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AFGHANISTAN WATCH

16-31 AUG 2022

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AFGHANISTAN

Taliban Accuses Pakistan of Allowing US Drones in Afghan Airspace

Source:- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/28/taliban-accuses-pakistan-of-allowing-us-drones-in-afghan-airspace>

The Taliban's acting defence minister has said Pakistan allowed American drones to use its airspace to access Afghanistan, a charge Pakistan has recently denied following a US air strike in Kabul. Acting Minister of Defence Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob told reporters at a news conference in Kabul on Sunday that American drones have been entering Afghanistan via Pakistan.

Comments. Yaqoob's allegations are likely to fuel mutual tensions as Taliban is currently mediating talks between Pakistan & TTP (which is currently seeking shelter in Afghanistan). Though, Taliban relies heavily on trade with and through Pakistan to overcome economic and humanitarian challenges, the recent incursion of TTP militants in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Swat valley may have forced Islamabad to re-engage with the US. Taliban's frequent appearances will jeopardise the talks between the two sides. That said, Pakistan's renewed efforts to build a fence across the 2,600-kilometer border, will alienate Taliban altogether, forfeiting any chance of a peace deal.

India Argues against Meddling in Internal Affairs of Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan

Source:- <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/deccanherald-epaper-dh881cfe1ab97d482fb3abb8994f502a8b/india+argues+against+meddling+in+internal+affairs+of+taliban+ruled+afghanistan-newsid-n416495340>

India on Wednesday not only called for respecting the sovereignty and independence of Afghanistan but also emphasised avoiding meddling in the internal affairs of the conflict-ravaged country currently ruled by the Taliban.

It stressed on ensuring that Afghanistan's territory must not be used to intimidate or carry out terror strikes on any other nation. It reiterated its call for dialogue among all parties to set up an inclusive and representative government in the country.

After Defence Minister Rajnath Singh participated in a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Tashkent on Wednesday, a press release quoted him voicing India's full support for a peaceful, secure, and stable Afghanistan.

Comments. India's outreach to the Taliban is principally aimed to prevent Pakistan from turning the group's return to power into a strategic advantage against the country. To this end, India must continue to maintain people to people connect by ensuring steady supply of humanitarian aid while establishing steady communication directly with the Taliban leadership. On numerous platforms, India has been voicing against militant factions (primarily AQ, LeT & TTP) using Afghanistan as a safe haven. With AQ struggling to find a successor, and TTP looking for a peace deal with Islamabad on their terms, it is yet to see how Taliban will deliver its promise.

India Delivers Fresh Batch of Medical Supplies to Afghanistan

Source:- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-delivers-fresh-batch-of-medical-supplies-to-afghanistan-101661017226696.html>

India on Saturday supplied a fresh batch of medical supplies to Afghanistan as part of its humanitarian assistance. The consignments of medical aid were handed over to the Indira Gandhi hospital in Kabul.

"Today, India supplied the 10th batch of medical assistance as part of India's ongoing humanitarian assistance," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. In view of the urgent appeals made by the United Nations to assist the Afghan people, India has, so far, supplied 32 tons of medical assistance in 10 batches.

Comments. India's policy to establish people to people connect has provided confidence even within the ranks of Taliban who constantly voice for more engagement in the context of humanitarian aid. As a part of the package, India has provided anti-TB medicines along with 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines which has been handed over to the World Health Organization (WHO) and Indira Gandhi Children Hospital, Kabul. Medical institutions/Hospitals such as the Indira Gandhi Children Hospital provides care to over 150 patients at a time with a 360-bed facility. At the peak of covid-19, the hospital saw an intake of over 1,000 patients a day, many from distant provinces in addition to 250-350 admitted daily. With a collapsed healthcare system, India must provide technical assistance (with support of WHO/ICRC) in the context of developing hospital infrastructure and medical training support in some of the larger provinces in the country.

In Afghanistan \$7.1B in Planes, Trucks, Weapons Seized by Taliban since Withdrawal: DOD Watchdog

Source:- <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/08/in-afghanistan-7-1b-in-planes-trucks-weapons-seized-by-taliban-since-withdrawal-dod-watchdog/>

Nearly one year after the last US military aircraft departed Kabul, the SIGAR report says approximately \$7.1 billion in US-funded planes, trucks and weaponry, all provided to the Afghan military, has been seized by the Taliban. The breakdown includes \$923 million in aircraft, \$4.1 billion in ground vehicles and \$511.8 million in weapons, according to a report published today by the inspector general for Operation Enduring Sentinel and Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The report was produced as part of the watchdog's quarterly updates to Congress on the military campaigns.

Comments. In reference to the SIGAR report, the hoarding of modern weapons and armour points towards Taliban's capability to *prove an equal* against their adversary at least in the context of modern arms. The Haqqani Network has both the means and the capabilities of smuggling the weapons out of Kabul. They may use it in the form of revenue by selling it in the black market, which would help them raise significant finances. There is no doubt that Pakistan will be the first buyer, who will hand over the said caches to Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba fighters, resulting in an increased incursion at the Indian LOC.

Obaid ur Reh-man Nizamani Appointed Pakistan's New Ambassador to Afghanistan

Source:- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/obaid-ur-rehman-nizamani-appointed-pakistan-s-new-ambassador-to-afghanistan-101661604178750.html>

Senior career diplomat Obaid ur Reh-man Nizamani has been appointed Pakistan's new ambassador to Taliban-rule Afghanistan. Currently serving as the director general Europe at the foreign ministry, Nizamani has more than 20 years of experience in Foreign Service. This will be Nizamani's first ambassadorial posting. He also served as the director general South Asia in the ministry. Nizamani also served in the Pakistan embassy in Washington as deputy head of the mission from 2015 till 2019.

Comments. The appointment of Obaid ur Reh-man Nizamani as the new Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan confirms what Taliban has always alleged, Washington's steady influence on Pakistan's Afghan policy. Ambassador Nizamani has served for over twenty years in the Foreign Service and much recently held the appointment of Director General Europe, before relinquishing the appointment of Director General South Asia. He was instrumental in retaining Pakistan's influence in Washington's Af-Pak policy through a four-year stint as the Deputy head of mission in Washington. This was a time when EU and international institutions including US military commanders expressed discontent on Pakistan's duplicity towards Afghan affairs. This further points towards Taliban's renewed allegations on Pakistan permitting Washington to use its airspace against active Taliban members. It also means that the US will continue to rely on Pakistan post withdrawal and in return Islamabad may seek some relief through financial/economic package. Ambassador Nizamani could further play a mediating role between Washington & Taliban leadership, however, it is yet to see how far will Washington exercise influence or Islamabad mould under the said influence.

Want to Export Goods to India like Pakistan, Says Taliban Minister in Afghanistan

Source:- <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/afghanistan-taliban-foreign-minister-amir-khan-muttaqi-india-export-request-1989506-2022-08-18>

Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is the Foreign Minister of the Taliban government of Afghanistan, has sought to export goods to India. He said that the Taliban want good relations with all countries. Addressing an event in Kandahar, Muttaqi said: "The Islamic Emirate wants good relations with all countries. But relations after 20 years of war with some countries are not expected to be normalised quickly." Muttaqi was speaking to a gathering of tribal leaders in Kandahar."

Comments. Taliban played a key role by assisting India in transporting goods to Uzbekistan via the Pakistani transit routes. Through this Taliban tried to demonstrate the role of a reliable partner. This is evident in their repetitive comments to woo Indian leadership and repetitive emphasis on historical and strategic partnership once shared. Though Taliban government is not recognised by India as a legitimate, its efforts to strengthen trade relationship could bring India closer to their decision-making ecosystem. India may use this as an opportunity to increase the trade partnership in the light of Chabahar's absence of connectivity from the port to the Afghan border.

In 2020-21, India's exports to Afghanistan stood at \$825 million, whereas imports were at \$509 million. In terms of imports India were 74% higher in 2020-21 as compared to \$509 million in 2016-17. Today, the export from India to Afghanistan are shipped via Karachi port in Pakistan where the consignments are offloaded before they are again loaded in trucks to be delivered at the Af-Pak border points of Torkham and Chaman. A trade agreement with Taliban will provide India direct access to its borders through an air corridor.