



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES
(CENJOWS)

SEPTEMBER 16-30 2023



AFGHANISTAN WATCH

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 2

**No Current Talks
With Taliban,
Afghanistan's
Massoud Says,
Promising Guerrilla
Warfare**

**India Participates
In 5th Meeting Of
Moscow Format
Consultations On
Afghanistan In
Kazan**

**Afghan Embassy
Suspends
Operations In India,
Diplomats Leave
For Europe And US**

SEPTEMBER 16–30 2023

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Afghan Embassy Suspends Operations In India, Diplomats Leave For Europe And US

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/afghan-embassy-suspends-operations-in-india-diplomats-leave-for-europe-and-us-101695986249117.html>

The Afghan embassy in India has suspended all operations after the ambassador and other senior diplomats left the country for Europe and the United States where they gained asylum, three embassy officials said on Friday, 29 Sep.

Comments

The Afghanistan Embassy in New Delhi will cease its operations from Sunday, October 1, while citing reasons of “lack of support from the host government” and reduction in personnel and resources required to manage routine functions of official affairs.[1] This step has been taken months after a power struggle was underway at the Afghan Embassy in Delhi as Ambassador Farid Mamundzay, appointed by the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan government, who was battling to stay on in office in defiance of the Taliban-run Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul.[2] The Taliban regime, to seek legitimacy on the world stage, has taken control of at least 14 missions abroad where it has posted its nominees but Delhi is not yet one of them.[3]

Trigger

The embassy statement issued on 29 Sep 23 highlights key factors compelling them to close its operations as lack of support from the host government, alleging that it has experienced a notable absence of crucial support from the host government, absence of a legitimate functioning government in Kabul, lack of visas for 2500 Afghan students and inadequate diplomatic support by India to the embassy in denouncing Taliban regime.[4] However, with the hope of extended diplomatic support from India, the embassy also said it is keen to reach an agreement with the Indian government at the earliest.

[1] India, T. O. (2023, October 1). Lack of resources and discord with the Taliban regime: The Afghan Embassy in India closes today. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/afghan-embassy-in-india-suspends-operations/articleshow/104083842.cms?from=mdr>

[2] Jazeera, A. (2023b, October 1). Afghanistan closes embassy in India citing lack of diplomatic support. Politics News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/1/afghanistan-embassy-closes-in-india-citing-lack-of-diplomatic-support>

[3] Online, F. (2023b, September 29). The fight for power! Afghanistan Embassy may shut down its operations in New Delhi as infighting continues. Financial Express. <https://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/the-fight-for-power-afghanistan-embassy-may-shut-down-its-operations-in-new-delhi-as-infighting-continues/3258499/>

[4] Bhattacharjee, K. (2023, October 4). A shutdown of the Afghan embassy in Delhi | Explained. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-shutdown-of-the-afghan-embassy/article67377405.ece>

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Indian Perspective

As far as India is concerned, it has maintained a neutral stance so far with the calculated response with the statement “From our perspective, this is an internal matter of the Afghan embassy and we hope that they would resolve it internally.”[5] Though India has yet not officially recognized the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, yet India’s technical establishment in Kabul continues to operate. India had closed down its embassy after the Taliban took over the country and the Ashraf Ghani government collapsed in mid-August 2021.[6] However, the “technical establishment” primarily focuses on distributing humanitarian aid with the assistance of local partners. Regular consular services have been discontinued.

Challenge to India

Recent overtures by the Afghanistan Embassy have put the Indian diplomatic setup in a dilemma. Geo-strategic compulsions such as the increasing influence of China in Afghanistan, Indian investments in various projects in Afghanistan and security threats posed to India by terrorist organisations operating from Afghan soil have compelled India in a binding situation to adopt an unambiguous stance.[7] Maintaining ambiguity may be misconstrued as according to legitimacy to the Taliban government. The Indian government’s cautious approach towards recognizing the new Afghan government has led to adjustments in their diplomatic operations, such as maintaining a presence in Kabul primarily for humanitarian purposes while addressing embassy issues in Delhi. The closure of the Afghan Embassy in Delhi, coupled with the strained relations over student visas, reflects the complex and evolving situation in Afghanistan and its impact on diplomatic ties with India. India will have to tread a cautious approach while not according to legitimacy to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as per its democratic values and in the meantime secure its security, economic and geo-strategic, interests by maintaining functional relations with the Taliban.

[5] Transcript of a weekly media briefing by the official spokesperson (June 02, 2023). (n.d.). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/36642/Transcript_of_Weekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_June_02_2023

[6] PDF view – CENJOWS. (n.d.-d). Cenjows Afghanistan Watch Issue, Volume 9 Issue 1 https://cenjows.in/pdf-view/?url=2023/09/Afghanistan_Watch_1-15_Sep_CENJOWS-N.pdf&pID=21056

[7] India-Taliban relations: A careful balancing act, driven by pragmatism. (n.d.-b). Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/india-taliban-relations-careful-balancing-act-driven-pragmatism>

SEPTEMBER 16–30 2023

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

India Participates In 5th Meeting Of Moscow Format Consultations On Afghanistan In Kazan

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-participates-in-5th-meeting-of-moscow-format-consultations-on-afghanistan-in-kazan/articleshow/104071349.cms>

Special representatives and senior officials from India, Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan took part in the fifth meeting of the Moscow format consultation on Afghanistan in the Russian city of Kazan on Friday, 29 Sep.

Comments



Source: ANI News

On September 29, 2023, the fifth meeting of the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan at the level of special representatives and senior officials from China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was held.[8] The meeting was also attended by the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. Representatives of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey were in attendance as guests of honour. India was represented by the Ambassador to Russia, Pavan Kapoor, as the special envoy who normally attends the format.

Quagmire

Participants noted with concern the difficult security situation in Afghanistan due to the renewed and increased activities of terrorist groups, primarily ISIS from its soil and industrial drug production, which indicates a serious and dangerous increase. [9] Also, it was stated that there had been no progress in forming a truly inclusive

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

government in Afghanistan, reflecting the interests of all ethno-political groups in the country.[10] The Taliban regime continues to run a polarized government based on non-inclusive strict Islamic regulations.[11] Despite the appointment of some individual representatives of various Afghan ethnicities to the Kabul administration, the participants observed no political pluralism in it. Other issues brought to the notice were respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, equal rights to work, education and justice, without distinction as to gender and primary concern about imposed restrictions on women's employment and girls' education.

The Forum appreciated current Afghan authorities for their serious fight against ISIS, reduction in poppy cultivation and prospects for the development of regional economic projects with the participation of Afghanistan. Forum members also called upon the current Afghan authorities to provide the necessary conditions to improve the welfare of the Afghan people, prevent their further migration and provide conditions for the return of the refugees and promote modern education in schools conforming to international standards.[12] All members emphasized that the USA must shoulder its responsibility for post-conflict reconstruction of the country and unfreeze the Afghan national assets and lift unilateral sanctions immediately.[13]

Taliban Viewpoint

The Taliban regime highlighted that “In the last 45 years no foreign prescriptions have solved the problems of Afghanistan,”[14] and also called for more economic support and for a move towards political recognition of the Taliban regime which is ready to engage with the world on the basis of “common legitimate interests”.[15]

The participants also “gave assurances to continue providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan” and emphasised the need to “strengthen bilateral and multilateral economic ties”, the declaration said.

[8] ‘Moscow Format’: Pakistan, regional countries call on Afghanistan to ‘dismantle’ militant groups. (2023, September 30). Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2383071/pakistan>

[9] Terrorist groups remain a significant threat in conflict zones, neighbouring states, senior official tells Security Council, noting force alone can exacerbate matters | UN Press. (2023, August 25). <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15396.doc.htm>

[10] Haidar, S. (2023b, September 30). Kazan meet makes no headway on equal rights in Afghanistan. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/form-inclusive-government-ensure-equal-rights-for-all-regional-grouping-tells-taliban/article67366144.ece>

[11] PDF view – CENJOWS. (n.d.-d). Cenjows Afghanistan Watch Issue, Volume 8 Issue 2

https://cenjows.in/pdf-view/?url=2023/09/Afghanistan_Watch_16-31_Aug_2023_CENJOWS.pdf&pID=21020

[12] Afghanistan situation. (n.d.). Global Focus. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/afghanistan-situation>

[13] Kazan Declaration of the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan. (2023, September 29). The Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of India. https://india.mid.ru/en/news/kazan_declaration_of_the_moscow_format_consultations_on_afghanistan/

[14] Ariana News. (2023). No foreign prescription has solved Afghanistan's problems, Muttaqi tells Moscow format meeting | Ariana News. Ariana News | Bringing Afghan News to the World. <https://www.ariananews.af/no-foreign-prescription-has-solved-afghanistans-problems-muttaqi-tells-moscow-format-meeting/>

[15] PressReader.com - digital newspaper & magazine subscriptions. (n.d.). Press Reader. <https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-hindu-erode-9WW6/20231001/281767043856646>

SEPTEMBER 16–30 2023

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

However, it failed to make headway on the issue or extract any promise from the Taliban representatives on a timeline for government formation or on restarting girls' education.

Indian Perspective

India, grappling with the Afghan embassy issue at the moment, adopted a neutral stance at the meeting. Taliban's social media handles declared that Mr Muttaqi met the special representatives of China and Pakistan, Yu Xiang and Asif Durrani, together, and discussed the security situation and border tensions with Pakistan.[16] He also met delegations from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other countries. However, the external Affairs Minister of India declined to comment on whether Mr Kapoor met Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on the sidelines of the Moscow Format and whether there were any discussions over the staffing of the embassy.[17] No country recognises the Taliban regime as a legitimate government but all the Moscow Format countries and representatives from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Qatar, who attended as observers, maintain missions in Kabul.[18] In such a scenario, India needs to balance its relations with Afghanistan with due caution while maintaining its image as the largest democracy in the world as well as meeting diplomatic aspirations for the national interest.

No Current Talks With Taliban, Afghanistan's Massoud Says, Promising Guerrilla Warfare

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/no-current-talks-with-taliban-afghanistans-massoud-says-promising-guerrilla-warfare/articleshow/104043032.cms>

Ahmad Massoud, the exiled leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), stated that there are no negotiations with the Taliban for a peace settlement. He vowed to increase guerrilla warfare to force the Taliban to the negotiating table. Massoud emphasized that the Taliban would only gain legitimacy through elections, which are currently unlikely.



Source: Reuters

[16] Ariana News. (2023b). Muttaqi meets Chinese, Pakistani envoys on sidelines of Moscow format | Ariana News. Ariana News | Bringing Afghan News to the World. <https://www.ariananews.af/muttaqi-meets-chinese-pakistani-envoys-on-sidelines-of-moscow-format/>

[17] Chaudhury, D. R. (2023b, October 1). Moscow format meets calls for inclusive govt in Kabul & ensuring women's rights. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/moscow-format-meet-calls-for-inclusive-govt-in-kabul-ensuring-womens-rights/articleshow/104077783.cms?from=mdr>

[18] PDF view – CENJOWS. (n.d.-d). Cenjows Afghanistan Watch Issue, Volume 9 Issue 1. https://cenjows.in/pdf-view/?url=2023/09/Afghanistan_Watch_1-15_Sep_CENJOWS-N.pdf&pID=21056

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Comments

Afghan anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, exiled leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF) said on 27 Sep 23 during an interview in Paris that there will be no talks with the Taliban to negotiate a peace settlement and vowed to step up "guerrilla warfare"[19] to bring the hardline Islamists to the negotiating table. He also added that the only way for the Taliban to achieve legitimacy would be to hold elections, but there was no prospect of that happening for now.

NRF: Paradigm Shift

Massoud, who has been compelled to operate from overseas, mentioned that the NRF had been forced to change tactics because it could not fight the well-equipped Taliban conventionally. He also rued a lack of support from the Western world in their fight against the Taliban. As per his claims, the number of his fighters had grown from 1,200 to 4,000 who had resorted to guerrilla warfare while relying on stocks from the decades of war in the country and needed ammunition. As per a statement by Massoud, "It is enough to be a headache for the Taliban, but not to topple them or to create too much pain for them so they come for proper, meaningful talks. So, this is the thing the world must understand." "If the Taliban announced that they accept elections, today we all can return because this is what we want." Also any scope of returning to Afghanistan as part of a Taliban reintegration scheme of former officials has been declined by NRF leaders.

World View

Many Western governments do not formally recognise the Taliban administration, notably over its treatment of women in the country. But there is little pressure or desire to once again get involved in the country with their focus primarily on the war in Ukraine.

Indian Perspective

India needs to maintain a neutral stance as of now keeping its strategic interests foremost. Though historical, cultural, economic and emotional connections with Afghanistan prior to the Taliban regime are very strong however current security challenges, inroads being made by Pakistan, ever ever-increasing influence of China and the changing world order have been posing far too many challenges in front of India. Apropos it is recommended that India while maintaining cordial relations with NRF, must continue to engage diplomatically as well economically keeping its own interests paramount.

By
Col Rajesh Grover
Senior Fellow, CENJOWS

[19] Irish, J. (2023, September 29). No current talks with Taliban, Afghanistan's Massoud says, promising guerrilla warfare. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/no-current-talks-with-taliban-afghanistans-massoud-says-promising-guerrilla-2023-09-29/>