

# Afghanistan Primer

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## I. Abstract

Afghanistan plays a pivotal role in shaping the geopolitics of the world specifically Asia. This paper aims to explore various facets of the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan like its historical background, and economy. Geographical setup, politics, demography, present-day challenges etc. This study is completely based on secondary sources. The study has highlighted the history of modern Afghanistan, looked into the current economic scenario, analysed its demography, explained the existing political system along with a comparison to the previous system and examined the myriad of existing challenges faced by the country under the Taliban regime. Although there have been few positive changes on the political and economic front, the severity of human rights violations and the impoverished condition of the majority of the population along with the Taliban's reluctance to adhere to the conditions of foreign countries reflects a bleak future for the country.

**Keywords:** *Afghanistan, Taliban*

## II. Introduction

The Islamic emirate of Afghanistan, also known as the graveyard of empires, has always been a land of conflicts. Looking back in history, we can see that present-day Afghanistan, according to various Indian sources, was originally named Gandhara. Over time the names changed and the currently used term Afghanistan came up when it means the land of Pashtuns. Afghan is a synonym for the word Pashtuns. Its unique positioning in central Asia made it attractive to the foreign powers who aimed to have a foothold in Asia. On the one hand where Afghanistan has a unique history, a mineral-rich geography, and a diverse cultural background (that evolved with the cultural integration of various empires that ruled that nation), on the other hand, its location, terrain, socio-religious - ethnic structure, and several other factors led to the foreign powers not being able to control the region for a long time earning it the nickname of the graveyard of empires.

Even in the 21st century, Afghanistan is still a hotly debated region or topic in diplomacy and international relations. Currently, under the Taliban regime, the country is going through turmoil on all fronts. The country is facing a complete shift in policies and ideas from the previous republican regime along with an economic crisis, lack of global support, and severe human rights violations. Undertaking all these factors, this document aims to provide a meaningful understanding of the country in historical, geographical, demographic, political, economic, and social spheres with a key emphasis on the present context.

## III. History

Afghanistan has the earliest traces of humans from the Paleolithic age 1973. After centuries of rule under various empires in 1921, after the 3rd Anglo-Afghan War, Afghanistan was declared an independent nation under the Barakzai empire by King Amanullah Khan. After the tumultuous rule of 5 more decades in 1973, Mohammed Daoud Khan, cousin of the then king Zahir Shah established a republic country under his People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan by overthrowing the centuries-old monarchical system through a military coup.

### A. Cold war era

The Cold War officially began on 12th June 1947, but the Afghan-USSR relations can be traced before the beginning of the Cold War. The Russian monarchical empire during the Great Game period itself tried to influence Russia which irked the British and this grudge led to the 3 Anglo British wars. Post the Third Anglo-Afghan War USSR became the first country to officially establish diplomatic ties with

Afghanistan. In 1921 the countries signed a friendship treaty where they agreed upon a nonaggression pact and friendly relations, especially economic and technological terms. For the USSR it was a chance to remain in proximity to Britain-ruled India. Throughout the Second World War too it remained neutral while being benefited by soviet aid. Coming to the cold war era, Gen. Mohammed Daoud Khan, became the prime minister of the state in 1953. He was always in favour of ussr. The Soviet Union had three primary long-term goals when it started its intervention in Afghanistan in 1953. The first was to either threaten or position themselves to harm the Iranian oil fields in the years to come. Increasing influence in the Indian Peninsula was the second goal. The final objective was to redirect Western armaments to places that were not producing anything. The relations further grew when Nikita Khrushchev signed a treaty for the economic and technological development of Afghanistan. During the 50s Afghanistan also received US assistance for technology and infrastructure though they declined for defense. In 1973 under the then-prime minister's leadership and support of the Afghan communist party, the king was overthrown and Afghanistan was declared as a republic under his presidency. Once he came to power he introduced several reforms among which were bringing women to the mainstream which received severe backlash, along with this his attempts like trying to have closer ties with the West to stop Afghanistan from being a puppet of ussr and suppressing his opposition led to bitterness in the relation. The culmination of all these steps taken under the Daoud Government along with the death of the parcham faction of the communist party's leader Mir Akbar Khyber, paved the way for the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan. Although there are speculations on the role of the USSR and Iran in the revolution there is no concrete evidence to prove so. The revolution was triggered due to fear that Khyber was murdered under Daoud's orders and he could do the same to wipe out the communist party. The revolution in 1978 led to the death of Daoud and the communist leader Nur Mohammad Taraki became the new president. Although he didn't prefer much soviet influence still under his rule Afghanistan maintained good relations with them, he also signed the 20-year friendship treaty which provided Afghanistan with military and economic support.

### **B. USSR Invades Afghanistan - 1979**

The control over Afghanistan during the Cold War era was crucial for the USSR. It was not just spreading the communist ideology to prove its ideological supremacy which made Afghanistan important, it was also the easy reach to warm water ports and gulf oil fields. When it saw that the new Government's foreign policy could have a US tilt and its policies could lead to internal disturbances, the USSR chose to take matters into its own hands. The internal disturbances were mainly by the pro-Islam insurgent groups which were against the modernist communist policies. Islamic fundamentalism was rapidly spreading across the country which in the eyes of the USSR was a threat to its communist ideology. One of the main internal disturbances was the heart uprising by the pro-Islamist tribals and a few army members which was later suppressed by the Government. Internal issues were not only occurring in the nation but within the party too, which eventually led to the death of Taraki which led Hafizullah Amin into power. The change in power didn't cool down the situation across the country. Ussr then took matters into its hands invading Afghanistan in late December and assassinating Amin. The new president Barbrak Kamal from the communist party itself was brought into power.

### **C. Rise of Mujahedeen**

Although ussr temporarily controlled the situation a bigger threat was rising - the mujahideen. Mujahedeen is a collective term used for many rebel Islamic fundamentalist groups that rose in Afghanistan against the Soviet communist Government. Their name translates to those who engage in jihad. They mainly had

members belonging to the tribal and urban regions. They aimed for a society rooted in Islam and opposed the communist policies that changed the traditional social system. Initially, they faced a shortage of arms, combat training, and funds along with the groups remaining dispersed across the country. This is where the USA with Pakistani support comes into play. The role of the USA in creating insurgencies within Afghanistan can be traced back to the late 70s when with the help of the Pakistan ISI it gave financial support to the insurgents or resisters of the state. But by this time their role became more active. With US support foreign fighters from various Middle Eastern countries were brought to fight as a part of the Mujahideen. They initially started with guerilla warfare techniques.

#### **D. Afghan-Soviet War**

With the USA's support, the insurgencies grew strongly across the country leading the soviet forces to again take matters in hand. This led to the afghan soviet battle from 1979 to 1989. The war created severe losses for ussr and eventually became a core reason for its disintegration. Many Afghans had to flee to either Pakistan or Iran due to the war. In 1986 Dr Najibullah became the new president of Afghanistan.

#### **Civil war era ( 1989 -1996 )**

In 1989, while the communists were still in power the soviet forces began to retreat from the country and this added fuel to the existing turmoil in the nation. The mujahideen overthrew the Najibullah Government in 1992 which led to a civil war within the country among various groups under the mujahideen. Large-scale atrocities and human rights violations ranging from loot, murder, and rape were to be seen across the country. Until 1996 a coalition Government led by the mujahideens ruled the nation but instability prevailed. There was infighting among the Mujahideens too.

#### **E. First Taliban rule ( 1996 - 2001 )**

In 1996 a new group among the mujahideens rose to power under the name of Taliban. They began ruling the country from 1996 until the US invasion in 2001. A faction among the mujahideen inspired by the Pashtun movement for promoting Sunni Islam and dissatisfaction with the communist Government formed this terrorist group called Taliban, which translates to students in Pashto who came to Kandahar in 1994. The Taliban and Mullah Mohamad Omar took the city into their hands in the same year. During the internal conflicts throughout the country, the Taliban presented its idea of creating a stable state under the Sharia to the people of Afghanistan. It also promised to economically develop the country. They killed former president Najibullah in 1996. After coming to power they supported an Islamic law-based rule specifically emphasizing the ideologies of Salafism and Pashtunwali. During this period the country witnessed severe violations of human rights. Women's rights faced severe backlash. Under the Taliban regime, the country became a breeding ground for several terrorist groups like al Qaeda. However, they did gain support from the masses for their infrastructural development and control over corruption.

##### **1. Taliban, Al Qaeda, and USA**

Al Qaeda was formed in 1988 by Osama bin Laden calling for a jihad against, initially US and later on the US to create land based on Islamic law free from foreign influence. To fulfill their motive al Qaeda began attacking the USA in different ways. And Afghanistan being used as a base for these attacks irked us. Post 1998 US embassy attacks, the USA begins attacking the terrorist group's bases in Afghanistan. But the 9/11 attacks under the leadership of bin Laden made us wage a full-fledged attack on Afghan terrorist bases.

## **2. Geneva Peace Talks -**

The Geneva Peace Accords of 1989 were signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Najibullah Government. They mutually agreed on matters of noninterference and refugee crisis. USA, the first guarantor agreed to stop arms supply to mujahideen and the second guarantor the USSR agreed to withdraw its forces. As the mujahideen was not a partner in the talk it didn't agree with the terms of the accord. The Taliban sheltered bin Laden and al Qaeda despite several warnings from the USA. This led us to overthrow the Government. There was an intense fight between both sides for months. The USA carried out many aerial strikes and the Taliban did not possess a good air force system and this became a major reason for its failure. In December 2001 under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, an interim Government was formed in Afghanistan.

### **F. Afghanistan as a republic**

The interim Government ruled till 2004, during this rule, NATO took over the security in Kabul which later on expanded to other regions due to conflicts caused by terrorist groups, and a constitution was framed for the country under the guidance of the loyal Jigra after undertaking various suggestions from across the country.

The first presidential elections took place in 2004 and were won by the former head, Hamid Karzai. In 2005 the first parliamentary elections were conducted. The Government under Karzai focused on peace and counterterrorism measures. By 2013 the Afghan military under his rule came to light as he asked the us military to withdraw. In 2013 the Afghan military took over security powers from NATO and further in 2014 the US Government under Barack Obama decided to cut down the military forces in the coming years. The country mainly runs with a large amount of humanitarian assistance from Western countries and international organizations. In 2014 a new president, Ashraf Ghani came into power. Although the election was suspected to be rigged, he later on went to rule till the Taliban returned to power. During his reign tried introducing measures to prevent corruption and promote women's rights. However, the anti-corruption measures were not very successful. Several peace negotiations with the Taliban were taken up but didn't result fruitfully in the long run. Economic upliftment of the country with foreign support and through Infrastructural development was specially focused. Once the Taliban was back in power he fled the country. The funds that we gave to make Afghanistan a new nation were not well distributed in the country. The urban elite consisting of Government and military officials prospered whereas the rural elite not only suffered from economic disparity but also from the conflict between the Taliban and the Government.

### **G. Re-emergence of Taliban**

Once the interim Government was in power the terrorist groups resorted to the outskirts of the country but still created insurgencies on a small scale. After around a decade of losing power, the Taliban slowly began regaining its power, especially after the gradual withdrawal by NATO and US forces. With time they became organized and gained funds through external support and their illegal activities. Ironically, they even used drug trafficking as a source of income. They tried to instil fear in people's minds by targeting ordinary citizens in addition to their regular attacks on the Government and military.

## Doha Peace Talks 2020 -

In 2020 the Afghan Government, the Taliban, and the US Government began peace talks. In February of 2020 after 9 rounds of talks, both the Taliban and USA signed the “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan”. They came to an agreement that no armed groups would harm nato forces in the country and they would eventually withdraw. The agreement also paved the way for talks between the Taliban and the Afghan Government with the aim of a peaceful future. In addition to these, the Afghan Government and the USA entered into an agreement aiming at the prevention of Afghanistan being used as a breeding ground for terrorist groups, withdrawal of troops, and achieving cease fire and stability in the country. After prolonged negotiations, the Afghan Government released around 5000 Taliban prisoners. But these steps did not stop the insurgency. On 15th August 2021, the Taliban came back to power in Afghanistan and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. As soon as it returned, countries across the world began evacuating their embassies and citizens, the opponents to the Taliban were killed or attacked, and the old Islamic laws began to be reimposed. Although few regions in Afghanistan resisted, they lost within a few months.

## IV. Geography



Image 01 - Political Map of Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>

### A. Analyzing the location of the country

Afghanistan is an Asian country mainly bordering China to the northeast through the Wakhan corridor, Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Tajikistan to the north, Turkmenistan to the northwest, and Uzbekistan to the north covering a land area of 652,230 sq km. India too has a border of 106 km with Afghanistan. It has no coastline and is completely landlocked. The 2 rivers that run through the country are Amu Darya Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan Helmand river source (shared with Iran). The country has extreme climatic conditions whether it be summer or winter. It is usually arid.

### B. Natural resources

Afghanistan is rich in fossil fuels like coal, natural gas, and petroleum and in minerals like iron ore, lead, zinc, copper, chromite barite, and precious gems like lapis lazuli, and marble. Statistics released by the CIA

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mapsofindia.com/world-map/afghanistan/>

say that around 58.1% of the land is used for agriculture. The mining industry of the country has great potential as a 2019 ministry report states that the country has 1.4 million tonnes of rare earth minerals. The usability of these in electronics and defence makes it a great source of income for the country.

### **C. Environmental issues**

This section focuses on 2 aspects, firstly how is Afghanistan contributing to environmental degradation and secondly how is Afghanistan being impacted by environmental degradation?

In the first part, we can see that Afghanistan is a country that faces scarcity of water, there is an overexploitation of the existing water resources which leads to groundwater depletion. Apart from this overgrazing and deforestation lead to destruction of the biodiversity. The country mainly relies on fossil fuels as a source of energy. Although solar and hydroelectricity projects are there, it is not much developed. Previous Governments have signed several conventions ranging from the Kyoto Protocol to, but in reality, its norms are hardly implemented. Various media outlets have called out the present Government for not paying enough attention to the environment with people with no expertise handling the ministry. The Government overlooks the environmental hazards caused by the irrational cutting down of trees for the timber industry and unsustainable mining practices. The lack of proper management in urban areas also results in air and water pollution. Surprisingly as per the UNOCHA Afghanistan is one of the lowest emitters of CO<sub>2</sub>. It also states that “Afghanistan ranks fourth on the list of countries most at risk of a crisis (INFORM Risk Index 2023), and eighth on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index of countries most vulnerable and least prepared to adapt to climate change.” The country faces high chances of desertification. The country is bearing the brunt of climate change as it is leading to irregular rainfall patterns, melting of snow, harsh climatic conditions, and drying up of rivers which causes both droughts and floods. The effects of climate change along with natural disasters like earthquakes exacerbate the impact of the existing socio, political and economic situation of the country. The vulnerability of the rural people has increased due to these disasters, the rural economies are presently facing less agricultural production and loss of livestock. With the West almost boycotting the Taliban-led Afghanistan, it is not invited to many of the international summits on environmental conservation like COP28. But in 2024 it had an online meeting at the UN on the climatic or environmental challenges faced by the country, its impact, and the lack of preparedness existing. It is the need of the hour for the Taliban Government to look into this threat looming over Afghanistan, if not it can turn disastrous for the country’s future.

## **V. Demographics**

### **A. Population**

The statistics released by the World Health Organization in 2023 point out that Afghanistan has a population of 41,454,761 with a growth rate of 2.2%.<sup>2</sup>In terms of direction, eastern Afghanistan is densely populated and the southern region is sparsely populated.

### **B. Religion**

Afghanistan is a major Islam practicing country with 99.7% of the country’s population following the religion. There exists a very small minority of Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs too. Within the Muslims too the majority is Sunni and only a small proportion follows the Shia sect.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.who.int/countries/004>



### **C. Ethnic composition**

The 2004 constitution of Afghanistan cites that apart from the religious minority groups mentioned above Afghanistan has ethnic groups like Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkman, Baluch, Pashaie, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur, and Brahwi ethnicities. Other groups like niazi, pamiri, kochi etc also exist.

### **D. Language**

The commonly spoken languages are Dari and Pashto which are the country's official languages. Other than these languages like Uzbeki, English, Turkmani, Urdu, Pashaie, Nuristani, Arabic, and Balochi are also spoken.

### **E. Present status of the education system**

The education sector in Afghanistan today is a victim of the barbaric laws and guidelines of the Taliban. Girls above the age of 12 have been denied the right to education. Women contributed a significant portion of the workforce of the education sector but today they are also not allowed to teach boys in any educational institution and their place as underqualified teachers has been introduced. According to Human Rights Watch the curriculum has been modified in alignment with the Islamic principles that the Taliban advocate. They have molded the system in a way that it has the least Western or foreign and Islamic influence going to the extent of excluding the English language. Even sports and arts are no longer part of the school curriculum. The prevailing economic and political system compounded with the poor quality of education being provided is causing high dropout rates. With no regard for child rights many children in present-day Afghanistan are forced to engage in child labor. According to Human Rights Watch harsh corporal punishments along with less importance to science subjects are running the future of the children. All these factors also point out the challenges faced by boys under the Taliban's new education system. The education sector itself faces a shortage of funding, the existing teachers are not receiving adequate salaries either. Although organizations like Unesco are working through its programs like the Afghanistan Education Sector Support Plan, unless and until the conservative laws and practices in the education sector are abolished and ideal public support is provided the situation is least likely to improve.

### **F. Present status of health care system**

Health is a matter of grave concern in Afghanistan, though the healthcare sector was on the path of revival post the first Taliban regime due to welfare measures conforming to Article 52 of the then constitution which guarantees healthcare support to the citizens, today Afghanistan possesses a poorly built healthcare system. It faces a lack of funds, infrastructure, and workforce. According to the statistics released by the CIA in 2024, the infant mortality rate in Afghanistan is 101.3 deaths/1,000 live births, and life expectancy at birth is 54.4 years. As per the statistics released by WHO in 2023 "8 million people in Afghanistan will lose access to essential and potentially lifesaving health assistance, and 450,000 patients will have little to no access to life-saving trauma care services". Women, children, and the poor are the major victims of this situation as they face a lack of necessary healthcare under the Taliban regime. Mental health support is severely neglected too. Shortage of medical supplies leads to illegal and unregulated smuggling of pharmaceuticals like medicines from nearby countries. The republican Government heavily relied on foreign humanitarian assistance for the functioning of the health sector but currently, the country is cut off from this and also suffers from the economic sanctions. Even though the UN and WHO support the healthcare industry, it's not sufficient for the whole nation's upliftment. This healthcare crisis compounded

with frequent, natural disasters, conflict, poverty, food shortage, malnutrition and, laws of the Taliban that restrict women's movement or participation in the workforce shows a grim future for the health of Afghans.

## **VI. Political System**

### **A. Political system under Republican Government**

#### **1. Organs of Government**

During the Republican era, Afghanistan had a presidential system with the system being divided into 3 organs. The executive was headed by the president who was elected for a term of 5 years through a direct election following the 2 round system. The president is assisted by 2 vice presidents. The president and vice presidents receive a single ticket and in case not secure in the first round calls for a second one. The president heads legislative and military matters. The legislative system is bicameral and has a House of Elders and a House of People where members are elected for 5 years.

#### **2. Administrative division**

The Afghan Republic was a unitary state divided into 34 provinces or wilayat, which was further divided into Wuluswali on the district level, and Deh and Sharwali on the village and municipality levels respectively. The councils present on each level overlooked the administration.

#### **3. Major political players**

According to the official website, Afghanistan had around 72 registered political parties as of 2019. Neither the first president Hamid Karzai nor his successor Ashraf Ghani was associated with any particular political party. However, the prominent political parties that existed were the National Coalition of Afghanistan by Abdullah Abdullah, Jamiat e Islami under Salahuddin Rabbani, the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan under Abdul Rashid Dostum, etc.

### **B. Political system under Taliban rule**

#### **1. Organs of Government**

The current Government of Afghanistan is only a caretaker Government headed by the Taliban and religious scholars. The position of Head of the state is held by Haibatullah Akhundzada. He was appointed by the Quetta Shura consisting of Taliban veterans of which he too is an important member. The council plays a key role in choosing other important leaders and influencing the policy-making of the Government. On the lower level exists a 33-member cabinet consisting of the Prime Minister and 3 deputy prime ministers. The leaders who run the political system are Muslims and mostly of Pashtun origin. There is no representation from any Muslim group or women. There is no new constitution, the governance is based on Islamic ideals influenced by the Hanafi school of Islam. The nature of the judicial system has entirely changed with the advent of the Taliban. The structure of the judicial system comprises the supreme court, appellate court, primary court, and military court. The misfits who are favoured by the Taliban are mostly appointed as judges and issue judgments based on the sharia. The people may consult with lawyers on matters but have to appear in court to present their cases. The investigation and other legal procedures are carried out by the judge and staff at court. The judgments are made relying on the Shariah and the Majjalah, another Hanafi law book from the Ottoman period.

#### **2. Administrative division**

The old provincial and district-level system of administration headed by Taliban leaders is still followed. The lower levels of bureaucracy are the same. The ministries have changed in 2 ways, firstly the technical ministries are continuing with the same staff but under Taliban leadership, other ministries have been

completely taken over by the Taliban members. The number of staff from minorities or who are Montalban is almost negligible.

### **3. Election of leaders**

The selection of leaders is done by the higher authorities of the Taliban, neither are any elections conducted nor are any leaders of the previously elected Government included in the cabinet. Most political parties are not allowed in the country except for a few like Hezb-e-Islami, Jamiat-e-Islami, etc.

## **C. Foreign relations in 2024**

### **1. Pakistan**

The relations between the closest neighbours Pakistan and Afghanistan have 2 sides. On one side it supports the Taliban rule in the country and on the other hand is facing the brunt of Afghanistan being the breeding ground of many terrorist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan which are causing heavy losses to Pakistan.

**Balochistan issue** - The Balochistan region is part of 3 countries, Iran, Afghanistan, and mainly Pakistan. Today, the region demands a separate nation of its own, and this idea is opposed by these 3 countries. While concentrating on Pakistan we could see that the people accuse the Government of exploiting their natural resources like gas but at the same time aren't doing much for the development of the people. Around 2 decades ago several insurgents from the region created the Baloch Liberation Army. Since then they have carried out several attacks in Pakistan. The Baloch liberation army is an ally of the Pakistani Taliban. And the region was also used by the Taliban for their drug trade. On the economic front, Pakistan is planning to collaborate with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan on the CASA 1000 Project which allows electricity transmission. It is a key partner in Afghanistan's coal exports. It also aims to make Afghanistan part of the China, and Pakistan economic corridor. Migration is another bone of contention between the two countries. In 2021 around 1.25 million Afghans, the majority of whom are women and children migrated to Pakistan and Iran. The people are living in Pakistan in miserable conditions with constant fear of deportation. In 2023 November Pakistan deported 541000 undocumented Afghans to their motherland and in 2024 the country is planning to execute its second deportation plan. Apart from the poor economic situation in Pakistan, the country is hostile to migrants mainly because they believe that the migrant Afghans are aiding the militants and other terrorist activities which is leading to an increase in terrorism in the country.

### **2. China**

China has always maintained balanced relations with Afghanistan. Various investments in the areas of infrastructure and industries including the recent mining project contract at Mes Aynak Copper Mine have been made. However the environmental cost of activities like mining is ignored, which is dangerous considering the vulnerability of Afghanistan to climate change. It also wishes to bring the Afghan territory under its belt and road initiative in the long run. China has been quite vocal about lifting the Western sanctions imposed and has engaged in several diplomatic meetings with the Taliban Government. The lithium reserves from Afghanistan can prove to be a boost to the electric vehicle industry of China. Afghanistan is important for China to reduce the insurgencies on the borders, boost its industries using minerals, and increase its influence in central Asia. The Chinese Government faces tension from the Muslim community in the Xinjiang province of China which is allegedly supported by the Taliban, so China sees amicable relations with the Taliban as a way to reduce the support of the

Muslim community and reduce tensions. It also plans to stop making Afghanistan a base for the Uighur militants with the help of the Taliban and also to bring the country under the ambit of the China-Pakistan economic corridor. However, people have doubts about whether the Chinese dependence on Afghanistan would eventually lead it to a debt trap. China and Iran have allowed Taliban representatives to operate embassies on their land.

### **3. USA**

The USA has played a significant role in Afghanistan since the 20th century. At present, there exists hostilities between both the countries but experts and the international community call for a pragmatic take on Afghanistan. The current US embassy for Afghanistan is located in Doha. As China and Russia are advancing their relation with Afghanistan it is the need of the hour for America to change its approach. Denying humanitarian assistance in such a critical situation when the people of the country according to the World Bank are multidimensionally poor would only cause further deprivation and unrest. Many in such a scenario have suggested the normalization of relations but on the other hand, the large-scale human rights violence and the Taliban not stopping it despite the sanctions, the country being a breeding ground for terrorists is against the ideals that the USA stands for. Hence it must adopt a pragmatic approach that doesn't compromise the security and ideals of the nation must be adopted.

### **4. Russia**

Afghanistan and Russia maintained amicable relations after the disintegration of the USSR, this continues with the Taliban regime too. In 2024 Russia decided to remove the Taliban from the list of terrorist organizations. Afghanistan is an area of mutual interest between Russia and India which on the other hand puts it in a dilemma when it comes to managing China's growing interest in the region. But the growth of terrorism in the Afghan region is a matter of concern for Russia too especially after the Islamic state Khorasan has made Russia one of its targets. Russia is also importing agricultural produce from Afghanistan. Russia also plans to use Afghanistan as a point to expand its oil trade in Asia using the newly proposed logistics hub in Afghanistan's Herat. Even though the international north-south transport corridor between Russia, Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India is not operative at present, Russia plans to utilize this route through Afghanistan to expand its trade in Asia and the Middle East. Afghanistan also took part in the Kazan BRICS Summit in Russia where the member countries have asked the Government to control the issues arising due to terrorism and narcotics and also to give women and girls more freedom.

### **5. Iran**

Iran's look east foreign policy recognizes the importance of Afghanistan in the Central Asian region. Iran had a long-term goal of making the region free of Western influence like the USA and its regional rivals like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia which put the regime change in a positive light for the country. Although they have not officially recognized the Taliban-led Afghanistan several diplomatic talks have been held in the past few years, Iran has also asked for the representation of minority groups that have ties with Iran in the Government. Despite facing US sanctions both countries have also had a trade worth 1 billion dollars proving their interdependence. Out of the total imports of Afghanistan 1/3rd is from Iran. The terrorism rooted in the Islamic State of Khorasan province is a threat to Iran too. Hence it aims at cooperating with the Taliban to tackle this common enemy. On the other hand, since both the countries face water scarcity sharing of the Helmand River's water there is a tension prevailing between them the recent dam construction plan on the river has escalated the tensions. Iran is also disturbed due

to the migration and narcotic business from Afghanistan. Unlike Pakistan, Iran is using Afghan refugees like that of the Hazaras to combat the threat of IS or for its proxy wars. Although both countries have similarities in religion, geography, and a bit in culture too, Iran is taking small and balanced steps in its relationship with Afghanistan.

## **6. Central Asia**

Apart from these countries, the Taliban Government has been building bilateral relations with fellow Central Asian countries too. Recently it signed a trade and investment deal with Uzbekistan. Under the deal, certain trade duties are cancelled. They are also working on developing the trans-Afghanistan railway which connects both countries. Uzbekistan is also a key trade partner of Afghanistan with around 461.4 million dollars of bilateral trade done in the first half of 2024. Taliban is also having talks about an agreement with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on building a logistics hub for trade in the western part of the nation. Kazakhstan also removed the Taliban from the list of terrorist organizations in 2023 and engaged in deals on energy, infrastructure, and agriculture. They have provided humanitarian assistance both financially and by supplying wheat. The countries are having talks on the Taliban establishing a trade mission in Astana. Turkmenistan is engaging with Afghanistan on projects for power transmission and transit connections. In 2024 both the countries signed a 200 million dollar trade deal. Kyrgyzstan has been supplying the Taliban regime with humanitarian aid but has certain security concerns too. The countries are also discussing the possibility of the construction of a transit route that can help traders reach China. They also support the CASA 1000 Power project. The Taliban's hostility towards the Tajiks in Afghanistan and the past terrorist activities have led Tajikistan not to maintain warm relations with the Taliban unlike countries like Uzbekistan which too has similar previous experience on terrorist activities. Although they are cooperating on the export of electricity the country has apprehensions about its security due to the activities of tehrík e Taliban Tajikistan.

## **VII. Economic System**

### **A. Economy during the republican Government**

In comparison to the present situation, the economic condition was far better during the republican Government. The economy heavily relied on aid and funds from the West. Which constituted up to 40% of the GDP. The system was rampantly corrupt under the republican regime which was subjected to constant criticism from the Government. Mainly due to the aid the economy grew 9% between 2002 to 2012 according to the World Bank, but the next decade saw decelerated economic growth. The covid 19 crisis and the Taliban's rise to power created a sense of uncertainty and political disturbances led to a lack of investments in the economy.

### **B. The present situation of the economy**

Under Taliban rule since 2021 the Afghan economy is in severe crisis. The country has stopped receiving humanitarian assistance from the West and countries like Russia and China aren't willing to support it at a much larger scale. Around 9.5 billion dollars that are part of the external reserves are frozen. Many Western nations along with the UN have imposed various sanctions on the country. 97% of Afghans are suffering from poverty, says a report published by the International Rescue Committee. Even though the country receives humanitarian assistance it is not something viable for the long-term development of the country. The banking system of a country cannot solely rely on such transfers to function properly. According to the UN, a 27 per cent contraction in GDP occurred between 2021 and 2023. Many jobs providing industries

from entertainment to beauty parlours are closed leaving many unemployed. Even the funds of 3.5 billion dollars kept by the Biden Government as part of funds for the Afghan people haven't been used yet. Denial of making women part of the workforce is also adding a toll on the economy. Exclusion of women from the economy will not only lead to a reduction in GDP but also lead to a brain drain in the country. But the Afghan society does see a glimmer of hope with the steps taken by the Taliban Government in curbing corruption and the centralized taxation system which have proven to be successful at least to a certain extent. Trade relations with foreign countries are also slowly gaining strength. Although the UN has imposed sanctions it still provides a certain amount of financial aid to boost the economy. Nontax revenues like royalties and vehicle tax are also important sources of income for the economy. According to a World Bank report, consumer prices will decrease in June 2024 and deflation has also been seen slowing down since January. The regional trade and exports of coal and minerals proved beneficial for the country. Even the currency turned out to be the best-performing one in 2024's third quarter. As per the World Bank, the increase in revenue collection saw an increase of 8%. Instead of roadside checkpoints official border points are used. Export of textiles, wood, etc is increasing, mainly with Iran which is also the largest import partner. Pakistan is the largest export market and India is the second. Food exports hold a major share in exports to India. Despite all this, The trade deficit is growing. In 2024 a decline in coal exports was seen which led to an overall fall in total exports. In the import sector, we can see that manufacturing inputs like machinery and chemicals are being imported in good numbers.

### **C. Current status of sectors of the economy**

The Afghan economy is heavily reliant on agriculture. The ban on poppy and opium massively cut down its production. In addition to a loss of 1.3 billion, this action also led to unemployment. There are no signs of people shifting to other crops or sources of income. We should not ignore the fact that many crops like wheat don't give as much return as poppy but are also unsustainable. Unlike poppy, many crops are not drought-resistant. The ban is not just on the cultivation of opium but also on the production and sale of all illegal narcotic substances. Many landlords are exploiting this situation by illegally producing and selling narcotics at exorbitant prices with the help of the existing inventory and massive stock of opium. Taliban has taken no measures to revive the condition of the farmers who have lost their livelihood. The opium ban has resulted in unemployment of around 450000 people and a loss of 1.3 billion dollars in income for the farmers. The other areas under the agriculture sectors are badly affected by climatic changes, harsh winters, natural disasters, and poor infrastructure. The lack of sufficient economic activity and public expenditure has led to the downfall of the formal financial sector; in contrast, the informal sector is doing good. On the industrial side, the medium and small financial sectors are not performing well. The mining sector holds great potential to revive the Afghan economy and currently, the Government is engaging in various trade activities and agreements to make use of this. The heavy dependence on foreign players is also important due to the lack of necessary infrastructure to utilize the sector. With the Taliban taking up a more nuanced stance on the internet and technology unlike its previous regime, the telecommunication sector is seeing investments in network infrastructure. At Least in the urban areas, a good number of people are seen to be using mobiles and the internet. Taliban is also paying attention to reviving the Tourism sector by taking steps like opening institutes for tourism and hospitality but the success of the sector could be difficult with the existing draconian laws, severed relations with other countries, and poor infrastructure. The private sector just like the local economies is facing a lack of capital. The difficulty in travelling abroad freely and easily is holding back businesses from flourishing. After being cut off from aid and banning several

occupations, the Afghan economy is trying to sustain certain income sources like remittances from abroad. Many remittances are sent through the hawala money transfer system but this is not sufficient to run the economy. With the freezing of the central bank assets and lack of economic activity has left the banking sector crippled. The banks have seen a significant decline in deposits, liquidity, and international transactions. The downfall of the formal banking sector has led to people shifting to cash and other nontraditional methods of payment. The service sector which earlier contributed around 45% of the GDP has reduced to 6.5 in 2022 with the measures adopted by the Taliban in fields of education, health, etc.

#### **D. Relation with international organizations**

Since the Taliban came into power the relations of the country with international organizations have not been very smooth. Many international organizations like the UN have imposed sanctions on the country. The International Monetary Fund has suspended the Taliban from accessing Afghanistan's monetary reserves worth 440 million dollars in 2021 and has not maintained any cordial relations since then. Other institutions like the World Bank and UNDP have been working for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan since 2021. The World Bank has contributed over 1.5 billion dollars to the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund to assist the Afghans in various ways by providing essential services. They have specifically taken 3 approaches to aid Afghanistan, first is approach 1.0 to provide emergency health and nutrition, the second is approach 2.0 which provides critical services and approach 3.0 which focuses on essential needs and women's empowerment. They are also keeping a close check on the independent management of the funds by the Taliban. They are also providing aid to the private sector for job creation. The UNDP has also been supporting microfinance initiatives in Afghanistan but they face challenges from the low cash flow. They are also working for women and children. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has also excluded Afghanistan from its meetings since 2021 despite being a major trade partner of many member countries. Afghanistan's membership in the World Trade Organization was revoked with the Taliban's ascendant to power and at present aims to regain it. The Taliban leadership has also been conducting talks with the WTO. Luckily due to the intervention by Pakistan, lack of consensus among members, and the dilemma faced by the organization on interfering in internal matters and no clear provisions for the expulsion of members has allowed it to remain as a member of SAARC..Lately, the Taliban has also expressed its interest in joining the BRICS.

### **VIII. Relations with India**

#### **A. Historical ties**

India-Afghan relations trace their history back to the ancient era and have shared a common history mostly till the Mughal emperor Jahangir lost it too. Both countries share cultural similarities. Afghanistan is a country of great importance to India, the strategic location of being close to Pakistan and as the path to central Asia, hence India has always tried to maintain cordial relations with the country irrespective of the powerholders. During both the later Cold War and the republican era India provided support to the country. A friendship treaty was signed between the countries in 1950. During the republican Government's rule, India has contributed to several infrastructure development projects like the new parliament building, Salma dam, etc. India has supported the country with various aid on humanitarian terms and also for the education of Afghan children. In 2005 India supported the country for its membership in SAARC. Further developing their bilateral relations the nations signed the strategic partnership agreement which addressed matters like defence training, reconstruction efforts, etc. A

milestone in India-Afghan trade relations was the 2016 Chabahar agreement signed between India, Iran, and Afghanistan. The port which is located in southeastern Iran allows India to trade with Central Asian countries without depending on Pakistan and to resist the increasing Chinese influence. However, the regime change, US sanctions on Afghanistan, and other changes in the geopolitical scenario delayed the project.

### **B. Present scenario**

The Taliban's advent to power in 2021, led India to launch Operation Devi Shakti for the evacuation of all the Indians in Afghanistan. Later on in the UN the country supported resolution 2593 and called for an inclusive Government and to stop Afghan soil from being a haven for terrorist groups. After the takeover, India sent its first delegation to Afghanistan in 2022. India has not recognized the Taliban-led Afghanistan but is maintaining pragmatic relations with the country. Afghan consul services are also active in Mumbai. On one hand, India has given aid to the country, like food, medical supplies, and vaccines for COVID-19 on the other hand India is critical of human rights violations, atrocities against minorities, and Afghanistan being a breeding ground for terrorism. India also lent a hand of care even when the country was struck by a devastating earthquake. Although both countries do not have proper diplomatic relations India has placed its technical mission to manage the aid delivery. Even during the 2024 Bishkek meet India advocated for an inclusive Afghan Government. Despite the opium ban, Afghanistan is an epicenter of drug supply which now is also gaining its roots in nearby Indian states like that of Punjab. The budget of 2023-24 had allocated 200 crores for providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Replying to a question from the parliament the minister for external affairs Shri Dr. S Jaishankar, a year ago stated that India has collaborated with the United Nations office on drugs and crime to the drug user population and has supplied various essential items to them. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations has given admission to around 3000 Afghani students and has also introduced the e-vidya Bharti platform to help them apply for scholarships. Online scholarships are also provided to Afghan students in Afghan national agricultural sciences and technical universities. The country is also maintaining trade relations with Afghanistan using the Chabahar port. Normalization of relations between the 2 countries has a long way to go due to the Taliban being adamant about not changing its stance on human rights and the prevalence of terrorism in Afghanistan but India is pragmatically handling the matters in its interest.

## **IX. Challenges Faced**

Denial of basic human rights has reached a level of normalcy in present-day Afghanistan. Under the Taliban regime, human rights are undermined in the name of the religion, culture, and political supremacy of the Taliban. These violations can be viewed across different groups.

### **A. Atrocities against women**

Taliban has always been infamously known for its treatment of women. The Ministry of Vice and Virtues frequently brings out draconian laws cutting down the rights of women one after the other. The moment the Taliban came to power in 2021, the international community was afraid of the re-imposition of the discriminative dogmatic rules upon women that deprived them of their basic aspirations. In Afghanistan under the Taliban women are not allowed to gain education beyond the primary level or work, not even in NGOs and international bodies. Women have to completely cover themselves in burkhas as per the way mentioned in the law, they cannot go outside without any man who is related to them by blood or their husband who is their mahram, can't let their voice be heard in public, can't talk to any men other than their



mahram, to any nonmuslim individual and most shockingly to any other women. Recent news also reports of increasing child marriage and divorced women asking to return to their husbands. In cases of noncompliance with these rules, the women are severely punished using techniques like public stoning. Although supporting women's rights would help the Taliban acquire funds from the West, seeing the present circumstances it's unsure whether the condition of women will change in reality or not. The international community has blocked humanitarian assistance and funds but still, a minor level of assistance towards social welfare is being provided by various organizations like the World Bank, and undertaking the condition of the women. The rampant poverty, food shortages, poor healthcare, and other socio-economic problems are adding to the sufferings of women. In rural regions, such situations are the causes of child marriages. Families with only women are facing more troubles as their mobility and employment are restricted. Women are strictly prohibited from being in homosexual relations, not religiously following Islamic customs too. The suppression of women's voices is seen as a way to prevent the information on atrocities faced by them from reaching out to the world. The frequent morality laws introduced by the Taliban are leading to a gender apartheid in the country.

### **B. Human rights violation - minorities and others**

Apart from women, various other Muslim, Pashtun, and Sunni groups face persecution in Afghanistan. Here minorities are not just limited to nonmuslim religious minorities like Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, the scope of tormented minorities by the Taliban includes the Shias and other ethnic minority groups, like nomadic groups like jogi and Chori frosh. Despite being Muslim the right to religious observance of the Shia minority is violated. The Government is also accused of practising discriminative treatment against various ethnic groups. Hazaras are one such community that has garnered much attention due to discriminatory practices and atrocities unleashed by the Taliban. The Hazaras are Shiite and are considered inferior by the other inhabitants of the land. The inhumane practices against them can be traced back to the 19th century and even before. Since 2021 the Hazaras have been constantly tormented by the Taliban by removing them from holding any position of power in the state, evicting them from their homeland. They face excessive violence and extrajudicial killings too. In addition to all these horrors under Taliban rule, now they are also targeted by Islamic State Khorasan Province. Nonmuslim minority groups like Hindus and Sikhs feel threatened in practicing their religion and culture under Taliban rule. Many also claim that they have to dress up like Muslims. Many are in the hope of immigrating to India. Recently the Taliban has said that it is working to return the land of Hindus and Sikhs which were illegally snatched from them by the warlords. But it will take time to see how far these steps have been successful.

### **C. Condition of media**

Taliban has always despised voices of criticism against their tyrannical rule. The most common source of dissent is the media and according to UN sources journalists are suppressed and many news channels or outlets are closed restricting any press activity that goes against the regime. The overemphasis on the sharia has even prohibited the media from publishing images of living things since 2024. Since the very beginning, they carefully censored all information going out to the citizens. Although the Taliban was in strict opposition to media platforms like social media and TV, even the internet was banned during its first rule, at present things have taken a small turn, post-2001, the terrorist groups themselves are using various social media platforms like a telegram to attract people and get members for their groups. The Taliban even carried this out at a decentralized level. So, currently, people are using the internet and related facilities constantly monitored by the Taliban and even censored at times.

#### **D. Challenges to the survival of culture under the Taliban regime**

The cultural system of Afghanistan comprising art, architecture, handicrafts, music, and many other components is a result of cultural integration and assimilation from different other cultures. It's extremely vivid and is a great source to attract tourists. But unfortunately, the Taliban regime opposes these. Music, Dance, theatre, and filmography are banned in Afghanistan as the Taliban considers them haram, this not only throttles culture but also leads to loss of employment. Buddhism was an integral part of Afghanistan before the Islamic invasions and is still reflected in Afghan culture, despite the Taliban's 2001 destroyed the famous Bamiyan Buddha statue which was even a UNESCO World Heritage site because as per the Islamic law, no living thing could be visually represented. This is just one incident that is widely known due to global protests against the destruction, according to various local sources many other representations of a living form from statues to paintings were destroyed by the Taliban. Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, the ministry oversees whether the instructions about following the Islamic law at all levels of society are strictly followed, they have even punished several artisans like musicians for secretly practising music. There have also been instances of destroying literature that belonged to the Shiite Hazara group. Surprisingly recent reports state that the new Taliban regime is not against artefacts and archaeology as during its previous term. Even a special police force is set up for cultural preservation. But people view these actions quite sceptically because cultural destruction by the Taliban came in the later part of its rule during the first term and maybe the current actions could be to appease the international and domestic community and once their regime gets stronger it could return to its original nature.

#### **X. Conclusion and Future**

Afghanistan amidst all the crises today is at a critical juncture and the steps taken today can make or destroy its future. The Taliban must gradually let go of its age-old regressive and inhumane practices and must modernize its values and the governance of the nation as a whole. Only then can it revive the nation and its foreign relations. A tyrannical rule can never create a fruitful state that ensures the overall development of all citizens. A more liberal and modernized approach is indispensable for a stronger economy and polity. Human development too is equally crucial in all terms, for the overall growth of society. Human rights violations must be immediately stopped. The diverse and pluralistic identity of the country must be retained. Even Though these suggestions are given for a better future for the country, the news reports one hand show the steps for economic revival and on the other show grave human rights violations. Hence, the future of Afghanistan appears to be bleak.

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