



India's Taliban Challenge

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This article is based on **Taliban has taken Kabul. Delhi must watch, not pronounce doom** which was published in the Indian Express on 16/08/2021. It talks about the Taliban capturing Afghanistan and challenges emerging for India.

Afghanistan has been plunged into chaos after the **Taliban took over** in the wake of the pullout of American forces from the country. It not only ensured a swift Taliban advance across Afghanistan but also a peaceful surrender of Kabul.

Reports from the provinces point to gross human rights abuses by the Taliban. If the new Taliban dispensation demonstrates a better record in Kabul, it might encourage the world to respond positively.

Nevertheless, the Taliban's entry into Kabul marks the beginning of a new phase in the relationship between Afghanistan and India.

Challenges For India

- **Issue of Indian Security:** The restoration of Taliban rule in Afghanistan presents some very serious potential challenges for Indian security.
The challenges range from securing its development infrastructures to safely evacuating Indians stranded in troubled Afghanistan.
- **Spread of International Terrorism:** For India, a bigger challenge will be about the Taliban's renewed support for international terrorism and Pakistan's re-direction of jihadi groups that have allegedly fought with the Taliban towards India.
- **Religious Fundamentalism:** Like all radical groups, the Taliban will have trouble balancing its religious ideology with the imperatives of state interests.
India faces a challenge to deradicalise the region for long lasting peace and stability.

- **New Regional Geopolitical Developments:** There can be new regional geopolitical alignments (such as China-Pakistan-Taliban) which may go against the interests of India.
 - Meanwhile, the US withdrawal compels the creation of a new balance of power system in and around Afghanistan.
 - Moreover, the US and the West will try to shape the international attitudes towards the new regime.
- **No Contiguity With Taliban:** Unlike Pakistan, China and Iran, India has no contiguity with Afghanistan.
 - Russia has a security treaty with Tajikistan, for instance, and has deployed more troops there to prevent a destabilising spill over from the turmoil in Afghanistan into Central Asia.
 - India has no such security responsibilities and no direct access to Central Asia.
 - This may give reasons to the Taliban to hit back at India through Pakistan in J&K, given that LeT and Jaish are operating in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban.

India's Options

- **Broader Diplomatic Engagement:** India should consider appointing a special envoy dedicated to Afghanistan. The envoy can ensure that Indian views are expressed at every meeting, and broaden engagement with the Taliban.
- **Decoupling of Taliban-Pakistan:** Although Pakistan's leverage over the Taliban is real, it may not be absolute.

The Taliban is bound to seek a measure of autonomy from Pakistan. India will have to wait a while before the current issues between India and the Taliban can be overcome.
- **Balancing the Opportunities in Afghanistan:** Structuring the internal balance of power within Afghanistan has always been hard. A deeper Sino-Pak partnership in Afghanistan will inevitably produce countervailing trends.

However, for a patient, open-minded and active India, there will be no dearth of balancing opportunities in Afghanistan.
- **Leverage Indian Infrastructural Developments:** Indian USD 3 billion assistance to Afghanistan is in concrete projects that serve its population and have earned it their goodwill that will endure.

The need today is to not stop the development work in Afghanistan and continue the good work.
- **Global Cooperation:** There is a lot less global acceptance of terrorism today than in it was in the 1990s.
 - No major power would like to see Afghanistan re-emerge as a global sanctuary of terror.
 - The world has also imposed significant new constraints on Pakistan's support for terror through mechanisms like the **Financial Action Task Force**.

Conclusion

India, as would be impacted by the consequences of American withdrawal, has to work with Taliban and other regional powers to protect its interests and stabilise Afghanistan. If India remains active and patient too, many opportunities could open up in the new Afghan phase.

Drishti Mains Question

For a patient, open-minded and active India, there will be no dearth of balancing opportunities in Afghanistan. Discuss.
