Resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan: A Global Threat to Human Rights, Security and Democracy

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Abstract

During 1996 to 2001, The Taliban controlled most areas of Afghanistan. Following the 9/11 attack by Al-Qaeda, the United States and its allies invaded the nation in October 2001, which is resulted into the movement of Taliban towards the south of Afghanistan, where they led an uprising against the government in Kabul, which is backed by the West, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANDSF), and troops from the international alliance. After relocated to southern Afghanistan, Taliban started to fight an insurgency against the Western-backed government in Kabul and his forces as ANDSF, and international coalition troops. The Taliban continued to hold power after the withdrawal of U.S. Defense forces. In Kabul, the Taliban established a violent Islamic government after quickly regaining control of the nation. Public executions, amputations, and flogging were among the harsh interpretations of sharia-based rule that the hardline government gradually reinstated across the nation.

Therefore, Thus, by analysing the role of institutions, corruption, poverty, economic instability, inequality, and other factors that contribute to the intricate interaction of internal and external factors, as well as the consequences and implications for regional and global security, this study explores the global and regional aspects of the coup phenomenon.

This paper explores the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 in the light of civil conflict and its historical roots from the Saur Revolution of 1978 to the U.S intervention of 2001. The study highlights three interrelated findings: first, the Taliban's reestablishment of a totalitarian system marked by repression, humanitarian collapse, and the rollback of rights; second, the intensification of regional security dilemmas, particularly with the presence of International terrorist Organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP); and finally, the reconfiguration of global geopolitics as great powers, including the United States, China, and India, recalibrate their engagement with Afghanistan.

Keywords

Afghanistan, Democracy, Human Rights, Security, Taliban.

INTRODUCTION

The multiethnic landlocked nation of Afghanistan is situated in the center of South-Central Asia. Imperialists have always desired Afghanistan because it is located between important trade routes, which links the South and East Asia to Europe and the Middle East. Afghanistan has always been a hub of many cultures and centre of attractions for people, because of its position, leading one historian to refer to it as the "roundabout of the ancient world." Persians Ruler Darius the Great, (522-486 BCE), and Greek Ruler Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), were ruled and also settled here. From the first century to the end of the 10th century, Bamiyan was ruled by kings of a thriving Buddhist culture. Islam was introduced by an Arab attack on Kandahar in 699-700, and it grew stronger when the Turks took control of Iran, Afghanistan, and India. [1]

Prior to an Arab invasion in 642 CE, the majority of Afghans were either Hindu, Buddhist, or Zoroastrian. After defeating the Sassanians, the Arabs ruled until 870, when the Persians drove them out once more. Genghis Khan's Mongol army overran Afghanistan in 1220, and the Mongols' descendants would control a large portion of the country until 1747. Pashtun King Ahmad Shah Durrani established the Durrani Dynasty in 1747. Afghanistan as we know it now began from his Dynasty.

As of 2025, the total population of Afghanistan is around 44 million. Dari and Pashto, two Indo-European languages belonging to the Iranian subfamily, are the official languages of Afghanistan. Approximately 99.7% of Afghans are Muslims, with 85–90% being Sunni and 10–15% Shia. Afghanistan is unfortunate to be situated at the intersection of the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The nation has repeatedly been attacked throughout its history, despite its mountainous landscape and fiercely independent populace. [2]

Numerous conflicts, including coups, invasions, insurgencies, and civil wars, have dominated Afghanistan's history from 1970s onwards. In 1978, a successful communist revolution resulted into the creation of a socialist state. But in 1979 to support its struggling communist government the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) invaded Afghanistan. During the Soviet-Afghan War, the Mujahideen battled the Soviets, and after the Soviets left in 1989, they continued to fight among themselves. By 1996, Islamic fundamentalist Taliban had controlled the majority of the country. Although their Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was not widely recognized until the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Therefore, from 1996 until 2001, the Taliban had taken the majority of Afghanistan and ruled over. Following the attack of 9/11 by Al-Qaeda, the United States of America (US) and its allies invaded the nation in October

2001. The Taliban leadership moved to southern Afghanistan after the U.S.-led invasion, and from there they launched an insurgency against the Afghan National Security Forces (ANDSF), international coalition forces, and Kabul's Western-backed government. The 2001–2021 war ended when the Taliban retook control in 2021 after seizing Kabul and toppling the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's government. [3]

The geopolitical and security landscape of the region has undergone a dramatic change since the US forces left Afghanistan in August 2021.with the withdrawal of forces, Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. The Taliban rapidly regained control of the country and formed a militant Islamic Government in Kabul. The militant government immediately reimposed its strict interpretation of sharia law throughout the country, including public executions, amputations, and flogging. Therefore, this study investigates the global and regional dimensions of Taliban resurgence and its consequences, and implications for regional and global security. In September 2021, the Taliban restored the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with an interim government. This Government was composed of only militants, despite their previous claims that they would construct an inclusive government for the nation. The Taliban government is still not acknowledged globally. [4]

In addition to signalling the end of a two-decade US engagement, the Taliban's quick capture of Kabul brought about new complications in Afghanistan's internal and external relations, especially with regard to counterterrorism activities. Afghanistan's post-occupation landscape has been significantly shaped by extremist organizations such as The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) and Al-Qaeda. The stability of the area and global counterterrorism plans continue to depend heavily on the Taliban's capacity or lack thereof to oppose these groups. [5]

Since the 1990s, al-Qaeda and the Taliban have maintained a close partnership. Al-Qaeda's operational capabilities in the area were mostly destroyed by the US invasion after 9/11, but some of the group continued to operate, frequently with the Taliban's protection. Significant worries regarding the Taliban's harboring of prominent terrorists were raised in July 2022 when Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda, was killed in a US drone strike in Kabul. [6]

When the U.S. coalition of forces official ended its combat mission in 2014, the security of Afghanistan was assigned to the ANDSF. The forces faced many challenges and constraints in holding control on territory and defending its citizens, because of continuing attacks and suicidal attempts rural districts and in major cities along with resurgence of Taliban. With these Afghanistan poses a significant threat to global democracy, stability, and human rights.

Therefore, in the light of above, this study investigates the implications of the Taliban's resurgence for domestic governance, regional security, and global geopolitics. By situating the Taliban's return within broader theoretical debates in international relations (IR), the paper contributes

to discussions of fragile states, counterterrorism, and great-power rivalry.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to comprehensively examine the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its implications for human rights, security, and democracy. The descriptive aspect of the research focuses on presenting an objective and systematic account of events, policies, and developments that have shaped Afghanistan's political landscape from the late 20th century to the Taliban's return in 2021. Meanwhile, the analytical dimension seeks to interpret and evaluate the underlying causes, patterns, and consequences of these developments by linking them to broader socio-political, economic, and international factors. This dual approach allows for both factual narration and critical assessment, offering a balanced understanding of how institutional weaknesses, governance failures, and external interventions contributed to the Taliban's resurgence.

The study will rely on a combination of primary and secondary sources to ensure the depth and validity of analysis. Primary sources will include official documents such as United Nations resolutions, reports of the UN Agencies, and relevant governmental bodies. These will provide direct and authoritative insights into the global response and policy measures concerning Afghanistan. Secondary sources such as academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and credible newspaper reports will supplement the analysis by providing historical context, scholarly interpretation, and diverse perspectives on the issue.

However, the collected data in this study were analyzed using a qualitative and interpretive framework that combines thematic, comparative, and historical analysis within the broader lens of International Relations (IR) theories, particularly the concepts of realism, human security, and state fragility. Through thematic analysis, the research identified recurring patterns such as institutional collapse, human rights violations, regional instability, and global power realignment following the Taliban's resurgence. Comparative analysis was applied to evaluate continuities and differences between the Taliban regimes of 1996–2001 and post-2021, focusing on governance style, ideological orientation, and external relations. A historical-structural approach was also used to trace the long-term evolution of Afghanistan's political instability from the Saur Revolution of 1978 to the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, situating these events within regional and global power dynamics.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN BEFORE 2021

Taliban was Formed in 1994 the resistance forces against the soviet. They were former Afghan warriors, collectively referred to as mujahedeen, who opposed the Soviet Union, when their forces invaded Afghanistan in 1979. These

mujahedeen wanted to enforce Islamic law based on within the nation and also eliminate foreign forces. After constant fighting with Soviet forces final, they took control over Kabul in 1996. After control the Kabul they enforced the Sunni Islamist Law and regulations. Women were mandated to don full-body veils, prohibited from pursuing education or employment, and barred from traveling independently. Television, music, and non-Islamic celebrations were prohibited. [5]

To fully comprehend the Taliban and their goals, in fact an important turning point in Afghanistan's history was the Saur Revolution of 1978, even though the group gained prominence during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s. Afghanistan had been under changed in terms of process of developments in the middle of the 1970s. The USSR and the US were two nations most keen to assist in developing Afghan infrastructure because they both wanted to establish a presence in Afghanistan in order to exercise influence over Central, West and South Asia. The surge of foreign funding made the Afghan government the nation's main employer, which in turn caused widespread corruption and made a way to the revolution. [2]

Different philosophies were vying for control of the country by that point. There was a group of primarily youthful Marxist activists, journalists, academics, and military leaders at one end. Islamists, on the other hand, were starting to appear and want to establish an Islamic state akin to the Muslim Brotherhood. At first, Daud Khan, the Afghan president at the time, sided with the youthful military leaders. However, he began to repress some groups out of fear of a revolutionary takeover. Khan was overthrown in a coup in April 1978. As a result, the People's Republic of Afghanistan was founded, with a Marxist-Leninist regime in power. A fledgling resistance movement resulted from the new government's suppression of Islamist and other opposition groups following an initial purge of the ruling Communist Party members.

The US took advantage of this and began funding Pakistan's intelligence services (ISI). The ISI was fully supporting Islamists in Afghanistan especially the former Afghan warriors. Initially, the US provided only token financial assistance and symbolic expressions of support to these warriors. However, it ultimately sided with an Islamist organization that was a part of the mujahedeen, a burgeoning rebel force that was more of a loose coalition than a cohesive unit. There were communist organizations run by the ruling government that coexisted with the Islamist movements. They were all united solely in their resistance to the government's growing repression. [5]

When Nur Mohammad Taraki, the Afghan leader at the time, was slain in 1979, his second-in-command, Hafizullah Amin, took over and proved to be a very oppressive leader, escalating the resistance. The 1979 invasion of USSR was influenced by suspicions that the US would take an advantage of the situation and create an instability in the region. Consequently, the US continued to provide financial support

to the mujahedeen, who were now defending their homeland against the Forces. For years, the mujahedeen fought a guerrilla war against Soviet forces until they had exhausted the invaders politically and physically. The USSR was forced to negotiate as a result of guerrilla war and outside pressure. In 1989, after the exit of Soviet Forces from Afghanistan, there was complete anarchy. The new administration, which was composed of mujahedeen commanders. As a result, they became warlords, with factions in various areas turning against one another more and more. A former commander of the Islamist mujahedeen, Mullah Mohammad Omar, looked to Pakistan during this unrest. There, a generation of young Afghans had grown up in refugee camps and attended many madrassas where they were taught Deobandi, a strict style of Islam. [3]

Najibullah's pro-communist regime disintegrates after Soviet forces leave the country and the Soviet Union falls apart in 1991. Since he cannot leave Afghanistan, he seeks safety at the United Nations compound in Kabul, where he stays for over four years. Leaders of the Mujahideen reach the capital and turn on one another. Large numbers of refugees are still escaping to Iran and Pakistan. Today, it is essential to comprehend what transpired during the Saur Revolution or how it contributed to the anarchy of the 1990s and the rise of the Taliban. [7]

When President Biden announced that U.S. soldiers would be leaving Afghanistan, many were taken aback by how quickly the Taliban took control of the country. However, if you examine how the Taliban became powerful in the 1990s, you will see that they are currently acting in a similar manner. "Look at the violence, look at the corruption, look at the drones that are dropping from U.S. planes," they are telling Afghans. As they did in the 1990s, the Taliban are once more putting out what they claim is a stable and secure alternative. Once more, they are using localism as a tactic.

RESURGENCE OF TALIBAN: A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL PEACE

After the US-Taliban Peace Agreement in February 2020, The Taliban changed their strategy from intricate attacks in towns and on military outposts. They started a wave of targeted assassinations, which created a terrified insecurity among Afghan citizens. The series of these targeted killings marked the end of an extended period of direct negotiations. These targets were basically women, who were leadership roles, journalists, judges, and peace campaigners. therefore, it seemed that not only Taliban had changed their tactics but also its extreme philosophy of Islam based on Shariat, which does not allow women to become leaders. After several incidents, the Taliban reduced their brutality to show that they were acting in good faith, although this decrease was brief. Additionally, even though it was not present during the US-Taliban negotiations, the Afghan government aggressively participated in military responses. While Afghan forces' offense against the Taliban stayed below the historical norm, the Taliban's aggression increased following

the US-Taliban pact agreement. In April, 2021, when in US, newly elected President Joe Biden came into power. Soon he announced that all American forces will leave Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. After this announcement, the Afghan officials expressed serious worries to the Taliban intervention with control of Afghanistan in the absence of foreign assistance. [8]

According to a UN Reports, Taliban including terrorist groups like al-Qaeda were publicly rejoicing at the West's exit. After the withdrawal of West forces, they viewed it as a victory for Islamic extremism worldwide. According to another UN estimate, between 400 and 600 al-Qaeda members are fighting alongside the Taliban. Afghanistan is already a popular destination for terrorist groups due to the large number of ISIS members operating there under the guise of ISKP. About 2,200 armed IS-K members are reportedly engaged in combat, primarily in Kunar Province, which is located near the Pakistani border. According to other reports, terror groups located in Pakistan have joined forces to support the Taliban's takeover. It is well known that Pakistan's military and intelligence community has actively supported the Taliban takeover in the hopes of enlarging Islamabad's strategic zone of influence. Terrorists have always been employed by the Pakistani deep state to achieve its main foreign policy goals. [9]

With the Taliban now in control, these puppet masters may intensify infiltration along the Indian border in Kashmir and train the different terrorist groups Pakistan maintains using Afghan camps. Afghanistan will therefore soon become the primary operational base for numerous terrorist groups from Pakistan and the surrounding areas. It goes without saying that this presents a serious security issue that could lead to a marked rise in the likelihood of terrorist strikes in Europe. Beyond the borders of Central and South Asia, the resulting nontraditional security issues will be a significant worry as the Taliban reestablish their control in Afghanistan. In addition to illegal drug trafficking and a rise in international terrorism, these problems will also involve arms smuggling, people trafficking, and migration. For everyone's benefit and security, the UN and the main geopolitical countries must set up a system to curb the growth of these operations. [10]

However, the return of the Al-Qaeda and ISIS could also create a major security threat to the Gulf states. The Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, will face significant challenges in dealing with the Taliban in the future. One important question is whether the Taliban will back Islamist movements in their hostility to governing regimes and operate as missionaries, or if they will try to become part of the global society. [11]

Pakistan and the US have a long history of support for the mujahideen, an Islamic insurgency in Afghanistan that overthrew the government in 1992 and fought against the USSR and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. When the Taliban, a Sunni Islamist nationalist pro-Pashtun movement, came to power in Afghanistan in 1996 following years of internal strife, Pakistan was among the few nations to recognize them. The Taliban was the most potent component within the mujahideen. Over the years, the Pakistani government deliberately employed the Taliban's Haqqani network, which was located in Pakistan and was responsible for numerous deadly attacks, to secretly further its objectives. [11]

Afghanistan's post-withdrawal environment continues to be difficult. The effectiveness of the Taliban's governance and their capacity to stop terrorist organizations like The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) and al-Qaeda are being closely examined. Although the Taliban aspire to international recognition, their claims of being a stabilizing influence in the area are undermined by their inability to effectively disassociate themselves from al-Qaeda and their difficulties in fighting ISKP.

The US in particular must make tough decisions about how to deal with the Taliban and the persistent threat of terrorism coming from Afghanistan. The future of Afghanistan as a hub for international terrorism is still up in the air as the area struggles with these issues. [8]

The new emerging totalitarian system of Taliban created a security dilemma among neighborhoods for broader security, cross border infiltration, Terrorism etc. along with unstructured insecurities. The Taliban's oppressive policies and repressive system create a fear and frustration among the people of Afghanistan particularly curtailing the freedom and suppression of women and minorities. cause fear and frustration. The Taliban and its divisive practices also shaped a threat of safety and security among the people. Under the Taliban regime, there is severe humanitarian violations with economic crisis, which led to the social restrictions on people's lives. The arrest of journalists and targeted killings and abductions of protestors especially women have created a new form of insecurities within Afghanistan. Due to these severe humanitarian violations and Political instability, People are worried about their future. Even after withdrawal US forces, armed conflict and attacks have been reduced in the last few months but this haven't provided a sense of safety and security to people. Rather, fear is stifling progressive voices and driving people abroad as a result of growing irritation, insecurity, and discontent with the current authoritarian regime. [12]

The Taliban authorities and those controlling the military wings of the Taliban formed the government. They are hardliners who have close relations with transnational terrorist groups. Taliban's atrocities have caused the emergence of resistance movements across the country, because of the lack of inclusivity of different ethnic groups, ideologies and gender in the political system. The Taliban is facing serious challenges, while balancing their ideological commitments in the governance. [13]

However, as soon as the totalitarian system is established, the resistance movement begins to take shape. Before the Taliban had finished their forcible conquest, many regions of Afghanistan organized themselves. Soon after the Taliban took over the country, the resistance forces from the northern

region and some pockets of the western region emerged. The inability of the Taliban to develop and execute an economic plan may further elevate poverty and famine and cause societal instability. [14]

RESULTS

The Taliban's return has reversed two decades of democratization. Findings indicate systematic repression of women's rights, elimination of political pluralism, and severe restrictions on press freedom. Afghanistan now functions as a one-party authoritarian state. In the light of Humanitarian and Economic Collapse, the suspension of international aid and halted development projects resulted in a 26% GDP contraction between 2021 and 2022 (World Bank estimates, cited in Fu, 2024). Over half of the population experiences acute food insecurity, with rising unemployment and widespread poverty. It is also a fact that emergence of Taliban is led to the intensification of Regional Security Dilemmas in the region. ISKP and Al-Qaeda remain active in Afghanistan, undermining Taliban claims of counterterrorism control. Pakistan, Iran, and Gulf states fear terrorism spillover, while India and China compete for strategic influence. [4]

Unemployment and poverty have significantly increased. Foreign governments abruptly halted all development support in response to the Taliban takeover. Many projects, including those costing over $2.8 billion in energy, transportation, and irrigation, were put on hold by donors, and very few have been restarted. In 2021 and 2022, the nation lost almost 26% of its real gross domestic output, according to World Bank estimates. After the resurgence of Taliban, millions of Afghans are living in poverty with severe starvation. Currently, 55% of the population are experiencing severe hunger in Afghanistan.

Washington has taken a careful approach to the Taliban-led administration since the US withdrew. There hasn't been any diplomatic interaction, and the US has emphasized that acknowledging the Taliban government depends on their behavior, especially in relation to human rights and counterterrorism initiatives. While battling the internal problem of retaining control over multiple militant factions, the Taliban have attempted to acquire international legitimacy. Their relationship with al-Qaeda is still controversial because the Taliban's assertions that they have severed their ties with the organization are called into question by al-Qaeda's continued existence and minimal action in Afghanistan.

DISCUSSION

However, China's engagement with Taliban 2.0 is rooted in its security concerns and geo-economic ambitions. There are security concerns about the unstable northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has seen a lot of investments and hired a lot of Chinese people in Pakistan. Starting in 2023, the

Islamic Emirate showed a greater readiness to open the Wakhan Corridor. They had several talks with Beijing to make it easier for trade and commerce to go through this route directly. China sees the Wakhan Corridor as an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to make Eurasia and the Middle East more connected. [15]

After the Indian Operation Sindoor-2025, With its first high-level, bilateral engagement with the Taliban regime, India appears ready to increase ties with Kabul. This would mark a significant step in diplomatic engagement for the Islamist group. In addition, India wants to regain its power in an area where China has become much more present since August 2021. India is not under any pressure to officially recognize the Taliban. This is especially true since the Taliban continue to abuse women and deny them any rights. However, trade, historical ties, Chahbahar, the International North-South Transport Corridor, and China are all very important reasons for India to work with the Taliban.

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CONCLUSION

Now, the Taliban across Afghanistan is facing three severe challenges because of this security contradiction, which sure has great impact on democratic rights and peace stability to the region including South and West Asian. First, the Taliban's previous tactics-attacks, killing and assassination that they used to win the war. Now they replaced these tactics with abductions, detention, silent and targeted killings and public executions. Because of these tactics, Taliban does not able to get internal and external legitimacy. Second, resurgence of Taliban created a severe challenge among the regional countries. Neighbouring countries are worried about Taliban's relation with transnational terrorist groups. Therefore, this makes their unpredictable and uncertainty in the South Asis, which impacts the political and security threats among the Neighbours. Lastly, the Taliban's capacity to strike a compromise between the aforementioned difficulties and their ties to international terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaeda. The Taliban Militants find it difficult to compromise on anything, because of their ideological commitment to Al-Qaeda. In the end, this might cause the Taliban to split on matters of security and governance.

A fresh set of uncertainties and fears has been brought up by the Taliban after 2021 not only in Afghanistan but in whole South Asia. Therefore, Totalitarianism in Afghanistan

offers a theoretical framework to explain why the new doubts and insecurities arise, even though it is inaccurate to believe that one would feel completely secure under other governmental systems. Effective security policymaking becomes politically impossible when a totalitarian regime is established and a militant group with connections to international terrorist organizations controls the populace.

There is a severe decline to the rights of women and girls. The Taliban government is the most discriminatory in the world in this area. Every single facet of its record throughout the past four years is infused with its harsh limitations on the rights of women and girls. Half of the population has limited access to numerous public areas and key services. Additionally, it has reduced women's independence and chances for personal growth and expression. Talibani government also prohibited women and girls from attending public secondary schools and universities. In addition, women have been prohibited from working for the UN and non-governmental organizations, while other decisions have prohibited them from accessing public restrooms, parks, gyms, and beauty parlors.

Press and political freedoms have been severely curtailed. Following the intervention of international forces that led to the dismantling of the initial Taliban regime in 2001, Kabul witnessed the rise of a contentious party system, characterized by competing Afghan factions striving for dominance through manipulated electoral processes and intermittent armed confrontations. The local media flourished in a similarly confrontational fashion. The recent ascendance of the Taliban in 2021 has ushered in a disquieting stillness within the political arena, as the current government exhibits an unwavering intolerance for dissenting voices. The Taliban have successfully instituted a one-party state through the prohibition of political parties, thereby dissuading most former politicians remaining in the country from resuming their previous vocations. Additional challenges faced by women journalists encompass restrictions on obtaining journalism degrees, the necessity of concealing their identities on television, and the requirement of having an interviewer or chaperone when attending press conferences.

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