

Afghanistan Crisis

September 7, 2021

The Taliban's Emirate has been re-established. What will happen going forward, not just for Afghanistan, but also the region and beyond?

In news: Return of Taliban has implications for India

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions

- What is the crisis about ?
- History
- Impact of the crisis on Global Politics
- Impact of the crisis on the Region
- Impact of the crisis on India
- How should India handle it?

Content:

What is the crisis about?

- In rapid takeover, Taliban regained control over country, prompting fall of govt and ending 20-year U.S. occupation
- In mid-August 2021, Taliban militants swept into Kabul, completing their takeover of Afghanistan and marking a new phase in what has been the world's most lethal conflict in recent years.
- Surprising everyone, the Taliban won a stunning military and political victory.
- The United States (US)-supported Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani could not stand up to the Taliban assaults and ultimately surrendered.

History:

The Afghanistan conflict was a series of wars fought in

Afghanistan from 1978 through 2021.

The conflict includes:

The Saur Revolution of 1978:

- It happened when the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew the government of the Republic of Afghanistan, which was headed by president Mohammed Daoud Khan.
- It then established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, a Communist state which allied itself with the Soviet Union

The Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989):

- The Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989) started when the Soviet Army intervened in the country in order to support the ruling PDPA following large-scale rebellions against the government.
- Soviet troops along with the allied Afghan Army fought against rebel factions which were mostly collectively known as the “Afghan mujahideen”.
- Afghan Mujahideen were backed by countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Egypt and West Germany.
- The war ended with the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989;

The Afghan Civil War (1989–1992):

- The Afghan Civil War was the continuing war between the government and the mujahideen, but without the involvement of Soviet troops.
- Nevertheless, the Soviet Union continued to financially support the Afghan government in its fight, and likewise, mujahideen factions continued to receive support from the United States and Pakistan.
- The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan survived until

the fall of Kabul in 1992, after which the mujahideen established the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

The Afghan Civil War (1992–1996):

- Another Civil War began when various mujahideen groups withdrew support from and began fighting against the Islamic State, including Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, later largely replaced by the Taliban and al-Qaeda (all of whom were supported by Pakistan), Hezb-i Wahdat (who were supported by Iran), and Junbish-i Milli (who were supported by Uzbekistan).
- Mujahideen loyal to the Islamic State were supported by Saudi Arabia.
- This phase of the war ended when the Taliban captured Kabul and established the partially recognised Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan;

The Afghan Civil War (1996–2001):

- The Afghan Civil War (1996–2001) was the continuation of the previous phase of the war, between militias loyal to the rival Islamic State and Islamic Emirate.
- Islamic State loyalists reorganised into the Northern Alliance, including Hezb-i Wahdat and Junbish-i Milli, who previously opposed the Islamic State.
- During the civil war, Al-Qaeda began committing terrorist attacks against the United States, culminating in the September 11 attacks, after which the Islamic Emirate lost almost all international support and diplomatic recognition

US Backed – War in Afghanistan (2001–2021):

- The War in Afghanistan (2001–2021) began with the NATO invasion of Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, seeking to remove the Taliban from power as they were hosting al-Qaeda militants.
- After the invasion overthrew the Taliban and established

the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the war turned into a protracted insurgency, with Afghan National Army and NATO troops fighting the re-organised Taliban and sporadically other groups such as al-Qaeda, Haqqani network, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin and ISIS-K.

- After the withdrawal of NATO forces and the 2021 Taliban offensive, the Islamic Republic fell to the Taliban and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was re-established.

The Panjshir conflict:

- The Panjshir conflict occurred in 2021 when the remaining forces loyal to the Islamic Republic reorganised into the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan in the Panjshir Valley.
- Despite having international recognition as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, the National Resistance Front received no foreign support.
- Attempts at a ceasefire were made as final victory by Taliban forces occurred with their capture of the valley on 6 September 2021.

Impact of the crisis on Global Politics:

After the withdrawal of US forces under the Doha Agreement, Pakistan's Afghan policy regained its prime.

Probable Shift in Global Power Balance:

- The long term consequence may be that the Afghan War symbolizes a global shift away from US power.
- The US became a global hegemon in the wake of the Second World War and Cold War and that has led to the construction of an American world order based around US allies and partners from South Korea to Israel, from NATO to US bases that used to be in place like Afghanistan.
- As the US withdraws, there are calls for more American withdrawals, such as from Iraq and Syria.

- The consequences are not just the immediate power vacuum or empowering US adversaries, and not just a blow to US reputation.

US-China Competition:

- With the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, the US now will have better options and greater resources in dealing with China.
- On the other hand, the absence of the US in Central Asia provides an opportunity for China in that region.

Rising Global Influence of Qatar:

- Afghan crisis raises Qatari influence on global stage
- Political leaders have flocked to Doha and some countries have moved their Kabul embassies to Qatar, all praising their host for its key role in the airlift out of the Afghan capital.
- Tiny Qatar has seized the moment, cementing its outsized global influence and reputation as a neutral mediator after winning the trust of all sides in Afghanistan's forever war.
- Doha's long-standing hotline to the Taliban ultimately helped Qatar burst onto the world stage as the lynchpin of efforts to evacuate desperate Afghans and foreigners – and now the push to reopen Kabul airport.

Engagement with Taliban and Conciliation

- Many external actors, such as China and Russia, have been conciliatory toward the Taliban, even hinting at formal recognition.

Humanitarian Crisis and Migration

- US surrender to the Taliban will have deleterious effects far beyond Afghanistan.
- Another migration crisis in Europe could be among the most consequential.

- Migrants and refugees from Syria, Iraq and Libya will be joined by people from Afghanistan
- The coming influx of tens of thousands of unvetted Afghan migrants will undoubtedly result in a much more grave humanitarian crisis as well as national security threat

Impact of the crisis on the Region

Refugee Crisis:

- The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan created thousands of fearful Afghan refugees desperate to leave the country.
- However, humanitarian efforts from neighboring countries, particularly in Central Asia, have been lackluster.

Uncertainties / Regional Instability:

- The situation in Central Asia has fundamentally changed since a hotspot of instability developed.
- Much will be determined by the Taliban's policies, which is now difficult to anticipate.

Impacts on Neighbours:

- Among Afghanistan's neighbours, India and Iran are two countries that would find accommodation with a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan very difficult. This is due to their warm relations with the Karzai and the Ghani regimes in the past two decades.
- **Iran** can't ignore the Sunni extremism of the Taliban and its oppressive record in dealing with the Shia, and Persian-speaking minorities.
- **Pakistan:** Geography has given Pakistan the capability to destabilize any government in Afghanistan. There is a danger of the conflict spilling over to the east of the Durand Line, and hostile groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) gaining sanctuaries in

Afghanistan.

- **China:** potential Taliban support to the Xinjiang separatist groups is a major concern.
- **Afghanistan:** If the Taliban is unwilling to accommodate the interests of all Afghans, it simply sets the stage for the next round of the civil war in Afghanistan.

Impact of the crisis on India:

Asylum to displaced persons from Afghanistan:

- Hundreds of Afghan nationals, many of them allied to the previous Ghani government, are seeking to leave the country, and have applied for visas from the Indian Embassy in Kabul.
- Among them are those with links to India, who have studied or trained here, or with families in India, or those who could face reprisal attacks from Taliban militia.
- If the government does accept them, then arrangements for what could be thousands of refugees will need to be made.

Cross-Border Terrorism & Security

- There are concerns that anti-India terror groups could occupy space in Afghanistan to carry out terror attacks against India.
- The Pakistan army used the jihadi armies to gain control of Afghanistan and launched a proxy war against India, especially in the Punjab and Kashmir regions.

Challenge of Pakistan's Proximity to Taliban:

- The larger questions that the government faces are about how its strategic options in Afghanistan will change given the Taliban's proximity to Pakistan's establishment.
- India's influence with the new government is likely to

be considerably curtailed, as Pakistan's influence over the Taliban remains strong, and the government will have to reconsider whether to now engage Pakistan directly as well.

How should India handle it?

Short-Term Measures

- India should securely evacuate Indian diplomatic personnel and other citizens from Afghanistan. This will require a major logistical effort.
- The government of India must also offer refuge to those Afghans who have worked with Indian initiatives and are desperate to avoid potential retribution from the Taliban

Diplomatic Channels

- India should engage the Taliban. A large number of players in the international community are going to recognise/negotiate/do business with the Taliban. So, basic statecraft requires that we follow that route as well.
- Also, the less proactive the Indian engagement with the Taliban, the stronger Pakistan-Taliban relations would become.
- Regardless of whether or not India recognises the Taliban as the legitimate ruler in Afghanistan, the government will have to open channels of communication to engage the Taliban
- Other strategic issues involving future connectivity, which India had sought to do via Chabahar port in Iran, must also be considered in the longer term.
- India must make all possible efforts to get the international community to hold the Taliban to its word on letting all foreigners leave with peace, protecting the lives of all Afghan citizens, and respecting

international humanitarian law.

- India also chairs the Taliban Sanctions Committee of the UNSC. It will have an important role in framing the international response to the Taliban's demands for the lifting of all sanctions against its leaders.
- Similarly, India should also make the international community provide humanitarian assistance to the large number of Afghan people displaced by fighting.

Domestic Measures

- India must maintain vigil against a resurgence of cross-border terrorism that could quickly destabilize Kashmir and escalate the conflict between India and Pakistan.

Mould your thought: The rapid collapse of the Afghan government and the triumphant return of the Taliban will have a considerable impact around the world. Evaluate.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the present Afghan Crisis briefly
- Discuss Impact of the Crisis on World Politics
- Discuss Impact of the Crisis on the Region
- Discuss Impact of the Crisis on India
- Conclusion