

CHINA-TALIBAN RELATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT: A CASE OF TALIBAN'S POLITICO-ECONOMIC PREDICAMENTS

Jalal-Ud-Din Kakar

M.Phil. Scholar. (International Relations) University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan
jalalkakar63@gmail.com

Javeria Fatima

M.Phil. Scholar. (Political Sciences) University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan
Javeriafatima91@gmail.com

Muhammad Waqar Anwar

Researcher at Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad; Graduate from the Department of Defence and Security Studies, Massey University, New Zealand.

mwaqaranwar87@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1395-5856

ABSTRACT

China is keeping a close eye on the Afghan issue, weighing its options and drafting strategies to prevent any unwanted consequences. The Chinese government believes that peace in neighboring Afghanistan is in their best interests, and it is attempting to fill the void left by the chaotic US exit from Afghanistan so that it does not obstruct Chinese interests. In this regard, China is negotiating with the Taliban on a diplomatic level. Moreover, the geo-political and geo-economic interests of China in Afghanistan necessitate a more activist approach to the country, but instability is likely to limit such participation. China's flexibility toward the Taliban is tempered with caution, and it is influenced by the Taliban's internal political and economic stability, as well as its foreign policy. Above all, China wants a moderate Taliban government in Afghanistan that will maintain domestic stability and foster positive relations with neighboring countries. The purpose of this research paper is to examine the relationship between China and the Taliban, as well as the Taliban's politico-economic predicament in the aftermath of the US pullout. Primary data will be gathered through interviews from various Islamic clergy in Afghanistan as well as field specialists.

Keywords: China-Taliban's Relations, Politico-economic predicament, Extractive politico-economic institutions, United States of America, Primary data, Af-Taliban (Afghan-Taliban).

INTRODUCTION

Despite divergent socio-political systems, norms, values, culture and religions, China and Af-Taliban (Afghan-Taliban) have maintained a strong diplomatic relation since the Af-Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. China envisions a prosperous future for Afghanistan in terms of economic development, human resources, transportation along with investment in the mining industry in Afghanistan. China envisages a stable Afghanistan as it is in its prime interest. For China, the U.S. withdrawal has some positive implications for Afghanistan and the region. The Taliban took the control of Afghanistan and total annihilation of Ashraf Ghani led regime on 15 August 2021 without any internal or external resistance. This fact was duly noted and endorsed by Retired Lieutenant General Javid; a security analyst based in Lahore. He was of the view that, "Afghan people consider the US withdrawal tantamount to freedom from occupational forces and this withdrawal has some positive implication giving power to the indigenous people. After Taliban's takeover of Kabul, the United States has frozen all foreign assets of Afghanistan and also stopped economic assistance as a reprisal." (Javed, personal communication, 2022)

Consequently, Taliban led Afghan government has no economic resources and funds to run the state machinery. The incumbent Taliban regime is endeavoring to heal the wounds of the Afghan nation

which were inflicted by the US and allied forces during twenty years' war, through cooperation and trade with the neighboring countries.

The Taliban, who had faded from political prominence following the US invasion, staged a powerful and unexpected return to power by taking Kabul last year August the 15th. The US had not expected Ghani's regime to fall as quickly as the Taliban had made it appear. Many countries around the world are still recovering from the painful withdrawal and debating how to respond to the drastic transformation in the region. China, on the other hand, reacted rapidly to this abrupt upheaval, welcoming the Taliban takeover and behaving as though the Chinese were prepared for this power transition. The spokesperson of Chinese foreign ministry Hau Chunying, has expressed his concerns that,

"Afghanistan's situation has undergone significant changes. Afghanistan's war has gone on for more than four decades. Stopping the war and bringing peace to Afghanistan is a common goal for more than 30 million Afghans, as well as the international community and other countries in the region. China has maintained contact and dialogue with the Taliban and has played a positive role in promoting an Afghan political settlement" (FMPRC, 2021).

It's worth noting that China's current stance to the Afghan Taliban is diametrically opposed to their antagonistic posture in the 1990s. During the 1990s, China took an assertive stance toward the Afghan administration, suspending diplomatic relations with the Afghan Taliban and refusing to recognize them as a legitimate power in Afghanistan. For many years, the embassy was closed, and diplomatic relations came to a halt. China, on the other hand, took a completely different approach to Afghanistan's authorities this time. The Chinese diplomats' recent statements make it clear that they regard the Af-Taliban as Afghanistan's most powerful political actor. Chinese officials have stated repeatedly that they will support an inclusive Taliban's administration. Chinese spokesperson Mr. Wang expressed,

"China considers important the political role of Taliban and can form solidarity with all factions and ethnic group in Afghanistan, and build a broad-based and inclusive political structure suited to the national realities, so as to lay the foundation for achieving enduring peace in the country" (CGNT, 2021).

From time to time the Afghan political leaders have been visiting China since 2015, and this implies that both sides have cordial relationships. According to the foreign ministry of China, *"The Af-Taliban are to continue peaceful dialogue with national and international leaders. We are ready to continue to develop good neighborly and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in Afghanistan's development, peace and reconstruction"* (Pakistan, 2018).

China is well aware that the Af-Taliban controls all of Afghanistan's political factions on the ground. China was aware that after the United States left Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban was inevitable. After the Doha Agreement, the Chinese predicted that the Taliban would emerge as a powerful political force. The rapid US exit following this accord, leaving the Afghan people at the mercy of the Taliban, backed up Chinese observations. In this context, China reached out to the Taliban via diplomatic channels and established close ties with the Af-Taliban. The Afghan Taliban, who are politically outcast at the international political stage by the west, also seized this opportunity which was offered by China and welcomed the Chinese friendly approach. Acting Foreign Minister of Islamic Emirate, Amir Muttaqi, Stated,

"Afghanistan will maintain good relationship with China as well as other nations in the area, and we welcome China's involvement in Afghanistan's rehabilitation and development".

When the Af-Taliban is facing a variety of local and international crises, China has made favorable and encouraging diplomatic statements (APP, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Extractive Political Economic Institutions:

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, in their book "Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Prosperity and Poverty," are two proponents of this hypothesis. Both emphasized the importance of political and economic

institutions in creating a society's future. "Inclusive economic and political institutions are a society's decision; it can be either inclusive to support economic growth or exclusive to stifle economic growth," they said. While inclusive economic and political institutions claim that a nation's prosperity may be achieved through strong political leadership. Acemoglu and Robinson's hypotheses about extractive political and extractive economic institutions are used in this research work (Acemoglu & Robinson, "Why Nations Fail, The Origins of Power, Prosperity And Poverty", 2012).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Historically, Afghanistan's economic growth and investment have been hampered by governance concerns. Afghanistan's rating on the "World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators" reflects this viewpoint (WGIs). On three of the six WGI indicators, Afghanistan has the lowest average rating among its peer result in the following, Transparency and Accountability, Social Cohesion, and social order (WGI, 2020).

Extractive institutions constitute a roadblock to economic development. The current awful situation is a result of previous corrupt administrations' bad policies. Following the fall of Kabul, the Taliban leadership now faces the task of stabilizing the country's economic situation. Peace in Afghanistan and institutional stability are prerequisites for economic revival.

State institutions such as the executive, legislature, administration, and judiciary, as well as mature representative government, are essential for long-term economic progress. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has retained non-representative governmental institutions for the elite or tribal leaders who help to sustain the status quo throughout its history. This is due in part to the long-running warfare. There are systemic challenges that, if addressed by the Taliban government, can aid in the establishment of stable and accountable institutions that enable sustained strong economic growth.

It is the Taliban regime's communal responsibility to provide a workable solution to the country's economic challenges. If the Taliban and tribal leaders do not work together to find a meaningful solution to Afghanistan's economic and political concerns, millions of Afghans would die as a result of terrible economic conditions and political instability, and the region will be plagued with concurrent problems. When a nation already has extractive economic institutions that are backed by extractive political leaders, it fails.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is a kind of structure that guides the researcher for the implementation of 'research method' and it also helps the researcher to analyze the contents. It could take many forms depending upon the nature of enquiry, availability and accessibility to data and fields. Some notable types are historical research design, descriptive research design, and exploratory research design. This enquiry will merge two approaches i.e., exploratory with descriptive to map and understand the fluid and uncertain field of China-Afghan relations. The Descriptive-Exploratory Research Design is employed when a researcher wants to make a comprehensive summarization of a specific event and describe who play what role in making it happen. It is used to explore the interaction of two or more than two phenomena in a polity, with positive or negative outcomes on the overall security and stability. Hence, we can also describe our research design as exploratory descriptive research design.

Rationale

The qualitative design neatly fits in the scheme of research because the nature of problem is not quantifiable. Especially the predictive nature of the study, lack of verifiable statistical data and contingency design less desirable because the research questions are designed in way that only address China-Taliban relations, perception and engagement.

Qualitative Content Analysis

This study is based on qualitative content analysis. It helps to understand the meaning of statement, intentions, and strategies of actors from the structured interviews and secondary sources. (Denzin., Norman., & Lincoln. , 2005). In this research, the author used qualitative content analysis.

Interviews

This study is unique in terms of collecting first hand data in the form of structured interview technique to gather in-depth information, including specific research questions. One can obtain a decent notion of the nature pressure, attitudes, and even insider information that prompts a researcher to investigate new parts of a topic under investigation. However, there are other stakeholders who either influence the issue or are affected by the circumstances which were also a part of interview. In order to compile a full timeline of events, some of them were members of the government. Academics, politicians, Taliban scholars, and Chinese experts were interviewed using the snowball sampling method.

ANALYSIS

Taliban's Political Predicament:

Political instability is a challenge for the current Taliban administration, and political stability is crucial for Afghanistan's economy. The peace and development of the region are dependent on Afghanistan's stability. Afghanistan's unique geographical location benefits the country greatly while also creating significant challenges to its neighbors. The abrupt US withdrawal has caused havoc in the region; yet, the US withdrawal also has certain positive aspects, which must be exploited if the region is to thrive. There is also concern that, as was the case prior to the Soviet Union's withdrawal, Afghanistan could become a war zone for political control among various political and ethnic factions. Independent Chinese expert in the field Shakeel Ramay stated,

"Therefore, it is imperative for the neighboring countries to play their role and employ their resources to make an inclusive government in Afghanistan which is necessary to prevent civil war in Afghanistan" (Ramay, personal communication, March, 2022).

The peaceful transition of power in Afghanistan is also in the interests of neighboring countries, particularly China, which is becoming a global force. Peace in Afghanistan, on the other hand, will help the area thrive because Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Peace in Afghanistan is also critical for China to fulfil its regional economic objectives. Afghanistan, for example, serves as a crossroads between China and its geostrategic and geo-economic partner Iran. Ethnicity and sectarianism are the two important socio-political factors lying down conditions for the political future of Afghanistan. This fact was duly noted and endorsed by Retired Lieutenant General Javid; a security analyst based in Lahore. He was of the view that,

"In the past, the 'ethnic minorities' controlled the central government in Afghanistan than Pashtun majority having less power in the central government. Afghanistan is separated by ethnic groupings, with the majority Pashtun living in the eastern part and the rest distributed throughout the country. The Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups dominate Western Afghanistan" (personal communication).

Rashid Dustum, a legendary warlord, is a Tajik, for example. Taliban, who have Pashtun heritage and popular backing, are now in control. These ethnic groupings support various political leaders, and Afghan politics revolves around them at all times. The majority of Uzbek and Tajik political figures have recently fled the nation, and Pashtun factions currently rule Afghanistan. Domestic politics and state institutions are dominated by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The many ethnic groups face a significant obstacle on their way to becoming a part of the Emirate. The Taliban claim that they would build a government that will include members from all Afghan factions and ethnic groups. The Taliban holds the future of Afghan citizens in their hands, and their policies in the future might bring either rewards or punishment to the Afghan people (Javid, personal communication, March, 2020).

However, the formation of an inclusive government is a gigantic task, and there is a need of a herculean effort to concoct a plan for the crafting of a new government which could be acceptable to all Afghan factions. This fact is expressed by Jamal Dini Baloch that

"The international community is pushing the Taliban, who are predominantly Pashtuns, and the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, to include other ethnic leaders from, for Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara and Baloch, Dari, Persian communities in their interim government" (Baloch, personal communication, 2022)

This multicultural and inclusive government will ensure strong and peaceful country. Taliban leadership have shown positive response to the demand of international community; however, it is a more difficult task for the Taliban leadership to appease its young members and foot soldier, who believe that these minor communities collaborated and made nexus with the US when the Taliban were fighting against the United States. It becomes more difficult for the Taliban leadership to make the masses agree especially when ISIS and Islamic State Khorasan, ultra-religious terrorist organizations, have strong presence in the region. If the Taliban leadership try to appease international community by including other ethnic groups in the government, it may lose the ground support of its own masses. There is a considerable chance that those who leave Taliban might join other ultra-religious groups like ISIS and IS Khorasan (Chaudhury, 2021). Currently, the Taliban leaders are in between the devil and the deep blue sea; therefore, they are vacillating between the options of including or not including the other ethnicities in the government. This situation will test the nerves of the Taliban Leadership, and it is also a test of the capability and sagacity of the leadership that how they handle this situation as their current decisions will dictate the future of Afghanistan (Senator Dr. Jamaldini Baloch, personal communication, March, 2022)

However, Taliban leadership is pondering to find a solution which could be acceptable to both its own party masses and the international community. Current regime is weighing its options to mitigate any negative fallout of the current political transition. This truth was duly recorded by Retired Lieutenant General Javid, a security analyst based in Lahore. He was of the view that *“Considering the challenges posed to the formation of inclusive government the Taliban leadership is borrowing more time from the international community”* (Javid, personal com, March, 2022).

And it is a fact that in order to overcome the challenges in the way of inclusive and stable government formulation require a holistic approach which will take time. The Taliban leadership is also aware of the fact that it is not possible to establish diplomatic ties with the western world without formulation of an inclusive government. Therefore, they believe that inclusive government ought to be made on urgent basis so that they can get economic assistance from the international community for the rehabilitation of their masses who are severely affected by the protracted war and sanctions imposed by the western world. Taliban have fought a long war against the superpower but now they have to fight for the rehabilitation of their citizens and the latter war is harsher and difficult. One of leader Shura from Afghanistan (consultation committee of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) has expressed his thoughts as, *“Countries around the world have to open formal relations with Taliban-led Afghanistan, citing an end to the war in the country The overall Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan should start focusing on establishing an inclusive government, and a stable security and peaceful atmosphere by giving due attention to the domestic politics of Afghanistan, economic development and trade relations with the world”* (Clergy, 2022). The future will reveal the answer whether the Taliban leadership and international community succeed or fail to form an inclusive government (Molvi, personal communication, March, 2022).

In addition to this, the Taliban leadership is faced with the challenge of meting out basic rights to the Afghan masses especially after the implementation of sharia law. Firstly, the rights of minorities are at stake. Taliban are Sunni Muslim and the interpretation of the Sharia by the Sunni sect is not acceptable to the Shia sect. There is a considerable number of Afghans who follow the Shia sect; therefore, it would be difficult for the Taliban to implement Sharia law in the country. If the Taliban leadership compel the Shia community to follow their interpretation of sharia, it will be considered the attack on the freedom of religion. And, it is not acceptable to the international community. Moreover, suppression of the Shia community is tantamount to make animosity with the neighboring Iran (Thames, 2021).

Secondly, the woman's rights are at stake in the Taliban regimented regime. The Afghan women are facing serious restrictions which are imposed by the Taliban regime in the name of Sharia law. For example, women are not allowed to travel alone. Moreover, the girls are not allowed to get education. These *perceived* violations of women rights have serious repercussions for the Taliban regime as international community cannot tolerate this attitude; therefore, Taliban leadership needs to soften its policies towards women to earn a good image at international level. Thirdly, the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan promised the provision of amnesty for all citizens, especially for those who worked with *Westerners* during war, in the Doha agreement; however, now it seems the Taliban leadership have reneged from their promise. There

are different reports making headlines on the international media about the reprisals to those Afghans who worked for the NATO and the US army; such harsh actions of the Taliban regime will only widen the gulf with the international community (Barr, 2021).

Additionally, the Taliban leadership is faced with myriad of other challenges especially terrorism coupled with narcotics, smuggling, border control etc. The ISIS has already established very strong roots in Afghanistan, and it is very difficult for the Taliban leadership to fight against the ISIS with meager resources. However, with the support of international community, Taliban have the capacity to uproot the ISIS from Afghanistan as they once defeated ISIS with the support of the United States. This fact was appropriately documented by Shakeel Ramay He was of the view that

“Similarly, the East Turkistan Islamic movement, which mainly consists of Uzbeks and Tajiks, poses serious threat to the Taliban leadership and also to the national security of China. The Taliban leadership has claimed that they will not allow anyone to use its land for terrorism activities” (Ramay, personal communication, March, 2022).

However, it is necessary for the Taliban leadership to include the Tajiks in the inclusive government so that they do not join East Turkmenistan Islamic movement. The Taliban leadership is also faced with the challenge of narcotics as Afghanistan is currently one of the largest opium producer countries. The problem of narcotics cannot be resolved unless the economic conditions are not improved. Harvesting of opium and other lethal drugs is the predominant source of income in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is imperative for the Taliban leadership and international community to find the ways to improve the economic conditions of the ordinary Afghan citizens (Ramay, 2022).

Taliban’s Economic Predicaments:

China becomes quite assertive in the region in order to fill the vacuum which is created by the United States. To deal with the ambiguous post-withdrawal climate and improve economic ties in the region, China has used its "assertive diplomacy." It is significant to remember that the expanding Chinese economy is entirely dependent on Middle Eastern oil, specifically Iranian oil, and that trade must continue unhindered. In order to accomplish its economic goals through Afghanistan, it is pursuing strategic connectivity.

In an effort to increase its regional influence, deepen its relationship with its neighbors and safeguard regional peace in the future, China launched the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI). President Xi solidified and steered China's "assertive diplomacy" in order to secure China's proper standing in the international community and to advance the country's long-term strategic objectives. China's long-term investment will be at risk if Afghanistan remains unstable. President Xi was of the view that, *“restoring China’s rightful place is within their reach, and urges them strive to do more in international affairs to facilitate China’s advance.”* China has left its old approach “long-practiced low-profile, and reactive foreign policy.” Therefore, China has adopted “a proactive and agenda setting diplomacy” to achieve its long-term objectives (Lai, 2011).

China is expanding the BRI project by utilizing a "proactive diplomatic approach." Additionally, Afghanistan is a crucial neighbor for Chinese connection in the region. Afghanistan can provide the shortest path to Iran and the Middle East, which China needs to secure its interest in the region. The BRI is promoting China's governance in regional matters and driving the United States out of the region. But the incumbent regime of Taliban is facing unprecedented economic crisis at home which is thriving with each passing day. Uncertainty and instability in Afghanistan can put China’s long term investment in the region at stake. It is difficult to forecast the outcome of Taliban’s future which is still shrouded in the events of fluidity (Weitz, 2022).

The political and economic situation in Afghanistan is chaotic in the aftermath of the US withdrawal, and it is deteriorating day by day. The Taliban's rapid conquest of Afghanistan has resulted in a plethora of problems. Following the Taliban's takeover, all international economic and financial support was halted. The Afghan economy was already clogged by rampant corruption and drought, and the fact that a large portion of the population is still unvaccinated against the COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation on the ground. As a result, the Afghan people confront malnutrition on a daily basis, and a lack of economic

activities, poor healthcare access, and an unpredictable employment market, among other factors, are driving Afghans to migrate. This fact was endorsed by Dr. Shoaib Pervaiz, he was of the view that,

“The Taliban leadership appears befuddled, as they have no other solution to the country's economic issues except to blame the West. On the other side, the US's vengeful measures against the Taliban are harming ordinary Afghans who have nothing to do with the conflict”. The rest of the world's leaders are giving theatrical statements condemning the Taliban and expressing sympathy for Afghans, but it appears that no one is willing to alleviate the suffering of regular Afghans” (Pervaiz, personal communication, March, 2022).

It's indeed time for the international community to take concrete efforts to alleviate Afghan concerns. If the holistic approach is not devised timely, this situation will give rise to more complex global issues like migration, terrorism etc. It is a big challenge not only for the Afghan leadership but also for the whole world how they tackle the economic problems of Afghanistan (Pervaiz, 2022). For Afghanistan's economy to grow and remain stable over the long term, strong state institutions need to be in place. Nevertheless, despite their flaws, they failed to establish an inclusive political system, which is necessary for the stability and prosperity of the nation. This is the perfect illustration of a political institution that is extractive. Sadly, throughout its history, Afghanistan has supported non-representative governmental institutions for the ruling class and tribal chieftains who have helped to uphold the status quo.

Similarly, the Afghanistan economy remained dependent on foreign aid during the war but the United States withdrawal led to the retraction of western aid as well. Dr Shoaib an independent scholar in the field, stated,

“The United States, who claimed they have spent trillions in Afghanistan but failed to form vibrant economy? The financial conditions of Afghanistan are currently worse than they were before the invasion of the US. It seems the United States achieved nothing during their twenty-year protracted stay in Afghanistan except making the country a foreign aid dependent state. The United States has stopped the economic assistance and frozen the foreign assets of Afghanistan” (Pervaiz, 2022)

The United States current behavior is reminiscent of 1990s behavior. During the war against USSR the US flooded billions of dollars of in the accounts of Afghan war lords who were fighting against the USSR; however, after the end of war, the United States did not spend a single penny for the rehabilitation and development of war-torn society. On the other hand, the Taliban leadership who rushed to take over Kabul has no viable solution for the stable economy. The current Taliban government is run by clergies who do not know how to handle economy and run state affairs. The skilled workers and other experts fled the country after the takeover of Taliban. The Taliban leadership has not only faced the financial crisis but also of skilled labor (Pervaiz, personal communication, March, 2022).

Moreover, the Taliban's leaders are under the United Nation's sanctions that hinder their reach to different levels of international cross border contracts and they are yet to be recognized by the international community. The international monetary institutions including World Bank and International Monetary Fund have also stopped billions of dollars. It has made it difficult for the newly established Emirate to sustain the fragile economy of Afghanistan. The basic commodities prices are soared and doubled this year. The data collected by the United Nations Development Program has said that “As much as 97 per cent of the population could fall into poverty next year” (UNDP, 2021).

Although Afghanistan is enriched with the untapped natural resources, the Taliban regime does not have experts and machinery to parlay these resources into cash assets. One leader of Afghanistan Shura (consultation committee of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) has expressed his thoughts as,

“The Taliban leadership wants to bring back its own skilled workers who fled the country due to the fear of Taliban. However, the educated youth of Afghanistan do not want to return to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime”

Similarly, foreign skilled workers are not willing to come to Afghanistan under this regime. It is one of the greatest challenges for the Taliban leadership to convince the foreign experts. If the Taliban leadership remained successful to bring foreign experts, it can prosper its country by using its own natural

resources without much foreign assistance. To this end, Taliban need to create a favorable and peaceful ambience so that it could attract foreign investments and experts. No investor is willing to invest in Afghanistan in these harsh conditions. It is also the responsibility of the world leaders to extend their hands towards the Afghan people in this difficult time. Afghanistan's prosperity is directly related to the region's and the world's prosperity (Molvi, personal communication, March, 2022).

SUGGESTIONS

The Doha deal between the United States and the Taliban leadership provided a safe exit to the USA and its allies from Afghanistan. The Taliban leadership did not offer any resistance or hindrance to the US forces while they were evacuating Afghanistan. When the Western forces completely and safely evacuated Afghanistan, they sanctioned the Taliban leadership and also froze the foreign accounts and assets. After the exit of US forces, Taliban take over the Kabul swiftly and peacefully without any bloodshed. It was a great feat for the Taliban leadership to take over Kabul without any bloodshed. However, the Taliban leadership's real test starts now; that is of governance and building a more inclusive representative political system.

Robert Dahl's proposition of polyarchy sits well with need of Afghanistan; plurality of elites should be accommodated in any polity to avoid conflict. As of now with frozen accounts, impending food crisis and flux of refugees to Kabul make it harder for the regime to concentrate on the political sides of the problem. However, the situation on governance front is not without any tension, the regime is now faced with multifarious challenges pertaining to local, national, and international issues.

The most pressing concern is the rehabilitation of citizens who have been adversely impacted by the two-decade-long war. Furthermore, the Taliban leadership is prohibited at the international level, and removing their leaders from the international blacklist is a difficult task. Afghan leadership lack the financial means to administer the governmental apparatus. For failing to commit to the Doha accord, the western world has confiscated Afghanistan's foreign accounts and international aid. Following the Taliban capture of Kabul, the Taliban leadership pledged amnesty to all people; however, there are reports in the world media that the Taliban are retaliating against those who cooperated with the western forces throughout the conflict. Furthermore, after the coup, skilled professionals and experts departed the country. After the capture of Kabul, professional workers and experts also departed the nation. The Taliban lack expertise to administer the state apparatus, and the educated Afghan masses who have fled the country are unwilling to return under the existing regimented government.

Secondly, the international community is requesting that the Taliban leadership form an inclusive government, and the Taliban leaders have agreed to do so. Certain obstacles stand in the way of forming an inclusive administration. Given the current situation and the diversity of Afghan society, forming an inclusive administration will take some time.

Thirdly, the Taliban have established their own Sharia law on the country, which is too strict for other religious sects. The Taliban believe that applying Sharia law is essential for discouraging crime, but other faiths, particularly Shia Muslims, are opposed to the Taliban's Sharia ruling. As a result, the Taliban leadership face the challenge of safeguarding minorities' rights. The international community, which does not believe in intolerance, finds this approach toward the Taliban intolerable.

Similarly, eradicating terrorist organizations like ISIS and IS Khorasan will be a gigantic task for the incumbent Taliban administration. The Taliban leadership is likewise adamant that no terrorist organization will be allowed to exploit its territory for terrorist actions against any other country. The Taliban, on the other hand, lack the resources necessary to combat these terrorist groups. In light of these obstacles, it is the international community's responsibility to work with Afghan leaders to protect the safety of citizens in order to avert civil conflict and the loss of human life.

CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. withdrawal has created a new situation and a climate of uncertainty in the region. This situation has repercussions for China who shared a border with Afghanistan. In the meantime, new assertive China is also weighing its options to mitigate any negative fallouts coming out of the situation. Thus, China has

developed a new "five-pronged engagement policy" toward Afghanistan, which includes accepting the Afghan-Taliban's dominance in the political affairs of Afghanistan, preventing Afghanistan from again becoming a sanctuary for terrorists, facilitating inclusive politics in the country, demonstrating a greater degree of humanitarian concern, and shaming the United States of America and NATO for squandering the country's resources (Zhang F. , 2022). However, with a veer of troubles at home, the Taliban is up against a plethora of challenges, ranging from political to economic. Now it is up to the Taliban's policy options to determine how much Chinese investment and trust they are going to attract.

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