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**Taliban Takes
Over 14
Diplomatic
Missions, Wants
To Control More
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Afghanistan: Taliban Takes Over 14 Diplomatic Missions, Wants to Control More Missions

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Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021 after overthrowing the internationally-recognised government, diplomats of the former government have continued to run missions abroad in coordination with the Taliban's foreign ministry. Amid international isolation, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has so far taken control of 14 diplomatic missions abroad. While no country has so far recognised the Taliban regime, there are countries working with it and which have supported it since inception, such as Pakistan, China, and Russia, and these three features among the 14 countries where Afghan diplomatic missions have been taken over by the Taliban regime. The Taliban continues to face international isolation as countries and international organisation refuse to recognise its regime over its unlawful takeover of the country and its suppression of basic human rights of girls and women in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021 after overthrowing the internationally-recognised government, diplomats of the former government have continued to run missions abroad in coordination with the Taliban's foreign ministry.

Comments

Background

In the initial Taliban rule (between 1996 to 2001), the world witnessed Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognizing the then Islamic Emirate. Though, no nation has formally recognized the Taliban government since taking over Kabul more than a year ago, the Taliban is isolated at the global level than it was during the initial rule. That said, the Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu became the first public official to call international community in providing recognition to the Islamic Emirate[1]. While the Taliban leadership is creating greater diplomatic momentum, the apprehensions displaced by the West has resulted in greater diplomatic conundrum especially after the targeted killing of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, and according one Kabul based scholar received regular briefings from the Taliban interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani.[2]

[1] News Desk. 2022. "Islamic Emirate Must Take Steps for Recognition: Cavusoglu." TOLO News, March 14, 2022. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177104>.

[2] Interview with the author

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With that, Iran becomes the newest member in the list of states to have formally handed over the Afghan embassy in Tehran over to the Taliban and accept the group's diplomats without formally recognising the group's government. According to one scholar, the Taliban has already dispatched a seven-member team of diplomats, under the leadership of a chargé d'affaires to formally assume the charge of Afghanistan's embassy in Tehran. With this, Iran joins several neighbouring and regional countries which has permitted Taliban to nominate staff and manage Afghan diplomatic missions within their respective countries.

An IEA embassy in Tajikistan?

In a sudden shift of events, the Afghan consulate in the eastern Tajik city of Khorog has aligned themselves with Kabul, whereas the staff at the main embassy in Dushanbe, are still weighing their options. While speaking to a Dushanbe based scholar, the Khorog consulate has been issuing Afghan passports (in the name of previous regime) and the staff have been receiving salaries (in the past two months) from the IEA.[3] Though the consulate comes under the administrative jurisdiction of the embassy, since uncovering the link with the IEA, the consulate is not being directed on any matters from the embassy. That said, the Dushanbe based embassy had severed all communications with the Taliban government while pledging their allegiance to the erstwhile Republic's First Vice President, Amrullah Saleh.

On taking a tour of the embassy, the scholar found boundary walls of the consulate in repairs (which was destroyed in earlier avalanche), with a full-house consulate staff, working on regular affairs.[4] The scholar further mentioned a visit by a senior Taliban official who administered the basic repair work and overview certain activities of the consulate.

The visit couldn't be possible without Dushanbe's approval, which continues to adopt a frosty outlook Taliban since the group overthrowing the Republic under the erstwhile president Ashraf Ghani in August 2021. At this point it is impossible to identify if the Taliban official meet Tajik representatives within the foreign ministry or any senior Tajik official, but the continued trade relationship between the two nations paints a different picture altogether.

[3] Interview with the author

[4] Interview with the author

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According to a Dushanbe based scholar, the trade between the two nations was capped at \$111mn in 2022 (which primarily includes Tajik experts to Afghanistan), almost one-third more than it was recorded in 2021, with main exports being electricity and cement.[5]

That said, President Rahmon has delivered some of staunch criticism against the incumbent Taliban regime in his speeches.[6] After the fall of Kabul, he negated the idea of recognizing the Taliban's rule until and unless the country's ethnic Tajik minority, (which according to him was 46%), was inculcated in the critical decision-making process.[7] His anti-Taliban stance was further bolstered when he bestowed state honors (posthumously) to the Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani.[8] To that note, conscious of the Massoud bloodline, President Rahmon not only offered sanctuary to Massoud's son, Ahmad, but provided platform to rally his fighters, technical hardware and necessary monetary support to an alliance which later became the Northern Resistance Front.

Mapping International Engagement with Taliban

According to one Tehran based scholar who has been monitoring international engagements (bilateral meetings) with Taliban, from a total of 178 bilateral engagements (46%) were undertaken in the Middle Eastern states, making it the preferred destination for engagements for a regional bloc.[9] Though Western nations have largely engaged in multilateral discussions with Taliban, states outside this regional bloc have preferred for bilateral engagements. This point towards a greater discontent within the Western nations that exists beyond global discussion platforms focusing humanitarian aid. That said, according to the scholar, China has met the Taliban officials more than any other state, highlighting the significance of the Islamic Emirate in the great-power competition that brings back the focus of West's apprehension from terrorism perspective and ramifications from engaging with sharia-based islamists faction. However, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and other officials have been careful in making statements on their non-interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs.

[5] Interview with the author

[6] Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy. 2021. "Tajikistan Sends Stern Message to Taliban on Minorities in Government." The Economic Times, September 12, 2021. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/tajikistan-sends-stern-message-to-taliban-on-minorities-in-govt/articleshow/86122259.cms?from=mdr>.

[7] RFE/RL's Tajik Service. 2021. "Tajikistan's Rahmon Warns UN Of 'Serious Threats' Emanating From Neighbouring Afghanistan." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 24, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/rahmon-tajikistan-taliban/31476036.html>.

[8] Chaturvedi, Amit. 2021. "Tajikistan Honours Lion of Panjshir Ahmad Shah Massoud after Two Decades." Hindustan Times, September 2, 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/tajikistan-honours-lion-of-panjshir-ahmad-shah-massoud-after-two-decades-101630593138174.html>.

[9] Interview with the author

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Source: New York Post

But the world witnessed Mr. Wang plant a commemorative tree inside the Taliban's MoFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) compound with hope of a prosperous Afghanistan.[10]

Since then, Beijing continues to engage with the group through the Afghanistan-China Business Association, which specializes in providing resource support to Chinese investment companies looking to conduct business in varieties (antiquities solid/wet food preservation, mining of coal & copper, soft infrastructure, logistic supply, oil and gas extraction, slaughterhouses, sheep herding) with an aim to introduce Afghanistan in prospects under the Belt & Road Initiative. With sole supporting agency, it has been tasked to oversee two of the largest projects:

- 1) An industrial park in the eastern province of Nangahar province
- 2) An agreement between the firm Oxus (a Paris based Microfinance company) and the Afghanistan Oil and Gas State Company (20 percent stake agreement) for extracting oil from the Qashqari site in northern regions of Sar-e-Pol.

The only shift from this relationship, is the altering stance of Afghanistan's state-run news outlets towards the US. To that end the Bakhtar News Agency have initiated dis-information campaign against the US, parroting toe to toe with Chinese state-run media outlets on US engagements in the region.

[10] Associated Press. 2022. "China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi Visits Afghanistan To Meet Taliban." Outlook, March 24, 2022. <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/china-s-foreign-minister-wang-yi-visits-afghanistan-to-meet-taliban-news-188404>.

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Mapping the frequency of engagements

Although Taliban leadership prefers to host its engagement on bilateral discussions in Kabul, it prefers Doha, as the most suitable place to engage with Western nations, taking into account the West's apprehensions and eliminating the question of legitimacy from the minds of anxious decision makers hawk-eyed to such events. Yet, one may argue that some western nations have taken the benefit of doubt from direct engagement in Kabul. In early January 2022, Taliban foreign ministry officials were hosted by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oslo, which may have resulted in certain confidence and opportunities. This did not limit to Norway re-opening its embassy in Kabul, but we witnessed a visit from the Swiss National Bank representatives to the Afghanistan's central bank, a British company representative being hosted by the Taliban's minister of mines and petroleum and officials of the Swedish company hosted by the minister of energy and water.

Mapping the frequency of international engagement, a total of sixteen countries have reopened their missions (for formal consultations with Taliban leadership) in Kabul since the group's takeover:

| Missions in Kabul <i>(No formal recognition)</i> | IEA representatives in Afghan Embassy on Foreign Soil <i>(Author's interview with a former official of the MoFA)</i> |
|---|--|
| China The European Union ¹¹ India (Technical Team) Indonesia Iran Japan ¹² Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Norway ¹³ Pakistan Qatar Saudi Arabia Turkey Turkmenistan United Arab Emirates Uzbekistan United States (under the protectorate of Qatar) ¹⁴ | China Pakistan Qatar Saudi Arabia Turkey Turkmenistan United Arab Emirates Uzbekistan Iran Malaysia Kazakhstan Russia Kyrgyzstan |

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Other nations which continue to hint on a possibility of opening their missions include Germany and Malaysia, the only ASEAN nation which has permitted Taliban to appoint/nominate staff to manage Afghan diplomatic missions.

That said, the Taliban has re-established 14 Afghan embassies out of which those identified by the author are mentioned in the aforementioned table.

The Road ahead

Taking the aforementioned data into context, the author analyzes the trajectory between nations willing to reopen embassies in Afghanistan versus those willing to permit the entry of Taliban officials on their soil. The overall trend states:

- The group in theory may receive isolation in comparison to the 1990s, the Western nations are taking specific interest in resources (reflected from engagements), marking an upward trajectory, though not in a pace expected by Kabul.
- A larger section within the international community continues to advocate for comprehensive and inclusive government within the IEA, which respects the rights of all Afghans, while denying safe havens to terror factions operating from Afghan soil.
- There is clear distinction in global apprehensions when it falls to hosting Taliban officials on their soil.
- Regional economies will play a major role in the future of Taliban's international engagement with the West.

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[11]RFE/RL's Tajik Service. 2022. "EU Says It Will Establish 'Minimal' Presence In Afghanistan After Five-Month Hiatus." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 21, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-delegation-humanitarian-talks-norway/31664929.html>.

[12]Yukifumi, Takeuchi. 2023. "Ambassador Calls on Japan to Lead Aid Effort for Afghanistan." Nippon, March 10, 2023. <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00880/>.

[13]Majumdar, Anwasha. 2022. "Taliban Requests Norway To Take The Initiative In Recognising Its Afghan Government." Republic Network, January 19, 2022. <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/taliban-requests-norway-to-take-the-initiative-in-recognising-its-afghan-government-articleshow.html>.

[14] Associated Press. 2021. "Qatar Agrees to Represent US Interests in Afghanistan." The Economic Times, November 13, 2021. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/qatar-agrees-to-represent-us-interests-in-afghanistan/articleshow/87672546.cms?from=mdr>