challenges for the current Taliban government?

The Taliban government is facing multifaceted challenges on three fronts

- Domestic: The domestic or internal vulnerabilities relate to or emerge from non-inclusive structure of government, economic stagnation, terrorist organizations, internal insecurity, developmental incapacities, political multi-polarity, dichotomy of control, and compounded rationality.
- Regional: The regional challenges refer to a shift in regional geopolitics and its influence on the regions security.
- International: The international setbacks for Afghanistan are the issues of legitimacy and international recognition.

Domestic

On the domestic front, the following challenges indicate that how difficult and time-taking the process of transformation can be.

Non-inclusivity in the system

A non-inclusive system is one of the major issues in Afghanistan. Neither the Taliban government nor the previous Afghan government can be considered as inclusive governments. Inclusiveness is when they include all the ethnicities within their government structure or when they hold elections and form a government of people's choice. Without inclusivity and public participation, no government can stand long. In addition to system instability, grievances can increase and the present ethnic fault lines can deteriorate the situation further. As a result, people are only left with an option to fight and challenge the *status quo*. A proper inclusive system must be introduced while ensuring the participation of public and societal groups.



Afghanistan's economy is in dire straits.

Militant entities

Militant organizations operative within Afghanistan is another issue not only for the country but also for regional and international states. Some of these factions having 'pan-Islamic' beliefs are dangerous as they can have a spillover effect. Meanwhile, others seek separation on the basis of ethnic issues. Afghanistan is marred by ethnic tensions, as no one has invested in nation building. It looks like that they just want to invest enough to raise a ruckus at some point and separate Afghanistan's geography which would be a huge injustice to the country as a nation and its people, and to the region as a whole.

However, the Doha Agreement highlighted that the international and regional terrorist organizations must not be provided any space and that Afghanistan must not be a terrorist breeding ground. The Taliban had provided assurances in this regard; but after a year, the problems are coming into the light. This poses a great danger to the Afghan interim government.

Internal insecurity

Internal insecurity in Afghanistan has created complications in several domains. The maintenance of security is crucial for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Though the Taliban have established a very strong grip on the country but undoubtedly the security issue is still a threat, however not existential, to governmental structure. The insecurity has particularly sprung up from the militancy, which lack technical intelligence and have limited human intelligence.

Lack of development

Coupled with economic stagnation, the lack of development has created alarming situations in Afghanistan. The country has been devastated by wars and civil conflicts, which has hindered development of every sector. In health sector, this situation is worrisome as even hospitals are not operative and the ones that are functioning, have only male doctors and female patients cannot go there. In the education sector as well, the facilities and ratio of women's education is still very low. The economic sector has been in turmoil. The social structure is crippling, and so on with other sectors.

The occupation forces never paid any attention to these things as they would simply say that it is not their job. The people are in despair and the markets are dead silent. Although the Taliban know the grievances of the people but again they are not paying heed to them. Afghanistan has ample resources but the internal developments have left these untapped. The Taliban are rigid even in matters like women's employment and education.



Women protesting against measures taken by the Taliban.

Dichotomy of control

The dichotomy of control within Afghanistan has been an internal issue. There are certain things that were under the control of the Taliban and then there were certain things that were not. There were problems of design along with other issues. And here the question arises of international recognition, legitimacy, certain problematic narratives, and the way forward. The Taliban could not control the economic crisis that followed the withdrawal. The crisis was already coming and as soon as they came to power, the assets were frozen. There is also a liquidity crunch in the country. So, the 'international community' is likely to believe that much of the humanitarian crisis is the result of the Taliban policies, which it is not as it was already there.

However, Taliban control the structure. There was a very fluid insurgency that had a very *laissez-faire* model when they were fighting and now, their structure is turning into a formal organization in the form of government. So, at the end of the day, subordination is something that is inherently brought to you and learning it later becomes difficult. The Taliban are so relaxed as if they have all the time in the world, which they don't have because Afghanistan is a polarizing issue on the world stage.

Compounded rationality

There is also compounded rationality within Afghanistan which means that there is always an involvement of culture and ideology while making any decision or judgment. If the Taliban were to be asked whether they can have decent battle assessment or work out a decent peace settlement, they will say that angels would help them. They think the same way about humanitarian aid and economic revival. While 'international community' have not been mindful of sacred values and ideologies of the Taliban, their narratives and policies based on basic cost-benefit analysis, leverages, and carrot and stick might not work.

Political multi-polarity

There is also an issue of political multi-polarity in Afghanistan. There is this narrative being pushed by the Taliban that there is only one Taliban and you're either with them or against them. Afghanistan has had a history of political parties that existed during the Soviet Union and had some semblance during these 20 years of republic. That needs to be revived with conscious efforts. Also, the multi-polarity is further aggravated by problematic narratives being developed. Very often, there is the narrative, 'well, war is coming, and it's bound to happen', which is problematic because it is not just talking about the future but prophesizing it. And it is very important that leadership and states do not adopt this line of thinking about Afghanistan going back to another war, as it harms all of the world.

Regional

The situation in Afghanistan created a dilemma for the regional states including Pakistan, CARs, Iran and China. The US military's retreat has left a power vacuum in Afghanistan, causing a shift in regional geopolitics. In this scenario, Afghanistan, as the geopolitical hotspot, is now set for new 'Great Game' politics. Moreover, Afghanistan is now under a former guerilla force that came unprepared and unplanned without having knowledge, training, and experience to govern a nation and millions of people. For them, translating their mindset and transforming Afghanistan is an uphill task. These aspects create an air of uncertainty at the regional level which has implications for regional security.

International

The hesitancy of the international community in recognizing and giving legitimacy to the government in Afghanistan is a huge setback for the country. As far as recognition by the regional countries is concerned, they were meeting each other, consultations were increasing and it seemed that recognition was near. Then, at the end of March, Afghanistan made an announcement to restrict women's education. Consequently, all the meetings and negotiations became a futile effort in a huge setback for the government in Afghanistan. Some other incidents, like the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul, also killed the hope of recognition by the international community.²

Pakistan's position is that it cannot recognize Afghanistan alone as it would be a liability. Additionally, the regional countries are not recognizing Afghanistan because it is not doing enough to satisfy them. Afghanistan must show that it is serious about reforms to satisfy the regional countries or ease their concerns so that they may accept it.

Regarding international recognition, in the Doha Agreement, Afghanistan is mentioned as the Islamic Emirate in six places and, in each of these, it is declared in brackets that the USA does not recognize it. Afghanistan is becoming a polarizing issue, especially in the US and internationally. But, the case of the West recognizing Afghanistan is interesting as they recognize states and not governments, and the state of Afghanistan is recognized. Only embassies are yet to open.³ So, in the West, political recognition is not much of an issue as the only hurdle is economic interaction.

In this regard, the Taliban are to blame as well. If there is black boxing, then there is also the fact that Afghanistan is ruled by an emir who is unheard, unseen, and inaccessible. And then, there is the foreign minister who comes to meetings, takes notes, goes back, and forgets what he heard and then he is never heard from again. This is completely against the philosophy of how a new regime should engage with the world.

Q. What is the way forward/policy options?

For 'International Community'

As the major problem of the country is recognition, the international community should take timely decisions and work things out to recognize the government in Afghanistan. This is important because, by not recognizing them, the international community have kept them out of the system and it can cause a major problem. This is detrimental to the future of Afghanistan.

The international community needs to be mindful of compounded rationality with the Taliban and develop their policies accordingly without sticking to the carrot-and-stick rule. With their policies, they cannot change the mindset of the Taliban.

² More such developments have occurred in recent months like the collapse of the legal system, implementation of harsh strategies particularly towards women, and the absence of any actual reforms. This has made the international community review its engagement with Afghanistan.

³ However, most embassies of European nations were shut down in the wake of the crisis and no European state has reopened its embassy since then. This indicates their reluctance to engage with the Taliban government.



The international community' should keep in consideration that the proposition of 50% non-Taliban participation of the deal and inclusivity was dependent on Ghani. As a vacuum was created because Ghani fled, the Taliban have become exclusive. Now compelling them for inclusivity and not recognizing them over this matter is not practically possible because it was Ghani who backed out of the deal and the responsibility falls on poor leadership of the past.

For Afghanistan Government

Taliban need to pay attention to the people and if they do not, their public problems will rise further and may result in agitation, which would not be in anybody's favor. The Taliban must also alter their approach by reducing their rigidity. They cannot rule with rigidity and without listening to the people with diverse background. There is a need to develop policies in line with people's desires and needs, especially regarding women's employment and education.

For Pakistan

The issue of Afghanistan has been overshadowed by the Russia-Ukraine war.⁴ The world is now busy in Europe and Russia. This has created another problem for Afghanistan because now the people's voices are not heard. But despite this, Pakistan should remain proactive in connection with Afghanistan.

Confidence-building and training of the nation should be given importance. Pakistan needs to adopt a policy to educate the Afghan society as well as create awareness about this at the national level.

Pakistan must also address internal and external factors that are negatively affecting its national image in Afghanistan. Pakistan needs to learn patience from China and tactical approach from Iran as well as focus on its image-building in the international arena. As stated by the late Mukhtar Hassan, Afghanistan and Pakistan are two states and one nation. This is the same spirit with which Pakistan can move ahead. The issue of Pakistan's image in Afghanistan is a deep problem and a lot of effort in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan is required to make an improvement. The need of the hour is for soft power building even inside Pakistan.

Moreover, Pakistan needs to understand that criticism and resentment is a natural phenomenon that exists even between neighbors like the USA and Mexico, and France and Belgium. So, Pakistan must accept it, become thick-skinned and should not be emotional about it. Pakistan needs to persistently maintain its proactive approach and policy direction, while comprehending that the transformative process is time-taking.

Q. What is Iran's role in Afghanistan vis-à-vis Pakistan?

Though many scholars in policy circles do not agree with this, Iran's influence is not bad for Pakistan if it is able to manage relations with its neighbor as the countries should not be on opposite sides. Islamabad has to be crystal clear about one thing; Iran, like Pakistan, has interests in Afghanistan and, instead of resenting it, this fact should be accepted. This will make things easier to work out.

Moreover, Iran hosts Afghan refugees just like Pakistan, and, compared to those in Pakistan, those in Iran are rather disciplined. Also, Iran's response is rather strong and decisive than Pakistan's when it is blamed for having influence with the Taliban. For instance, during the last days of Ghani's presidency, he organized protests against Pakistan and made 'sanction Pakistan' trending on social media. This is despite the fact that Pakistan even hosted the family of the Afghan minister who publicly abused Pakistan. But Afghans cannot use such tactics with Iran, otherwise they would lose their amnesty, house, and money and would be pushed out of Iran.

In addition, the linguistic diversity of Afghanistan is a liability as well as an opportunity for Iran. The Afghans who return home from Iran are trained in social sciences whereas those who return from Pakistan are trained doctors and engineers who had studied at the best universities of the country. Pakistan has a very balanced approach towards all the ethnicities from Afghanistan and give them admissions accordingly. On the other hand, Iran does not have a balanced approach towards ethnicities and mostly bars those from outside its

⁴ And, more recently, by the global economy that is headed for recession.



community from admissions in educational institutions. So, this is one of the reasons why Iran has a limited but strong influence in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Several events unfolding after 2019 have brought new realities on ground in Afghanistan. This includes more socio-economic problems, political issues, international isolation, humanitarian crisis, and development crisis leading to a precarious situation in Afghanistan even after one year of an independent and exclusive Taliban rule.

There are several intrinsic factors and a combination of decisions by government and international entities that has pushed the country to this situation. An important factor is that the country is under a regime that came unprepared and unplanned with no prior mechanism of governance for a conflicted state like Afghanistan. In addition to this, because of their reputedly outmoded strategies and authoritarian methods of rule, there has been an increasing demand for an inclusive government within as well as outside the country for it to be recognized at international level. Moreover, the government inherited a weak system of institutions and is seeing an economic and diplomatic isolation as well. This situation has created a vacuum that can't be addressed immediately. In this picture, the transformation of Afghanistan and its government, that is itself going through transitions, would be a time-taking process.

As a way forward, both the Taliban government and international community have to play their role. The Taliban have to understand that their social contract is no more to their own fighters only. They have a huge nation of more than 41 million people who are waiting for the mitigation and redressal of their decades long grievances. Moreover, the Taliban must realize that they have to deliver in terms of human development, women rights, political freedom, peace, and counter terrorism assurance.

At international level, an important factor that can largely contribute to the transformation is the consistent engagement of Afghanistan across different domains and levels. In this regard, states must devise and implement policies to push development and constructive transformation, rather than isolating the country. The economic and diplomatic isolation has only worsen the crisis in Afghanistan. After such an active engagement in Afghanistan for war purposes for nearly two decades, it should not be difficult for the international community, particularly the US, to adopt a proactive approach and policy direction to for constructive transformation to rebuild Afghanistan.

Epilogue

More developments have occurred in recent months in Afghanistan like the collapse of the legal system, implementation of authoritarian strategies, and the absence of any actual reforms. The situation so far does not seem to ameliorate as the Taliban are adopting reactionary measures, particularly towards women. For example, in a recent decision, women were banned from taking university entrance exams. More than 90% of medical clinics are not operational to provide essential services. There is a fear of an accelerated food insecurity due to shortage of rainfall and droughts, while the country is still facing sanctions. Furthermore, the situation is spiraling downward as the global economy is headed for recession.

Moreover, as the international community continues to review its policy approach towards Afghanistan, only a few states have retained their engagement including China, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Most embassies of European nations were shut down in the wake of the crisis and no European state has reopened its embassy since that. This indicates their reluctance to engage with the Taliban government.

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