

Strained Relationship of the Taliban with International Community; Obstacles and Opportunities

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Abstract

Afghanistan is inextricably attached to the international community in the global village and putting itself in intensive consultation and diplomacy with the rest of the world is a matter of indispensability for the leadership of this country. Both sides have deep controversies and some common interests which can be analyzed as opportunities for formal ties. The bottom line is that Afghanistan would and should not live in political isolation since it will leave behind eternal social, economic, and political complications, and stumbling blocks for future development. Conversely, a recognized and strong Afghanistan will help to prevent the resurgence of militancy particularly, the resilient notorious faction of IS-K in the region.

Barring women from high schools and university education, lack of inclusivity in government, and inflexibility of social policies are the disturbing bites to the relationship, while good intention, security enhancement, and above all the suppression of IS-K in the country which is not only a lip service of the Taliban but realistically stamping out the faction, are all somehow opportunities that can bring the parties closer.

This article attempts to spell out the controversial lines between the Taliban and the International community including the United States. It also transcribed pragmatic suggestions to weed out controversies and pave the way for future friendly grounded negotiation. Regular Delegations, negotiators of different countries, and UN agencies more particularly, delegations from the Islamic world can have a more positive impact in bringing the parties to line and leaving hair-splitting behind for true constructive negotiations.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Taliban, USA, International Community, Obstacles, Opportunities.*

1. Introduction

The Doha Agreement on February 29, 2020, and then the takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021, are all considered the turning point in the twenty-year-long Afghanistan conflict and made great differences to the social, political, and economic aspects of this war-torn country. The impacts also stretched to the neighbors.

On August 15, 2021, when the Taliban seized power in Kabul, the United States and its allies closed their embassies and missions in Afghanistan with one call and lifted their Afghan colleagues through a chaotic evacuation as the Biden administration blamed that bad intelligence, Trump administration, and the Afghan themselves were responsible for the disastrous evacuation while commenting on United States long-awaited review of the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan [1]. Biden asserted that he was “Severely constrained” by the Trump decisions [2].

Afghanistan and the United States both have formal membership in a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, WTO (World Trade Organization), and World Bank but none

of these organizations recognized the Taliban and have not even shown any inclination to accept their representatives.

On the other hand, The Taliban are stiffening their domination in the country and implementing their policies which are always faced with a backlash and censure from the US and international community. Barring girls from schools beyond the primary level at the first step and then the prohibition of female students from higher education, and non-inclusivity in the government body are all considered the crux of the political distance between the Taliban and the International community.

The isolation of Afghanistan from International platforms and the strained relationships of the country's ruling party with the international community is a substantial issue for the Taliban and widely for every citizen who lives here. This friction has widely impacted the social, political, and economic well-being of the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, the importance of the article lies in the importance of the issue for the future of the people of Afghanistan in every aspect of life.

This article offers a pragmatic and ground-based analysis of the status quo of the strained relationship of the Taliban with the USA and the international community. The article also expounds the barriers between the parties and the possible opportunities that can be taken for future settlement between both sides.

2. Obstacles

I. Women Education

After seizing power, the Taliban banned female students from high schools and later in December 2022 from higher education which sparked wide condemnation across the world. The United Nations General Secretary Antonio Guterres expressed his worries, saying "I am deeply shocked by reports that the Taliban have suspended women & girls' access to universities" [3]. Another UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk harshly condemned the ban through a formal statement "The reported decision by the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to ban women from attending university is another appalling and cruel blow to the rights of Afghan women and girls and a deeply regrettable setback for the entire country," [4].

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has always tried to have constructive and somehow more positive and cooperative relations with the Taliban government also expressed its deep concerns and disappointment through a formal press release "Following the decision by the de facto government of Afghanistan to maintain an earlier ban on girls' schools, the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) expresses its deep disappointment over this unexpected decision" the press added [5].

The Taliban has always denied directly and indirectly the permanent closure of female education in the country. Their leaders have always shown optimism and claimed that the ban on women's education is temporary and would be lifted after developing a policy based on Islamic teachings and thoughts.

The United States has also repeatedly wagged the finger at the Taliban for banning women from higher education. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has repeatedly warned that the Taliban would pay the price, "What they've done is to try to sentence Afghan women and girls to a dark future without opportunity," Blinken added in a conference in Washington DC [6].

II. Non-Inclusive government format

Inclusivity in the government body is one of the thorny issues and the basic insistence of the international community. Besides the international community, the neighboring countries have always called upon the Taliban to form an inclusive government.

Iran one of the neighboring countries that is somehow in close political proximity with the Taliban, criticized the leadership of the Taliban for not forming an inclusive government. Iran always reiterated that they would only engage and recognize the Taliban government when they set up an inclusive government. The Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdullahian recently explicitly expressed that Iran is not pleased with the current non-inclusive government in Afghanistan. The Tasnim, an Iranian news agency associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps reported: "The Taliban is part of the reality of Afghanistan, not the entirety of Afghanistan" [7].

Saudi Arabia and particularly Pakistan are also the countries that have shown their engagement in many ways with the Taliban. They also repeatedly called for an inclusive government in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia believes that an inclusive political settlement is indispensable for peace in the country and a prerequisite to attaining international community legitimacy [8].

III. Strict Social Policies and lack of flexibility in Diplomacy

The Taliban government in Afghanistan has been trying to derive each policy from the basic texts of Islamic law. The supreme leader and his advisory board have introduced a unique form of government that is thin on the ground. It's not a democracy and neither an absolute authoritarian. The country is running in the absence of a fixed coded constitution and every matter of contention would be solved in the light of the Quranic verses and in the narrations of the Prophet (PBUH).

The International Community, particularly the United States often lambasted the Taliban government for social restrictions, suffocating fundamental human rights, imposing extreme interpretation of Islamic law, and absence of a constitution which are always denied by the Taliban and regarded as interference in the internal matters of Afghanistan.

The U.N and the U.N Security Council have reportedly shown their deep concerns and unequivocal condemnation regarding the social and education policies of the Taliban. A senior United Nations official added in the meeting of the U.N Security Council that “spotlighting numerous restrictions imposed on women’s right to travel, study, and work freely, including for non-governmental organizations, making the response to the world’s largest humanitarian crisis even more challenging.[9].

Banning women from public gatherings and visiting parks, particularly during holidays and Eid vacations is another step that triggered an untamed international uproar. The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has ordered females not to visit parks and other public places along with men. The ministry has assigned special religious scholars wearing long white coats virtually indistinguishable from the ones worn by doctors. The rules of restricting females from parks and public gatherings are more strictly enforced on Fridays which is a formal holiday in the country.

Additionally, the international community often shows deep concerns that the government of the Taliban has never shown leniency and political compromise in solving critical issues since all political messages addressed to the government of the Taliban, particularly to their leadership have been denied and faced with a backlash often from the spokesperson of the Taliban.

3. Opportunities

I. Suppression of IS-K

ISIS known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is always considered an important part of international terrorism and a resilient militancy that can pose multifaceted threats to any nation in the world.

The Taliban takeover raised wide security concerns and worries across the globe. The Islamic State of Khurasan or IS-K was the prime concern of the international community and the neighboring countries. The fact is that the IS-K has been suppressed mercilessly, their strongholds in the outskirts of the Nangarhar and Kunar provinces of the country have come under heavy attacks by the Taliban consecutively after the fall of Kabul.

Thomas West, United States special representative for Afghanistan talking to Daniel F. Runde, senior vice-president of the American think tank, The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) “The Taliban are taking very active efforts against ISIS-K and, in a lot of ways, we hope they succeed” [10].

The repression of all the terrorist groups who pose a threat to the United States was also a kernel of the Doha agreement signed on 29, Feb 2020 between the Taliban and the United States. The agreement stated that “the Taliban will prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies, and will prevent them from recruiting, training, and fundraising and will not host them in accordance with the commitments in this agreement” [11].

The progressive repression of IS-K by the Taliban somehow increased the confidence and optimism of the international community and the neighboring countries over the Taliban. This in turn increases the hope of future political engagement of the parties and would set the scene for a more diplomatic contact.

II. Good Intention

Good intention has always been a good tool in diplomacy to open a friendly chapter and pave the way for solutions. It brings nations closer, fills the diplomatic gap and of course could end the current frosty relationship between the two sides.

Both the Taliban and the USA, the main actors in Afghanistan's political turmoil, have always shown their good intentions. Besides the USA, the neighboring countries have reportedly shown that they would always prioritize engaging in peaceful diplomacy with the Taliban. The United President Joe Biden frankly expressed in his speech in August 2022 that the United States has no intention of military intervention in Afghanistan and would always prefer to speak out about the Afghan people and their basic rights through diplomacy and economic tools [12].

On the other hand, the two global competitors of the United States, China and Russia have already shown the face of benignity toward the Taliban. They both emphasized the engagement of the international community with the Taliban and advised the de facto government to change the style of government and respond to the expectations of the world. China has introduced its ambassador and accepted the Taliban's representatives for the Afghan embassy in China. Like China, Russia is one of those countries that did not hesitate to engage with the Taliban after the fall of Kabul. The government of Putin had already a clandestine relationship with the Taliban during the past 20 years, particularly when the threat of IS-K grew in 2016. This relationship grew after the fall of Kabul, and diplomatic back-and-forth delegations traveled, and each side showed willingness and good wishes. Zamir Kaulov, President Vladimir Putin's special envoy to Afghanistan repeatedly praised the Taliban's contributions to security and suppression of IS-K.

Haibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme leader of the Taliban also repeatedly expressed that he wants a friendly relationship with the rest of the world. He added in the message released on the occasion of last Eid "The government of the Taliban wants friendly political and economic relations with the world" [13].

III. Security Enhancement

Security enhancement of the country under the rule of the Taliban assured the US and the International Community that the government has the potential to control borders and secure international diplomats and staff of different missions. This in turn made possible the movement of UN staff and all the international actors who play an important role in the current dilemma. The security provided the international actors a chance to visit different leaders all through day and night where a well-organized unit has been created for the safety of the International and UN representatives in collaboration and understanding with the UN.

The security of the country also means that the chance of the spillover of terrorism in the region has been decreased and allows the bordering countries and international community to deal, and engage with the Taliban. Security enhancement in the country also decreases the chance of any foreign military or intelligence intervention in Afghanistan since each country feels safe and the chance of eminent threat decreases.

IV. One-hand Supremacy

People, analysts, and world leaders are castigating the dominated kingship and monarchical thoughts among the Taliban government and see it as a repressive tool but to be pragmatic and more down-to-earth, a one-hand supremacy is a good solution to deal with the current political and social turbulence of the country. The country has been torn apart by the last 45 years of wars and domestic violence, and tens of social and Islamic Jihadist groups and factions have emerged. During the last 20 years of American presence, the main reason behind the chaotic situation and political turmoil in the country was the presence of those factions, landlords, and jihadist leaders who had pushed the country to lawlessness and a kind of anarchy. Currently, the country is united under one ruler, and in case of any political dialogue or breakthrough, it would be very easy to enforce any commitment and decision made by both sides.

3- Conclusion

There are deep controversies and ideal differences between the Taliban and the International community which is very vital to be put aside through meaningful negotiations. There are many logical reasons and ways for both sides to come closer. Regular and often delegations to convene meetings with the influential leaders of the Taliban. Sending the delegation of the OIC to discuss the rights of women and lifting the ban on women's education in the country is a good step to be followed up by other international organizations. The visit of the delegation of Islamic scholars and thinkers headed by Koutoub Moustapha Sano, Secretary-General of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) earlier in June 2022 is another good example of chasing down to get out of the political predicament.

International Media and think tanks can play a very vital role in binding the relationship. The Media could be an important tool to move the subject matter to a positive side. To be more realistic, the media has always exaggerated that the Taliban has been punishing women in public for not wearing a burqa and often reported that the Taliban are punishing the drivers, particularly the cab drivers for transporting women without a Burqa but the fact on the ground is opposed to what the media has been reporting since thousands of women with normal headscarves come out regularly to cities to purchase their daily necessary things and commodities.

To conclude, the opportunities on the ground can provide the chance to bring both parties nearer and ultimately lead to political engagement and international legitimacy for the Taliban.

To utilize the existing opportunities, international conferences, multinational forums, and regular delegations are essential to rebuild the frosty and strained relationship alongside the positive role of international and national media.

It's worth emphasizing that the deep roots of the controversies lie in the fact of non-inclusivity of government and barring girls from schools and higher education but there is still hope and a chance of a solution as the Taliban still never completely denied female education and always called upon the officials of deposed government of Ashraf Ghani to repatriate back to the home country. To be more realistic, the mentioned opportunities and common interests of the international community like the eradication of Narcotics, prevention of international terrorism, and the risks of not falling the American sophisticated military hardware into the hands of militants could reduce the distance and mitigate the disturbing and problematic situation. There is always hope, there is always a solution.

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