



The future of Afghanistan under Taliban-led regime: challenges and likely scenarios

Aamir Khan* | Aqsa Durrani

Department of International Relations and Political Science, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author Emails: aamiropriday@gmail.com

Abstract:

Since the takeover of the Afghan Taliban, there has been a lack of cohesion on the internal and external front and critical issues, including international recognition, the question of ethnicity, inclusive government, human rights, internal and external security, economy, and regional implication of the security and insecurity. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the likely challenges for the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Being the centre stage of the regional security complex and the diverse ethnic composition, Afghanistan remains an active ground for various fundamental ideologies. The Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) elements are freely roaming in Afghanistan, along with the news that the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) has regrouped itself in various parts of Afghanistan. The questions of terrorist groups are a major concern for the world and the neighbouring states of Afghanistan. Political legitimacy and international recognition are significant challenges for the Taliban regime. Similarly, economic problems and human rights violations are also critical challenges for the Taliban regime. Maintaining good relations with neighbouring states is crucial in ending the diplomatic isolation of the Taliban regime. All these are essential questions for the Taliban regime and the world, and this study has attempted to investigate and analyse possible solutions.

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1. Introduction

The Taliban completely controlled Afghanistan after 20 years long US control from political to economic and military aspects, the Taliban control is evident and is at the helm of the Afghan state. The US has lifted Afghanistan but the resurgence of the Islamic State of Khorasan or ISK, the potent resistance in Panjshir, and the militia commanders are still the existential forces that can challenge the Taliban. The ground realities suggest that the previously mentioned group is now strategically dominated by the Taliban and any efforts of resistance are likely to be crushed by the Taliban. Economically, the state of Afghanistan is in a vulnerable situation, the US and the Western world is threatening to sanction the Taliban regime. All major neighbours of Afghanistan view them from security and insecurity perceptions either to engage or not. The posed dilemma is for many states as they are cautiously engaging with the Taliban. Being rational actors, all neighbours' states are acting according to their national interests and objectives. What is left for the Taliban regime is to change the perceptions and their image in the neighbours and the international community. The choice and ball are in the Taliban court now either they change their worldview or address their social, economic, and political loopholes accordingly. The world and immediate neighbours of the Taliban have no other options than to engage or isolate the Taliban regime.

1.1. Significance and contributions

The research contributions are to put a fresh inquiry into the various challenges and likely scenarios under the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. It is necessary to put insights into the various challenges and likely scenarios because Afghanistan poses an existential security dilemma for the entire region of South Asia. Furthermore, being a central stage to international security considerations, it is also necessary to put insights into the emerging issues and challenges in the context of Taliban-led Afghanistan. The motivation and contribution of research that is analysing the possible policies, political and security trajectories under the Taliban Regime for Afghanistan and the region at large. This research also highlighted the political landscape of Afghanistan, its governance structure, and policies. The Taliban's promise and narrative of inclusive government are also critically reviewed keeping in view various internal and external factors that shaped the political landscape of the Afghan state under Taliban control. Similarly, the study is also significant in the sense that it will analyse the Taliban policies and reluctant acceptance of modern education and administrative hierarchies and the significant brain drain of the educated class practically female from the fear of targeting and strict policies. This paper is also significant in the sense that it highlights human rights and social issues related to women and minorities, the Taliban approach to education and health care. The Taliban policies on the previous aspects pose potential for social unrest and international attention.

This study also has contributed to world politics and international relations context because it also highlighted the role, response, and relations of regional and global powers and

international organizations with the Taliban Regime. The diplomatic and geopolitical interactions of various states will be a test case for their statecraft and the Taliban. The geopolitical implications of the Taliban's return to power are many and will shape regional and global perspectives. The potential for internal conflict and inter-ethnic strife might be a potential challenge for the Taliban regime. The interpretation of Islamic Law under the Taliban leadership also poses significance for emerging scholarships and the need for inquiry.

1.2. Research gap

After a review of the most concerned and relevant literature, it is found that the issues concerning under Taliban Regime in Afghanistan are emerging from socio-political, economic, security, and strategic aspects. The situation and stance of the Taliban on various issues are changing, and they face multiple challenges after coming to power. Therefore, this research would contribute to the existing knowledge and predict the challenges and likely scenarios under the Taliban Regime since their control.

2. Literature review

This section will highlight the common themes, approaches, and assessment of the topic in the available literature. Anderson (2021) highlighted the pattern and criterion of international recognition of the state. His article specifically focused on the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. The author also highlighted important aspects due to which any government or regime should be recognized by the international community. He also described the international aspects of state recognition. However, the scholar will use Murphy (1999) and Schuit (2012) criteria for government recognition. Both Murphy and Schuit assumptions are important to look at the internal and external factors concerning the recognition of government. In the available literature, this point needs further elaboration and need of assessment. Ahmad (2021) shed light on the promise of inclusive government under the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. He further argued that the potential disagreement over the government and composition can't be overlooked as the majority of the ethnic groups are excluded from the Taliban government. This absence leads to the deprivation and alienation of the diverse ethnic composition might spark internal conflict and disparity. The Taliban promise of inclusive government is not fulfilled as a majority of the government offices are held by the Pashtuns majority and only a few are designated to the non-Pashtuns. This will be the test case of the Taliban Regime that how they united the complex population under one government. Hence there is a need for further research and exploration of the underlying factors which can be subject to debate.

Ahmadi and Ebadi (2022) highlighted the Taliban Regime's views on girl's education and the ban on higher education. Both the authors mentioned the Taliban views and considerations on the fundamental rights of education. These views hold significance because the international community considers the Taliban's commitment to girls' education as a fundamental right and links international aid to the Taliban's commitment to girls' education. For international actors,

girls' education is an important tool for pressuring the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. Furthermore, there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of Taliban views on girls' education which this paper will try to cover at the maximum. Astor et al. (2021) also highlighted the staunch views of the Taliban on women and their participation in daily affairs of the state and government. The authors conclude that the Taliban are reluctant to consider females as part and essential in government affairs. Similar views were expressed by the European Asylum Agency (EUAA, 2023) that the Taliban are hesitant to engage women in all fields of life. They also argued the Taliban Regime to integrate women into the state and society as they are important pillars of society and government. Their nominal representation will be a considerable concern for major international stakeholders. However, the Taliban and Afghanistan cultural and societal norms are important, and the European Union Asylum Council views lack comprehensive analysis. There are deep societal norms and codes of Pashtuns, particularly of the Taliban, and the national and cultural symbols, which demand further deep insights and local perspectives (Malik et al., 2023).

As reported by Dawn (2022) the policies of cleric's interpretation and implementation of strict Sharia code will be a major challenge for the Taliban Regime. It will be difficult for the Taliban to justify their policies particularly the mass execution and their interpretation of justice. The supreme leaders of the Taliban issue various verdicts on issues according to their interpretation which might derogate the due process of law and justice at large. However, the Taliban consider these punishments as legal and justifiable according to their views and direction of the Sharia. There is a lack of importance in comprehensively analysing these policies of the Taliban and the available literature lacks and needs further research. Therefore, this paper will also be a contribution to the existing body of literature partially on the system of justice.

Taneja (2021) and Nelson (2020) argued in respect of emerging regional and global strategic challenges for the Taliban Regime. The authors also highlighted the changing nature and views on the Taliban both at regional and international levels. The strategic environment is changing and there is an emerging pattern of alliances with the Taliban. However, there needs to be a more comprehensive analysis in the literature on how regional and global states will react and establish their relations with the Taliban under emerging regional and internal security and strategic issues. This paper will also assess the changing foreign policy engagements of various regional states with the Taliban Regime. Further, there is no obvious research on the changing regional geo-strategic environment that will further justify the significance of this paper.

Clyton (2021) answered and predicted various scenarios for the Taliban in the post-US withdrawal scenarios including ethnic minorities, inclusive government, and the Taliban views on regional and global issues. His pattern or views reflect the uncertain future of the Taliban. However, in the current scenarios, many questions and scenarios need further exploration and corrections. Afghanistan's economy under the Taliban as mentioned by Williams (2021) and the United Nations report (2021) suggested the gloomy future of the economy and economic developments. The working space for women and households is shrinking and there are a

significant number of brain-drain from Afghanistan suggesting the vulnerable scenarios. In contrast, it is important to assess the Taliban's economic policies and outlook from a fresh perspective which highlights that there is a gap to be filled with facts and figures for greater understanding. Particularly, there is a lack of research on the conflictual trade relations of the Taliban with Pakistan and constant border closing and stalemate need further in-depth understanding and areas of contrast between the two states.

3. Methodology

This paper utilized qualitative research keeping in view the nature of the study. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized in this research paper. Primary data is collected through personnel interviews with experts on Afghanistan and the Taliban. Secondary sources were collected from various online sources, books, research journals new papers, policy documents, and relevant reports. The thematic and analytical approach is used as a data analysis technique. First, the author collected the bulk of data and then scrutinized and developed themes and followed the conclusion by analytical explanation and discussion.

The scholar applied the research philosophy of descriptive and interpretive paradigms. Research philosophy is the overall holistic lens through which any particular research can be conducted. Research philosophy and paradigm help in understanding the collected data, phenomenon, issue, or perspective under research. It gives guidelines and conceptual clarity to the researcher and reader at large.

A case study research design has been chosen in this research paper to get in-depth knowledge about an issue or phenomenon. In the case study research design the scholar tried to dig out attributes of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan with challenges and likely scenarios. Case study research design suit for the chosen topic because it observes the real environment including security, political, economic, and social in the context of the Afghan Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. Important variables including the dependent, independent, and intertwining are considered for the holistic assessment of the situation. In this context, both domestic and international variables are kept significant for the conceptual clarity and analysis of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan.

4. What will the future hold for a Taliban-led Afghanistan?

Afghanistan under Taliban control is leading to economic collapse. The World Bank report highlighted the gloomy scenario for the Afghanistan economy. The report level that the economic situation for households is worsening. Despite the positive indicators of economic revival, the Afghan economy is unable to generate new jobs and facilitate the skilled population. Unemployment is growing and most Afghans are unable to find modest jobs the job market capacity is shrinking. These indicators predict that the Afghan economy will further lead to degradation. On the same note, the deportation of nearly 400, 00 Afghan refugees will

further put the burden on the Afghan economy. World Bank report of 2023 highlighted that economic activity in all three sectors of the economy declined since Taliban control. The services sector declined up to 6.5 percent which contributes about 45 percent of the country's GDP. The agricultural sector declined 6.6 percent which contributes 36 percent of total GDP. Similarly, the industrial sector declined to 5.7 percent in 2022 and onward. These trajectories and statistics have shown the decline in the Afghan economy under the Taliban regime (World Bank, 2023). After the Taliban control of Kabul, most of the Western states threatened economic sanctions on the Taliban Regime. The perceptions and portrayal of the Taliban in Western media are negative and threats to regional security as well as to the Afghan society at large. The dilemmas are also for the immediate neighbour states either to engage with the Taliban or to isolate and boycott diplomatically and economically. The world should not ignore the Taliban regime, particularly the US after numerous efforts to build the institutions of the Afghan state and faith in democracy (Mehmood et al., 2022).

But this time the Taliban's strategy changed from their initial coups and control of Kabul back in the 1990s. At this time, the Taliban facilitated the US and the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan. They also did not abolish the democratic institutions. Which shows that to a minor extent, they have faith in these institutions? Importantly, the Taliban on a massive scale did not target their political opponents and provide them with a free space to fly to other states. These gestures showed that the Taliban wanted to stop the escalation of further conflicts and revenge. The fall of Kabul was dramatic, the things i.e., the Afghanistan army and forces fell apart swiftly like they were pre-planned. These gestures and developments were Taliban part of a strategy to show to the world as major responsible actors and legitimate rulers of the Afghan state. The mantra of democracy and the voting process still loom over the Taliban Regime. But the Taliban's perspective cannot be ignored i.e., the Western-led governments and institutions fail to improve the lives and conditions of the common Afghans.

Interestingly, the Taliban also maintained a close check on the international media and their narratives against them. Whenever the Western media reported and highlighted the Taliban's objectionable practices, they responded with effective strategy by denying and even providing proof on the ground. The Taliban spokesperson argued on their part that these are mismanagements and not the official policy of the Afghan Taliban. Similarly, it is also difficult for the Taliban to control all the regional and local commanders in the far-flung areas. The Taliban tried their best to present themselves as non-violent during the power transition and halted Western media's attempts to portray the Taliban as violent and savage. However, the question of inclusive government is still faced by the Taliban. Currently, only two members are non-Pashtuns under the Taliban government. Mullah Abdul Salam Hanafi serves as deputy head of ministers and belongs to the ethnic group of Uzbek from Jawzjan province. Another acting economy minister is Qari Din Mohammad Hanif from north-eastern Badakhshan. Qari Fasihuddin served as the acting chief of army staff and belongs to the Tajik ethnic group in Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2021). It is a fact that during President Karzai and Ashraf Ghani's government, none of the Taliban representatives were there but were against the Taliban.

In the Taliban-led government, there is no representative from Panjshir. These elements took an active part in the Jihad against the Soviets and were undefeated by the mighty power of the time. Under the US war against terror in Afghanistan, the Panjshir and their leaders sided with the US against the Taliban. Panjshir Valley has remained undefeated and uncontrolled for decades due to its geographical edge and unity in its ranks. However, after the Taliban capture of Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan, pressure built on the Untouchable Valley of Panjshir, and the former and self-declared President of Afghanistan Amrullah Saleh fled to Panjshir Valley. The Taliban started to advance toward Panjshir on 5th September 2021 and reached deep into the Valley and stronghold of the former resilient and undefeated Valley. On September 7, 2021, the Taliban declared and hosted the flag of the Islamic Emirate in the remote and untouchable territory of Panjshir the last territory out of Taliban control (Doucet, 2021). The resistance fighters, however, from their side claim that they still occupy the strategic positions and have not surrendered to the Taliban. Ahmad Shah Masoud audio circulated in which he argued to continue resistance against the Taliban and blamed international media and the US for facilitating and covering the Taliban propaganda. "The Taliban haven't captured Panjshir," Ali Maisam, spokesman for the NRF, earlier told the BBC, saying he was "rejecting Taliban claims (Doucet, 2021)" The consented views and claims further escalate the uncertainties in the clash between the Taliban and the resistance forces. On the contrary, the Taliban spokesperson from their side clarified that "with this victory, our country is completely taken out of the quagmire of war" (BBC, 2022). The uncertainties continue and different narratives loom over the surface.

In the battle of competing narratives and opposing views, it seems that the Taliban controlled the major strategic routes and points of the Panjshir Valley. But the far-flung areas and seditious still provide safe sanctuaries to the resistance forces. The threat of resistance is not over yet. It awaits major spark and support from external powers. It also adopted a wait and sees approach to the Taliban's behaviour and approach toward them. For the Taliban, the Panjshir Valley and its control are significant from a strategic point of view because it is like a jewel in the new crown of the Emirate. The geographic significance is evident from the remote mountains, and unreachable peaks and the rest of the Afghan Plateau is on a stone's throw distance. It means that holding an upward position in strategic terms is leverage over the enemy. But it seems quite difficult that the resistance leaders like the son of former legendary fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud and the former vice President Amrullah Saleh remain silent for a long (BBC, 2021 September 6). Currently, the situation on the ground suggests that the Panjshir resistance forces have proven to be weak. The acceleration of the resistance in Panjshir Valley depends on the treatment of civilians in the Panjshir Valley. The potential for rising resistance is there in Panjshir Valley but the situation in Afghanistan shows that the rising resistance is less likely because the Taliban controlled major routes around the Panjshir Valley.

The Shia sectarian and their role in possible resistance also depend on the treatment of the Taliban. Back in the 1990s the Taliban persecuted and targeted the Shia sect. It is now a test case of the Taliban's religious and sectarian tolerance. History suggests that the Hazara fighters

and their role in Iraq and Afghanistan against the Sunni fighters are another sparking dynamic and memories that can't be ignored under the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Due to the above-mentioned reasons, the Taliban have a hard approach towards the Hazara community in Afghanistan. Similarly, a lack of trust and the Iranian factor in the Shia connections cannot be ignored. But currently, the resistance in the Hazara provinces seems less likely. It seems that the Hazaras have accepted what they should accept under Taliban control without exploiting their grievousness and sectarian affiliations (EUAA, 2023). The Taliban are reluctant to tolerate and consider the protests of the urban educated girls as a challenge to their legitimacy and rule. Taliban also perceive that these protesting women also ignite other sections of society. It also provides grounds and evidence for Western media which are always critical to the Taliban regarding women and their rights. The Taliban has argued that it is not an issue for them if Afghan women work at ministerial levels and various jobs and services delivery to the common Afghans (Astor et al., 2021).

4.1. Education and Taliban's view

The Taliban and their views about girls' education are contradictory and subject to criticism from various sections of Afghan society as well as the world. The initial policy response and the Taliban's view on girls' education were clear, and they levelled that they have no concern over girls' education, going to schools and universities. However, the recent incidents of girls' schools closer sparked and attracted criticism from across the world. The Taliban denied these acquisitions and argued that it is false propaganda of Western-led powers to show a distorted image of the Taliban. However, later, the incidents across the country suggested discouragement from education. The girl's protest in Kabul and the rest parts of the state was an example in this context. Taliban response was that we would allow girls to continue their education but conditioned to the principle of *Pardah* and modesty (Ahmadi & Ebadi, 2022). However, the moderate sections in Afghan society consider these moral guidelines as the strict interpretations of the Taliban and return to their initial orthodox views on girls' education.

The bigotry and divide on the issue of girls' education continued in the Taliban government and circles. In this context, the Taliban education minister made a statement that they will limit access to secular content in schools, colleges, and universities. Furthermore, the Taliban former cleric later Chancellor of Kabul University argued for banning female education on campuses. Later, the Taliban spokesperson corrected the statement that it was not a reflection of the official policy of the Taliban. However, the sources of concern are there which is how religious clerics which are the majority in the Afghan cabinet tolerate and allow girls to education. The self-imposed code of modesty and ban on education conflicts with the tradition of Pashtun culture and the modern mind as highlighted by Qasim (Personal Communication, 2023).¹ "The Taliban view women not more than the servant within their houses and encourage being part of the competitive process, and especially in educational and governmental affairs." This shows that the Taliban view women under the term (rampant Sexism) which means that they only perceive education institutions through their misconception of sexuality" (Personal

Communication. 2023). “One should and must think about the history of Afghanistan, particularly after the 1950s, the moderate and liberal progressive education system of Afghanistan. My heart bleeds when hearing the news that the Taliban are still reluctant to open girls' education institutions” (Personal Communication, 2023). Another respondent argued that the Taliban used the banning of girls' education to conditionalize funding, aid, and financial help. However, the Taliban view contradicts this conception.

The above view represents the modest and moderate Afghans that were interviewed. However, the Taliban's position on girls' education particularly at the university level is quite paradoxical and irrational. “Why should we send our daughters to the Western education system where modesty and *pardah* are minimal and male teachers teaching them? It is contradictory to our *Pardah* system and the Sharia (self-interpreted)” (Personal communication, 2023). This shows that the Taliban not only view their stance as valid but also give references from Sharia that it sins to send daughters to modern education, universities, and colleges. “Why do not the girl's education champion and campaigning for higher education go to religious Madrassas across Kabul and various parts of the country?” (Personal communication, 2023). This seems quite illogical, that the Taliban did not reconsider the choice of career, particularly of the female in the context of education. In the past, the Taliban seemed hardliners for women in the government civil services and managerial circles. However, after the Taliban's control, they assure them to continue their jobs without any fear. Initially, the civil servants were reluctant to participate in government sectors but later on, the Taliban assured them of safety and encouraged returning to their offices. This posture was encouraging to sanction the administration effectively. The Taliban also replaced and fired the corrupt servants. They also replaced the court system. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women was replaced with the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention (International Crisis Group, 2023).

4.2. Government and challenges

The Taliban government will continue to face multifaceted challenges regarding governmental sectors. The first and foremost challenge after the Taliban capture was the brain drain of educated, government employees and common people. The world witnessed the US C 130 and the crowd at Kabul airport all of them are in hope for leaving the war-torn country and hope for a better future. The managerial class fled from the country, which created an administrative and managerial vacuum in the various government sectors. Indeed, it is a challenge for the Taliban government to restore the government official's trust in the Taliban Regime. On the other side, the managerial and administrative ranks and cadres are highly dismantled and derailed and replaced with the Taliban favourites. This will not be in the greater interests of the Afghan public as well as the overall managerial order and chain of command.

There are rays of hope both at the international level and regional levels that favour the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. For example, the Chinese government has shown interest and willingness to invest in Afghanistan. The Chinese investments and geo-economic designs in

Central Asia and the rest of the region depend upon peace and stability in Afghanistan. Similarly, China also has observations on Uyghur Muslims and their links in Afghanistan. The issue of ISK will be the major dynamic in China and the Taliban Regime in the future. On the other side, Iran has signalled to review and improve its relations with the new Taliban Regime for their interest and fears. Iran's main interests are to protect its sectarian population and Hazara group who were in the past subject to the Taliban atrocities (Jaafari, 2021). From Russia's and Central Asian republics' perspectives, there is no exit from Afghanistan; all the previously mentioned states want a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan. Because the latter's security and insecurity are directly related to each other's. The time is changing along with the perceptions in neighbouring states that they can't gain benefits and achieve their interests if Afghanistan remains unstable.

To accomplish the Taliban goal of a peaceful, prosperous, and stable Afghanistan, the international community at least should facilitate to delivery of the so-called promises and whatever reformist agenda they have in their manifesto. The industrialized states should at least provide financial incentives and assistance to the decade-war-torn Afghanistan. The Taliban Regime on many occasions retreated that their views had changed and wanted to see a stable, prosperous, and stable Afghanistan. The Taliban manifesto and plan revolve around these issues because the Afghan state did not experience the previously mentioned aspects for decades. But it will be the test case of the current Taliban-led Regime to fulfil these desired goals and objectives.

4.3. Question of recognition

For the modern nation-state system and its legitimacy as a sovereign and independent state, international recognition is a prime requirement. For the world community, to conduct and contact official relations with states, they must recognize a particular state. However, under international norms and practices, recognition of any government and sovereignty is a solely discretionary power of any state. It is not solely obligatory for any state to recognize any government if they have their reservations. It is a fact that recognition of a government is a highly political case linked to states' interests and objectives. There is a lack of clear and transparent criteria to recognize any government or not. However, the legal consequences and international law obligations can't be overlooked. In the context of the current Taliban government in Afghanistan, the challenges for recognition are numerous ranging from social-political, economic, and religious views and their overall approach to the government system and dealing with the world community. The following are some basic criteria for the question of recognition which can be explained in the context of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan (Schuit, 2012).

4.4. Criteria for recognition: administrative and political control

The administrative and political reach, recognition, and control over any given territory mean

that the government and the authority have sufficient power eligibility and preferences over the area they claim or under their sovereign jurisdiction. The state should maintain internal sovereignty over the area under its control and the international obligation ranging from the commitments to respect the territorial sovereignty of other states and oblige to international laws. Effective administrative and political control and reach are the prime criteria for government recognition under international law (Murphy, 1999). In the context of the Afghan Taliban Regime, the Taliban have effective administrative control over all parts of Afghanistan. They maintain parallel administrative setup and control through their local commanders and units. The question of Panjshir territory and its resilience to be out of control is over. The Panjshir fighters and resistance forces were subjected to the condition that the Taliban should target sectarian populations like in the past. It seems that the Taliban have fulfilled the basic requirement of government recognition in this context.

Apart from the above, effective political and administrative control for the government has also key criteria and requirements which include:

- a) The established government should be free from external dictation and will carry out its political decisions without foreign directions and hands. The Taliban leaders on many occasions retreated that it will not oblige to directions of government and their foreign policy from other states.
- b) Secondly, a government should control its territory without the assessment and help of other states and their armed forces. If it does not control its territory independently, it should not be considered legitimate and recognizable. However, the Afghan Taliban have established their reach and administrative control over the majority parts of Afghanistan even the untouchable parts. Therefore, there should be no doubts about their administrative and political control. Although loopholes exist in modern states also. It seems that there is no parallel political and administrative vacuum that challenges the Afghan Taliban.
- c) The third and most important prerequisite is the population of a particular state and its obligation to the government. The inhabitants should oblige to the authority and jurisdiction of the government. The population should submit their will to the government (Murphy: 1999). In the case of Afghanistan, the protest over the Emirate flag and disobedience and displacement in Kabul as well as the parallel *Beragh* (Flag) in various parts of the country are the big question mark on acceptance of the Taliban Regime (Clayton, 2021). The young generation and the educated youths seem reluctant to the Taliban rules and control. However, the fear compels them to the Taliban rule. Democratic legitimacy and will of people are the prerequisites to the government's legitimacy. The Taliban have not come through the process of elections and popular votes. They are not constitutionally to be considered legitimate as and represent the consent of the common Afghans.

- d) In the context of citizens' obedience to the Taliban Regime, there was hope and rays of fear across Afghanistan. Some sections of the Afghan population were hopeful that the new Regime would free up Afghanistan from corruption and nepotism and would bring stability and peace. However, the youth and educated, women and the potential brain drains of the citizens are also a source of concern for the Afghan Taliban's popular support and legitimacy. The worsening economic situation is the main reason for the current unrest and brain drain after the fall of Kabul. However, the Taliban's attitude towards, women, education, and reforms particularly political and the questions of inclusive government will determine their legitimacy and status among their masses.
- e) The last and central point is the control of the capital of a particular state under the new victor element (Schuit, 2012). The fall of Kabul was one of the most dramatic events in modern times when the established army and the national police collapsed like cards after the US announcement of the drawdown of their forces and the conclusion of the Doha Deal.

All the above-mentioned essentials and points suggest that the world should recognize or not the Taliban Regime. The Taliban leaders from their part also advanced these commitments and argued for international recognition (Clayton, 2021). The time and wisdom also demand that the Taliban Regime should be recognized as a legitimate political force in Afghanistan. However, the question of democracy and popular voting which the Taliban has failed to achieve so far is still the major stumbling block in their recognition by the world.

4.5. Implications and obligations after recognition

International recognition of government if happens has many obligations and commitments that the concerned government must ensure and fulfil. The International Law and Special Conference of 1965 recommended that a de facto government that is the state fulfilling international obligations and commitments should be considered for recognition. There are respective obligations on the state to be ensured that include the protection of human rights, international humanitarian assistance, and allowance of monitoring the previously mentioned aspects (Ferraro & Cameron, 2016). The state must show compliance with the law of responsibility and commitments. In the case of the Taliban Regime and its past practices, the world witnessed a lack of commitment and assurance to these obligations and responsibilities. At the current time, the same allegations are levelled against the Taliban Regime (Nelson, 2020). What is needed from the Taliban side is to fulfil this obligation or otherwise will face international isolation and de facto status.

4.6. Question of terrorist groups

For one year long, the Taliban Regime is still uncertain and struggling to achieve cohesion at both regional and international levels. Internally, the news of mobilizing the various terrorist

groups on Afghan soil indicates that the former again can turn into a haven for terrorists and non-state actors. Recently, the ISK and TTP have mobilized their activities across the borders and within Afghanistan. ISK is active in the northern part of Afghanistan and reportedly, mobilized and sped up their activities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Taneja, 2021). It's now the Taliban's turn to how they will neutralize these elements and persuade the international community that Afghan soil will not be used for terrorist activities. The Taliban officials on several occasions retreated from their commitments to terror-free Afghanistan. However, the historical record and the current geographic compulsions show that the Taliban will never fulfil these commitments (International Crisis Group, 2022, August 12).

Pakistan, as a close neighbour of Afghanistan, is linked with the security and insecurity of the latter. The recent cross-border attacks on Pakistan security forces and the received security campaigns of the insurgents in parts of Pakistan annoyed the former patron of the Taliban. It is a fact and a strategic dilemma for Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. The questions and reservations of Pakistan on the questions of Taliban regrouping in their territory are many and will likely be major hurdles in the future and relations between them. From a strategic perspective, the Taliban leaders are reluctant to take solid action against the various terrorist groups. The reason is that all these organizations and actors were once part of the Taliban campaign against the US and hold ideological commitments with the Taliban one way or the other. The Taliban was also reluctant to completely disown them keeping in view the soft corners for them and once served as allies against the US and coalition forces. The finger rises towards the Taliban regime both from the world and from the Pakistan side. A major question marks on the Taliban leaderships and their commitment to free up Afghanistan from terrorism and safe havens of the insurgents. It put a basic question mark on the Taliban's commitment to not use their soil against any state (Hussain, 2023, August 17).

The Taliban leaders are also reluctant to take solid actions against the TTP and Al-Qaida elements in Afghanistan. The question of TTP and the recent uprising in their movements in former FATA raised serious security challenges for Pakistan, despite the decade's counter-insurgency campaigns and military operations. This issue will remain a major stumbling block and bone of contention between the Taliban Regime and Pakistan. Recently, the TTP element ended a truce with the government of Pakistan and initiated various sporadic attacks across the country. The Chaman attack in which 6 people were dead and dozens were injured was a cross-border attack on civilians as well as the security forces. These activities of the TTP in Afghanistan and Pakistan are growing, unchecked, and creating security compulsion. The Afghan Taliban seems to be reluctant to curb the TTP elements. Officially, the Taliban's stance is that it will not use Afghan soil against any state. But the recent wave of the rising incidents of terrorism across Pakistan especially from cross-border questions marked the official position and stance of the Taliban (Felbab-Brown, 2023, February 3).

It is the test case for the Taliban on how they will manage and handle the question of TTP with Pakistan. The TTP once served as a strategic ally of the Afghan Taliban. Both were active

against the US security forces. The TTP has also been involved in terrorism in Pakistan. Their ideology and worldviews intermingled, shared, and possessed similar stances toward Pakistan. Pakistan needs rational and long-term negotiations and strategy towards the Afghan Taliban to handle the question of TTP. The latter becomes an existential security threat to peace in former FATA and for the rest of Pakistan. The negotiation continued with the TTP, failed, and paused. What matters for the state of Pakistan is the security of its citizens and forces against the renewed war from the TTP. To mention the economy of national security, CPEC and overall economic activities directly link with the internal security environment of Pakistan. Indeed, if not taken rationally the question of TTP, will create an unimaginable problem for the already shattering economy and political setup (Idrees et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2023).

There are also fears and even empirical evidence that Afghanistan again can turn into a safe sanctuary for terrorist groups and may affect the regional and international security. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has pledged its alliance to the ISK. It proved the existence of transnational terrorist groups in Afghanistan and the Taliban's lack of commitment and reluctance to eliminate these groups. The US official reports in August reported that the IS has potential and active fighters of up to 4,000 (Hussian, 2022).

4.7. The practice of mass execution and punishment

The Afghan Taliban publicly executed the first convicted of murder in Farah Province. The Taliban also confirms the news about public prosecution. The Taliban supreme leader Mullah Habitullah Akhunzada ordered the judges to fully execute and enforce the Sharia laws which include public execution, stoning to death, flogging, and amputation of the thieves. The Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid also said in the statement that the “eye for an eye” principle of Sharia rule has been put into practice (Khalid, 2023). This first case is said to be of robbery, murder, and snatching of the motorcycle and cell phone. Later, the relative of the deceased confirms his guilt. The execution, *Qisas* was carried out by shooting the convicted deceased father himself.

Initially, at the return of power, the Taliban leaders propagated that their worldview, approach, and stances on various issues had softened. But this rhetoric and stance proved failed, false, and contradictory as women are not allowed to travel alone and without their male. Women are forced to cover up their heads with Burqas or hijab when going out from home. The argument from Mujahid in defence of the execution that happened had been thoroughly examined by courts and the final order was issued by the supreme leader and then implemented (Dawn, December 2022).

4.8. Challenges of economy

The Taliban's surprise victory and capturing the heart of Afghanistan at an unprecedented pace brought another shock to the already war-torn state. The state and government of Afghanistan

before the Taliban takeover were struck by nepotism, corruption, mismanagement of resources, over-centralization of the government authority, and the drastic impact of the COVID-19 on Afghan economy (William, 2021). The government revenues significantly declined, and the economy was maintained and boosted by the artificial flow of US dollars in the shape of assistance and direct aid. Currently, the challenges for the Afghan economy are many as the US has frozen the Afghan reserves and the donors are reluctant to aid the Taliban Regime and link it with their overall views and practices. The humanitarian crisis is still going on in Afghanistan (Donnell, 2020). The world witnessed the brain drain of educated persons from Afghanistan mainly youth and former officials in government. They are reluctant, uncertain, and fearful to work under the Taliban Regime. The economic situation in Afghanistan and the international community's response greatly relies on the policies of the Taliban government.

The large replacement of the Afghan population in the country particularly in Pakistan is also a test case of the Taliban. The question of refugees and dislocation is further worsening the situation. The Taliban are also not sure about the sort of Islamic banking system they will opt. Similarly, the dissolution of the former Afghan army sent an economic shock to several families, soldiers, and even top-ranked officials compelled to hand carts to meet their requirements and to feed their families (James, 2021).

The US Federal Reserve has sanctioned and frozen all the foreign exchange reserves of nearly 7 billion \$ of Afghanistan. The Afghan central bank has no control over its reserves. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has the Afghan government access to resources. Under the IMF banner, these resources are called Special Drawing Rights or SDR. It is deployed and used in the balance of payments, and government finances-related issues. All the major donors of Afghanistan notably, Germany, Japan, and the rest of the European states and the World Bank have curbed all their resources. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund money has been stopped further by these donors. These include direct economic support, facilitation in the Budget, and basic public health projects and initiatives. On the same note, the Asian Development Bank also suspended the disbursement of the funds (United Nations, 2021).

5. Findings

The aim was to highlight the key challenges and likely scenarios under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It is found that the Taliban faces one immediate challenge political legitimacy and the question of recognition from both domestic and international aspects. Commonly, the Taliban lacks political legitimacy and proper procedure. It is viewed that from the former government stakeholders that the Taliban lacks political legitimacy and does not represent the Afghan people and their democratic will. The Taliban representation of the entire Afghan population is also a dream. Most of their ethnic population and groups are not represented or say in government. The Taliban's promise of inclusive government is not fulfilled at large. Further, international recognition is important in a nation's community. If the Taliban regime is recognized, it will serve or will be in the interests of the Taliban and will put many

commitments and responsibilities. The Taliban regime's hesitant stance over female education and track record of basic human rights violations is not good. All these aspects need to be put under consideration. Although, most of the provinces of Afghanistan, lack political legitimacy. The economy and attracting foreign investment are the key challenges to the Taliban government. The conflictual relations with Pakistan and the constant blame game derailed bilateral trade. Lastly, the changing regional and global powers' response toward the Taliban regime is also important. It is worth examining how regional and global states will interact with the Taliban regime.

6. Conclusion

The inference can be drawn that the Taliban, and their world view is contradictory to the real-time i.e. the current world order. The world has changed. New thinking within Afghan youth emerged. Going back in time is not wise in the context of the Afghan Taliban's implementation of the traditional system of Justice. One of the modern pillars of the democratic system i.e., Judiciary is centralized to the authority of one person. The criterion of justice goes back to the cleric's interpretation of the leader. The eye for eye and tit for tat approach will only bleed Afghans and their society more. It seems like crunching the old wound regularly. Afghanistan and its people witnessed the horrors of decade's conflicts. They suffered, their economy collapsed, and their social structure was completely distorted. The psychological traumas and suffering of women and children are yet an important aspect of the war to be kept in mind. Many in the Afghan generation have lost their lives to wars, many become permanently disabled. Generations have grown up as refugees. Every street, home, and city will remain one of the catastrophes of wars and their impacts. They want to see Afghanistan as a progressive state under the banner of democracy political legitimacy and public representation. A one-sided approach, power politics, and bulldozing the political opponents will not work. The Taliban's militant and ideological opponents are to be mentioned with the horrible future and consequences.

For Pakistan, the repercussions of the Taliban return are many. Once propagated the virtuous and changed nature and world view of the Taliban to the public and the world. Hence the Taliban's reluctance to act against TTP and the renewed insurgency and their activities across Pakistan's former FATA are the contradictions on which the state of Pakistan should count their fingers. The Taliban resumed their fearful policies and challenged the very nature and norm of the so-called liberal order. The fact is the common Afghans were sold out at the hands of the Taliban by the US and left Afghanistan in the lurch. The Taliban inherited the ruins of the longest war in the country. The internal contradiction in the Taliban will leave the region and the world once again concerned and in dilemmas. The thinking process of the Taliban leaders and their worldview is rigid, unable to mould, and soft for a long. The self-interpreted system of government (Emirate) seems nowhere in the Islamic world. The conclusion is that, despite moving with time, the Taliban are going back in time.

Going back in time in the context of political and social aspects is not compatible with the real and current world. There will have to be repercussions. No one can win hearts and minds by force. Yes, they can keep silent but not for long. Society has temperaments to bear the suppression, once cross the resistance then revolt is an obvious phenomenon. The history also abounds with examples. It is wise to learn from history because the latter repeats itself. Afghanistan faces various problems ranging from political, economic, social, and military aspects. These problems and solutions demand rational statecraft and careful calculations. Public trust is mandatory in this context. However, if the forces and actors occupy or fill the power vacuum left by the foreign forces, how can they be considered legitimate political actors who have support from the masses? The whole administrative and managerial system of government and economic order collapsed in Afghanistan. The video of the newly appointed governor of the province circulated on social media when a French Journalist asked him to point out the position, and location of Afghanistan on the small global map on his table. The governor was unable to point Afghanistan on the world map. What should one expect and say in this context?

In post-modern times and after the Westphalian system, the world recognizes and establishes relations with the responsible states who oblige and show commitment to international laws, rules, norms, and obligations. One-sided interpretations and counter arguments against the international system will not solve their problem. One should look at the internal problems and complexities of the states and then look beyond. A ray of hope that the Taliban worldview has changed and become moderate seems blurred and foggy and the expectations are not turning into reality. The future seems the return of the past which contrasts with modern times. When someone does not see the future, it is a tragedy and the same is true in the context of Afghanistan under the Taliban rule.

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ORCID iD

Aamir Khan <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9225-4937>

Aqsa Durrani <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9366-225X>

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Note:

¹ Dr. Gulam Qasim is Professor of Pakistan Studies at Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan.