



One Year of Taliban 2.0

For Prelims: Afghanistan, Taliban, Location of Afghanistan

For Mains: India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Crisis in Afghanistan and its Implications

Why in News?

It has been a year since **American Troops withdrew** and [Taliban took over the regime in Afghanistan in August 2021](#).

- Over the last two decades, **foreign powers including India** helped Afghanistan to rebuild roads, dams, government offices, hospitals, rural infrastructure, the economy, and education.

How did the Taliban Take Over the Regime in Afghanistan?



▪ About Taliban:

- **The Taliban**, or students in the Pashto language, **emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan** following the **withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan**.
- It is an **Islamic fundamentalist political and military organisation** operating in Afghanistan. They have dominated Afghan polity for quite some time and feature regularly in international affairs.

- The Taliban have been fighting against the U.S.-backed government in Kabul for around 20 years. They seek to **reimpose their strict version of Islam in Afghanistan.**
- **Background:**
 - **Terrorist Attack:**
 - **On 11th September 2001**, terrorist attacks in America killed nearly 3,000 people.
 - A month after 9/11, the **US launched airstrikes against Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom).**
 - **Transitional Government in Afghanistan:**
 - After the attacks, the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) coalition troops **declared war on Afghanistan.**
 - The US dislodged the Taliban regime and **established a transitional government in Afghanistan.**
 - The US had reached the conclusion long ago that the **war was unwinnable and approached for peace talks.**
 - **Peace Talks:**
 - **Murree Talks:**
 - In 2015 the US had sent a representative to the first-ever meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government that was hosted by Pakistan in Murree in 2015.
 - **Doha Talks:**
 - In 2020, before the Doha Talks started, the **Taliban had maintained that they would hold direct talks only with the US**, and not with the Kabul government, which they did not recognise.
 - In the agreement, the **US administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by 1st May, 2021.**
 - The deadline has been pushed to **11th September 2021.**
 - **US Exit:**
 - By July 2021, the US claimed that it had withdrawn 90% of the troops and Taliban claimed that it had controlled over 85% of the Afghan Territory.
 - **Taliban Takeover:**
 - Taliban **took control of the regime in Afghanistan in August 2021.**
 - This was the first time since their ouster 20 years ago in the wake of the 9/11 strikes that Taliban fighters had entered the city — they first seized the Capital in 1996.

How is Current Situation in Afghanistan under Taliban's Rule?

- **Overview:**
 - The Taliban took over a **readymade country**, but administering a nation of 32 million requires capacity and finances.
 - The Taliban are short on both.
 - Many wealthy people, and those of the middle class with means and education, including civil servants, **have fled the country**, not wishing to be part of the Taliban regime.
 - **The international community** has not yet recognised the regime formally, and **sanctions, including travel bans on many Taliban, remain in place.**
 - Their access to **international banking and finance** is limited.
- **Economy:**
 - In May 2022, the Taliban presented an **annual budget based entirely on domestic revenue.**
 - It projected an **expenditure of USD 2.6 billion**, and a **revenue of USD 2.1 billion.**
 - **No details were given about spending**, or how the gap with revenue would be bridged.
 - Most of Afghanistan's revenues are **now being raised through customs duties.**
 - It is also **exporting coal to Pakistan.**
 - [The United Nations](#) humanitarian response has helped Afghanistan keep its head above water.
 - Until the Taliban banned high school education for girls, **the UN was paying teachers' salaries.**

- [The International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#) is financing the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul.
- In the absence of international banking facilities, UN planes have flown in USD 1 billion in hard cash, including to fund money transfers to the needy through partner agencies.
- **Security:**
 - Taliban remains nervous about the **Daesh or ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan province)**, which has carried out attacks in Kabul with frightening regularity.
 - According to the UN, from mid-August 2021 to mid-June 2022, **2,106 people were killed or wounded — 700 were killed — in violence attributed to or claimed by ISKP.**
 - The **killing of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri** in a Kabul neighbourhood by the US **has added to the Taliban's insecurity.**
- **Afghan Population & Taliban:**
 - Though there hasn't been much change in the Taliban's attitude towards civil society from the time they last ruled in Kabul, **but unlike 20 years ago, outright brutalities have not been reported yet.**
 - **A dress code has been prescribed** for both men and women, but it is not strictly implemented.
 - **The anti-people action** by the Taliban to **ban the education of girls beyond class 6 in school**, and to **make it difficult for women to work** met with **protest by women** demanding **"Education, Employment and Bread"**.
 - It was **dispersed by guards who fired in the air.**
 - The UN has reported **160 extrajudicial killings, 178 arbitrary detentions, 23 instances of incommunicado detentions, and 56 instances of torture and ill-treatment** of former government and military officials.
 - Reports of **factionalism**, and the reported dissonance between the **Haqqanis and the Kandahar core** of the Taliban have fueled **speculation about the possibility of a breakdown and another cycle of civil war.**

How has India approached Afghanistan since the Taliban Regime?

- After the Taliban takeover, India is caught in the **middle of this dilemma divided between restoring Afghanistan** as a strategic priority in its policy and the **practical hurdles on the ground.**
- Currently, India is assessing **three broad ways of potential engagement with Afghanistan:**
 - Providing humanitarian assistance.
 - Exploring a joint **counterterrorism** effort with other partners.
 - Engaging in talks with the Taliban.
 - The end goal of all these is to **restore people-to-people links** and prevent **backsliding of the gains Delhi's developmental aid has made** in Afghanistan in the past two decades.
- India has undertaken **more than 400 key infrastructure projects** in all 34 Afghan provinces and has signed **strategic agreements to enhance trade and bilateral relations.**
 - From 2002 to 2021, **India spent \$4 bn in development assistance in Afghanistan**, building **high-visibility projects** such as highways, hospitals, the parliament building, rural schools, and electricity transmission lines.
 - These projects have created a **vast and deep pool of goodwill for India** of the kind that no other country can claim.
 - One of the projects that was **left incomplete was the Shahtoot Dam**, to provide drinking water to 2 million residents of Kabul.

What is the Significance of Afghanistan for India?

- **Economic and Strategic Interest:**
 - Afghanistan is a gateway to the **oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.**
 - Afghanistan's main advantage is its **geography**, as anyone who is in power in Afghanistan **controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia** (via Afghanistan).
 - Located at the **heart of the historic Silk Road**, Afghanistan was long the **crossroads of commerce between Asian countries** connecting them to Europe, and enhancing

religious, cultural, and commercial contacts.

▪ **Developmental Projects:**

- The massive **reconstruction plans for the country** to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.
- Three major projects:
 - The **Afghan Parliament**, the **Zaranj-Delaram Highway**, and the **Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam)**, along with India's assistance of **more than USD 3 billion in projects**, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) **have cemented India's position in Afghanistan.**

▪ **Security Interest:**

- India has been the **victim of state-sponsored terrorism** emanating from Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region (e.g., Haqqani network). **Thus, India has two priorities in Afghanistan:**
 - To prevent Pakistan from setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan, and
 - To avoid the return of jihadi groups, like al Qaeda, which could strike in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following countries: (2022)

1. Azerbaijan
2. Kyrgyzstan
3. Tajikistan
4. Turkmenistan
5. Uzbekistan

Which of the above have borders with Afghanistan?

- (a) 1, 2 and 5 only
(b) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
(c) 3, 4 and 5 only
(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. The proposed withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan in 2014 is fraught with major security implications for the countries of the region. Examine in light of the fact that India is faced with a plethora of challenges and needs to safeguard its own strategic interests. **(2013)**

Source: IE