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Human Rights and Multi-level Governance**



**THE TALIBAN'S RETURN TO POWER: GLOBAL AND
REGIONAL STAKES.**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Taliban movement's evolution, regional interactions, and its broader geopolitical consequences, particularly focusing on Central Asia. The Taliban's journey from its inception in 1994, through its initial rise to power, subsequent fall, and resurgence, is explored in depth. The study delves into the external influences and internal dynamics that shaped the movement, including significant support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and initially, the United States.

A central theme is the Taliban's transformation from an international pariah to a legitimate political entity. The analysis encompasses the movement's impact on Afghanistan's domestic politics, its role in regional security, and the implications for international relations, especially concerning the USA and Russia. Particular attention is given to the interactions between the Taliban and Central Asian countries, with a detailed case study on Uzbekistan's complex relationship with the Taliban.

The thesis also addresses the humanitarian and human rights issues under Taliban rule, and examines the strategic interests of major powers in the region. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the Taliban's historical trajectory, current strategies, and future prospects, highlighting the movement's significant influence on regional stability and international security dynamics.

Key words: *Taliban resurgence, geopolitical shifts, human rights concerns, Central Asia, diplomacy.*

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Introduction

The thesis examines the Taliban movement's evolution, regional interactions, and broader geopolitical consequences, with a particular focus on Central Asia. It explores the Taliban's history from its inception in 1994 to its recent resurgence, analyzing the movement's impact on Afghanistan's domestic politics, regional security, and international relations

In 1994, the history of one of the most unusual Islamic radical organizations began in Afghanistan, which for many years became the main enemy of the United States and other Western countries – the Taliban. This movement managed to capture a significant part of the country's territory and proclaim the creation of a new type of state. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has even been recognized by several states: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the UAE.

The Taliban movement plays a key role in the internal political process of Afghanistan. At the same time, his role is not limited exclusively to the domestic political, intra-Afghan context. The creation of the Taliban movement took place under the significant influence of an external factor. Regional and non-regional players expected to use the movement as a tool to achieve their goals in the long and bloody conflict that engulfed Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia helped finance the movement, Pakistan supplied weapons, and the United States provided political support.

Over the past decade, the Taliban has gradually turned from an international pariah into a legitimate side in the Afghan conflict and is welcomed in many capitals of the world. The Taliban has systematically worked to expand its ties, reduce dependence on Pakistan and gain international recognition.

The Taliban's return to power came almost 20 years after a U.S.-led military campaign toppled the group in response to it harbouring the international Islamist terrorist group Al Qaeda, which carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Taliban regrouped and launched an insurgency that, by 2005, challenged American and international armed forces, as well as the new Afghan government and its nascent security forces in parts of the country.

On September 7, 2021, the Taliban announced the creation of an "interim government" to govern Afghanistan. The announcement came weeks after the Taliban, which ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, regained control of the country following the collapse of the former U.S.-backed Afghan government amid the withdrawal of American troops. The Taliban's 2021 resurgence drastically changed the geopolitical environment in Afghanistan and Central Asia, bringing with it both new opportunities and problems for regional and international players. This paper argues that the Taliban's comeback to power has had a significant impact on international security, bordering Central Asian nations, and global powers, as well as changing the political landscape within Afghanistan. According to the report, comprehending these shifts necessitates a thorough examination of historical backgrounds, contemporary geopolitical tactics, and socioeconomic effects. The primary contention is that the government of the Taliban will intensify instability in the region, impact the strategic manoeuvres of prominent international powers, and require Central Asian nations to adopt flexible measures to tackle new challenges and prospects.

The relevance of this work is due to the active role of the movement in the political processes of the region and its desire to be recognized as one of the actors in the internal political process of Afghanistan in the international arena.

Primary Objectives of this work is to analyse the evolving role of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, focusing on its historical progression, regional connections, particularly with Uzbekistan, and wider geopolitical consequences for Central Asia. Consideration is also being given to the issues surrounding respect for human rights following the Taliban's rise to power. Furthermore, the research focuses on comprehending the various elements that have played a role in the emergence of the Taliban movement, its present tactics and undertakings, and the repercussions of these occurrences on both regional and global politics. The study also explores the strategic interests of major powers like the United States and Russia in Afghanistan and Central Asia, along with their foreign policy approaches in response to the influence of the Taliban movement.

1. Research Question:

1. What historical and political factors contributed to the rise of the Taliban movement?
2. In what ways does the Taliban movement engage in regional and international activities, and what impact does it have at these levels?
3. How does the current state of affairs in Afghanistan impact relations within the Central Asian region, and what broader consequences does it pose for stability and the evolving dynamics in Central Asia?

This work uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a multifaceted analytical approach. Along with a quantitative evaluation of security measures and economic indicators, it also includes a qualitative examination of diplomatic tactics, political developments, and security policies. Moreover, a wide range of sources, including academic research, government publications, expert interviews, historical documents, and statistics from international organizations, form the basis of the analysis.

The first chapter, “The history of the Taliban movement”, provides a comprehensive historical summary of the Taliban movement, setting the scene. It starts by examining the socio-political circumstances in Afghanistan that contributed to the Taliban's rise to power and tracing their beginnings in the mid-1990s. The next section of the chapter reviews their initial period of power, which ran from 1994 to 2001, emphasizing significant occasions and decisions. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, organized by the United States, is then highlighted as the turning point in the Taliban's downfall. The last section of the chapter examines the circumstances that allowed the Taliban to endure and progressively recover between 2001 and 2014, setting the stage for their eventual comeback and seizure of power by 2021.

In the second chapter, we will discuss the interactions between the Taliban and Central Asian countries, as well as the wider region, with a focus on the geopolitical and security implications. The analysis begins by providing an overview of the immediate consequences of the Taliban's resurgence in Central Asia. It then delves into a comprehensive exploration of the strategic reactions from neighbouring nations, including Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. The chapter also explores the involvement of external actors such as Russia, China, and Iran, examining their strategic interests and interactions with the Taliban. In addition, it

explores the environmental and geopolitical consequences of the Qosh Tepa canal project, emphasizing its potential effects on regional water security and relations between states.

Third chapter, “The case of Uzbekistan”, delves into the complex and diverse relationship between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, with a specific focus on Uzbekistan. It offers a historical viewpoint on the relationship between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, highlighting the importance of cultural, economic, and political connections. The chapter proceeds to evaluate how the resurgence of the Taliban has affected Uzbekistan's security, economy, and diplomatic strategies. The paper explores Uzbekistan's efforts in military cooperation, economic initiatives, and diplomatic engagements as a response to the changing geopolitical landscape. This chapter provides an illustration of how a significant Central Asian country manages its intricate relationship with Afghanistan during the Taliban's governance.

In the “Global activities” part, we will delve into the wider global operations and strategic manoeuvres of the Taliban, analysing the effects of their comeback on international relations, security dynamics, and global geopolitical strategies. This chapter explores the interactions between the Taliban and significant global players, including the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union. It also examines the reactions from international organizations. Furthermore, we will wrap up the chapter by delving into the humanitarian crisis, specifically looking at refugee flows, human rights violations, and the international aid response.

The fifth chapter examines the strategic manoeuvres and interests of the United States and Russia, two prominent global powers, in relation to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The chapter examines how both countries have strategically pursued their geopolitical objectives, exercised influence on regional stability, and responded to shifting circumstances following the rise of the Taliban. The chapter aims to provide a thorough examination of the complex interactions between these two dominant forces in the region, taking into account their historical engagement, present strategies, and future possibilities.

Chapter I - The history of the Taliban movement

Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to present an all-encompassing examination of the Taliban movement, including its historical development, consequences for Afghanistan, and resurgence since 2021. The chapter commences with its inception in the mid-1990s. Understanding the critical factors that have contributed to the rise, decline, and re-emergence of the Taliban, as well as analysing the repercussions of these events for Afghanistan and the international community, is the objective.

This chapter's main point is that the Taliban's path is strongly connected to Afghanistan's complicated social and political situation as well as the larger geopolitical problems in the region. According to the chapter, the Taliban's continued significance and eventual resurgence have been predicated on their capacity to adjust and reorient their strategies. Moreover, the chapter contends that the Taliban's fortunes have been substantially impacted by international interventions, specifically those undertaken by the United States, which have shaped the organization's tactics and behaviours throughout the years.

The chapter is organized into three primary parts: it commences by examining the origins, rise to power, and initial governance of the Taliban going from 1994 to 2001, all the while situating them within the framework of Afghanistan's civil conflict. After analysing their decline in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent invasion led by the United States, the article traces their incremental recovery from 2001 to 2015. The resurgence is centered on their survival tactics and the circumstances that enabled their resurgence. The chapter concludes with an examination of the path that led to their reestablishment of authority between 2015 and 2021, including political and military developments, peace negotiations, and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Through a meticulous analysis of these stages, this chapter offers a comprehensive comprehension of the Taliban's persistent presence in Afghanistan and the complex relationship of internal and external forces that have influenced their trajectory. It is imperative to perceive the present condition of Afghanistan and the possible future trajectories that may ensue during the Taliban regime.

1.1 Origins, rise to power and rule: 1994-2014

Afghan clerics and Sunni students, mostly from rural regions, who were predominantly of Pashtun descent, established the Taliban movement in 1993-1994. A significant number of them were former Mujahideen, who were previously recognised as anti-Soviet terrorists. After the departure of Soviet Union in 1989 and the subsequent failure of the Afghan government in 1992, a civil war erupted among the Mujahideen factions. Former militants who were disenchanted with the civil conflict established the Taliban organisation. A significant number of individuals within the organisation pursued their education in seminaries located in Pakistan and deliberately used the term “Taliban” in order to establish a clear distinction from the Mujahideen. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks against the United States reports that Pakistan supported the Taliban due to their capacity to provide stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan viewed the Taliban as allies. The Taliban's views and habits are consistent with the strict cultural norms of the Pashtuns, who represent the majority of Afghanistan's ethnically diverse population.

The Taliban as feeble, tainted with corruption, and antagonistic towards the Pashtun community regarded the governing administration of President Burhanuddin Rabbani. The prolonged conflict between several Mujahideen factions from 1992 to 1996 resulted in widespread backing for the Taliban, since they were perceived as being less corrupt and more effective in establishing stability. In November 1994, the Taliban seized control of the city of Kandahar in the southern region and then initiated a sequence of military operations throughout the country. Their efforts culminated with the occupation of Kabul on September 27, 1996. By the end of 1996, the opposition controlled over around 10-15% of Afghanistan's territory (Khalilzad, 2016).

The Taliban rapidly forfeited both global and local backing due to their imposition of a stringent interpretation of Islam in the territories under their control. They enforced their decrees, such as a prohibition on television, Western music, and dancing, with severe punishments, including public executions. The rights of women have been greatly restricted. They were prohibited from showing their face openly or being unaccompanied by their spouse or family in busy areas. Additionally, they were prohibited from engaging in any form of employment. Girls' access to school has been greatly limited by the

Taliban. In March 2001, the Taliban incurred worldwide criticism for demolishing ancient sixth-century Buddha sculptures that were intricately carved into the hills above the city of Bamiyan. The Taliban deemed them as idolatrous and in violation of Islamic principles.

The fundamental issue that ultimately determined global perspectives and relation to the Taliban was their decision to conceal Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda. In 1996, bin Laden relocated from Sudan to Afghanistan. During the 1980s, he played a significant role as a leading financial backer and organiser of efforts to assist the Mujahideen in Afghanistan (9/11 Commission Report). Bin Laden forged a strategic partnership with the Taliban, in which he supplied substantial financial resources and military assistance to support the Taliban's campaign to seize control of the country. In return, the Taliban granted protection to recruits of Al-Qaeda and facilitated the establishment of training facilities for them (9/11 Commission Report).

Following the bombings of American embassies in Africa in August 1998, the United States initiated cruise missile operations against Al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan. They were unsuccessful in removing Bin Laden or convincing the Taliban to do so. With the objective of utilising their influence to convince the Taliban to execute the head of Al Qaeda, the United States applied pressure on Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which, similar to the UAE, have officially recognised the Taliban regime. Nonetheless, their attempts had little impact. The Taliban has also been sanctioned by the US and the UN (Barnes, 2021). The Taliban leadership was firm. Although their connection with bin Laden was strained at times, it was founded on deep and personal values.

While many factions within the Taliban have expressed reservations about aligning with Al-Qaeda due to concerns about the negative impact on the Taliban's global reputation and the pressure exerted by the United States, the shared ideology between the two groups is so strong that a total separation is improbable. The dynamics of the relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have seen considerable changes in the last two decades. Prior to 2001, Al-Qaeda provided vital financial and military assistance to the Taliban. However, in the Taliban's recent resurgence in 2021, Al-Qaeda did not directly contribute to their return to power.

On September 11, 2001, a group of militants belonging to the terrorist organisation Al-Qaeda committed a sequence of assaults in the United States, resulting in the loss of about 3,000 lives. During a national speech to the joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush issued a direct request to the Taliban. He demanded that they surrender the leaders of Al Qaeda, close terrorist training camps permanently, and allow the United States to inspect these facilities. The President also warned that if the Taliban failed to comply, they would face the same consequences as the terrorists themselves (Coll, 2018). The Taliban officials refused due to the lack of evidence linking him to the attacks.

US military operations in Afghanistan commenced on October 7, 2001, following the authorization to employ military force against the perpetrators of the attack, as well as their accomplices or protectors. These operations involved launching airstrikes on Taliban objectives across the nation and providing direct air assistance to the anti-Taliban Afghan forces, commonly referred to as the Northern Alliance. In less than a fortnight, a restricted number of U.S. Army special troops, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary elements, and conventional ground forces commenced their deployment to Afghanistan. On November 13, the Taliban withdrew from Kabul and the city was subsequently reclaimed by Afghan forces supported by the United States.

The United Nations assembled Afghan opposition leaders in Bonn in November 2001 to form a transitional government, despite the fact that Taliban soldiers were still fighting in Kandahar. The Taliban did not participate in the negotiations that led to the Afghan opposition's selection of Hamid Karzai as the country's temporary leader. In December 2001, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar recommended accepting Karzai's authority and providing Kandahar to Afghan opposition troops (Gopal, 2001). In return, he requested permission for the Taliban members to go back to their homes. While some Taliban commanders were apprehended and held in custody, others, including Omar, escaped to Pakistan. Additionally, numerous Al-Qaeda leaders relocated there also. (Mlechin, 2014).

Several key factors contributed to the Taliban's collapse in 2001:

1. The internal opposition within the Northern Alliance, which formed the main resistance against the Taliban;

2. The significant technological advantage of the coalition forces;
3. The lack of readiness of the Taliban for large-scale military operations. In Afghanistan, they consistently engaged in combat against the interventionists, mostly employing partisan tactics;
4. Pakistan's rejection of endorsing the Taliban.

On May 1, 2003, U.S. officials declared the end of significant acts of aggression in Afghanistan. Starting in 2005, dispersed Taliban troops started reassembling in the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan, as well as in Pakistan. By 2009, the Taliban had extended their influence in the northern regions, encompassing places that were geographically far from the southern and eastern parts. Despite lacking substantial public support initially, the Taliban managed to enter local communities due to a confluence of events, such as widespread corruption within the Afghan Government. Additionally, the Taliban grew its power via the use of intimidation tactics.

The Taliban has also adapted its strategies, prioritising synchronised assaults on isolated U.S. and coalition military bases. As a reaction, the United States intensified its counterinsurgency operations (Evans, 2010). In 2009, President Obama declared a further augmentation of the American military presence and allocated additional funds for Afghanistan. By 2010, 100,000 American troops, alongside other international forces, were stationed in Afghanistan (CRS reports).

Western forces reduced the Taliban's authority in the south and east but did not completely eliminate it. Afghan forces were severely weakened by high mortality and attrition rates, as well as a corrupt hierarchy, and they continued to rely heavily on the United States for technical and strategic support. The Taliban had a robust and efficient intelligence network. Their militants were very motivated, and they employed a versatile range of tactical and strategic methods to extend their influence and combat the United States and Afghanistan's armies. The Taliban's successful operations frequently weaken the Afghan Government's capacities and erode the trust of the Afghan population in both the Government and its security forces.

In 2010, the administration of Barack Obama determined that the war was incapable of being resolved through military means and commenced initial negotiations with the Taliban. The primary focus of the discussions revolved around confidence-building

measures, specifically the creation of a temporary Taliban political office in Qatar. The Taliban's refusal to engage in talks with the Afghan government, along with the Afghan government's opposition to U.S. negotiations with the Taliban that did not include their involvement, finally led to the termination of negotiations in 2014 (MacAskill, 2010).

In summary, the relationship between the Taliban and the United States was first characterised by instability, which later escalated into hostility. Initially, the United States embraced the Taliban as a new military and political power. As to the analysis of American scholar R. Mackenzie, Washington had the expectation that the Taliban would serve as a deterrent to the efforts of Russia and Iran to enhance their influence in Afghanistan (Mackenzie, 2010). Furthermore, they were certain that the collective would successfully terminate the state of lawlessness and internal conflict that had consumed Afghanistan. The Western nations also had the belief that the Taliban would eradicate the training facilities of Islamist organisations inside its borders and aid in the restoration of former King Mohammed Zahir Shah to his position of authority.

Upon assuming control, the Taliban failed to meet the expectations of the United States: not only did they neglect to dismantle the training camps for terrorists, but they actually established other ones. The United States expressed significant apprehension over the head of Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, whom the Taliban warmly welcomed and treated with great respect. Hence, it is unsurprising that the American stance towards the Taliban has completely reversed.

1.2 The road to return: 2015-2021

In 2015, Afghanistan faced a critical juncture as it managed the complex process of transferring security duties from foreign forces to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). This transition symbolised Afghanistan's pursuit of independence and self-sufficiency, despite the enduring presence of long-standing conflicts that have afflicted the nation for many years. The ANDSF's assumption of full security responsibilities was a tribute to international efforts to establish a credible Afghan military force; nevertheless, it also highlighted the continued need for US aid, particularly in terms of airpower, training, and logistics. The aforementioned reliance

brought attention to the intricate dynamics that exist between the desire for independence and the pragmatic considerations of safeguarding against a resilient insurgency. The death of Mullah Muhammad Omar, whose leadership had previously brought the Taliban together under a rigid doctrinal banner, was another noteworthy development for the organisation in 2015 (Rashid, 2010). The news of his death, which was announced two years after his passing, caused significant disruption within the Taliban and had a profound impact on the wider geopolitical context. The Taliban had relied heavily on the mystique of Mullah Omar for cohesion; his absence prompted appropriate inquiries regarding the movement's future trajectory and unity. The rise to power of Mullah Akhtar Mansour represented a pivotal moment in the history of the Taliban. Mansour, renowned for his practicality and political astuteness, was regarded as a leader with the ability to guide the Taliban through the challenging landscape of Afghan politics and the presence of international military forces. During his time in office, there was a significant change in the Taliban's approach, as they became more assertive and demonstrated this by strategically capturing Kunduz in late 2015 (Jones, 2016). This military action not only resulted in a triumph but also conveyed a symbolic message by displaying the Taliban's capacity to capture and maintain control of a significant urban area, marking the first instance of such an achievement since their removal in 2001. The conflict in Kunduz emphasised the difficulties that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are encountering, revealing weaknesses in intelligence gathering, coordination, and logistical assistance, despite substantial international resources dedicated to their training and provision of equipment. The drone strike that resulted in the death of Mullah Mansour in Pakistan in May 2016 was a crucial occurrence, indicating the ongoing dedication of the United States to combating terrorism in the area. The demise of Mansour provided an opportunity for Haibatullah Akhundzada, a highly qualified leader with a strong religious background, to assume leadership of the Taliban (Walsh & Mashal, 2016). The anticipation of Akhundzada's leadership was met with a combination of hope and scepticism. Several experts perceived him as a unifying figure capable of guiding the Taliban towards a more politically active trajectory, potentially creating opportunities for discussion and peace. However, several individuals maintained caution regarding his conservative theological background, expressing doubts about his inclination and capacity to bring about substantial changes in the group's direction (Belokrenitski, 2010

p216). Throughout this time, the Obama administration encountered the formidable task of adjusting its military deployment in Afghanistan. The choice to retain 8,400 US soldiers beyond 2016 was a direct recognition of the unstable security conditions and the developing capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). This choice demonstrated a practical comprehension of the intricacies of the situation, weighing the goal of ending America's longest conflict against the necessity of averting Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for terrorist organisations. The Taliban's response to the continuous presence of US forces was varied. On one side, it provided them with a means of propaganda, enabling them to mobilise support in opposition to foreign control. However, this circumstance presented a strategic problem. They had to cope with a competent Afghan military force, which was not entirely independent. The United States' military might and intelligence resources backed up this force. The situation was additionally complicated by the internal dynamics of the Taliban and the wider regional geopolitical competition, as neighbouring countries sought to gain influence over Afghanistan's destiny.

In August 2017, the Taliban underwent a notable change in their strategy for the ongoing combat in Afghanistan, as evidenced by the issuance of an open letter addressed to President Donald Trump. The message emphasised the Taliban's recognition of the weaknesses of the Afghan government and their assurance of their own position within the war dynamics. Additionally, a letter from the Taliban requested President Donald Trump to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan. Furthermore, it represented a calculated move by the Taliban to directly interact with the United States while disregarding the Afghan government, which they considered feeble and inept. The Trump administration's reaction to the Taliban's peace proposals marked a crucial juncture in the United States' engagement in Afghanistan. The US and the Taliban engaged in formal and direct negotiations for the first time without the Afghan government's involvement. The purpose of these discussions was to finish the United States' most enduring dispute, resulting in the significant deal reached in February 2020. The agreement delineated two essential obligations: the complete removal of American and international forces by May 2021 and the Taliban's assurance to obstruct the utilisation of Afghan territory by entities such as al-Qaeda to endanger the United States and its allies (Rowlatt, 2017).

This arrangement also involved a contentious aspect—the reciprocal transfer of detainees between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Despite encountering resistance from international allies such as France and Australia, the process continued to progress. Some media reports speculated that the liberated Taliban fighters would be relocated prior to the conclusion of the prisoner release. On June 2020, report cited a Taliban commander as saying that the liberated militants would return to the battlefield.

The agreement detailed the mechanism and timetable for the withdrawal of American troops, which should be carried out in several stages, until 11 September 2021. At the same time, talks between the US and the Taliban did not determine how a coalition government would be formed. The parties agreed to leave this round of issues to the discretion of the intra-Afghan negotiations, which were to begin in March 2021 (Mashal & Faizi, 2010). However, these negotiations did not begin; an Afghan government delegation flew to Doha several times, but the Taliban leadership delayed their start.

The failure to initiate meaningful discussions among Afghan parties, along with the ongoing military attacks by the Taliban, highlighted the delicate nature of the peace process. The United States successfully executed the planned process and schedule for the departure of American forces, which was completed by August 30, 2021. Nevertheless, the lack of a well-defined structure for the establishment of a coalition government created an opportunity for the Taliban to step in and take control. The peace deal, although a significant milestone in terminating the US's military engagement, unintentionally facilitated the Taliban's strategic establishment within Afghanistan's political framework. The Taliban's restoration to power in August 2021 was predetermined by behind-the-scenes negotiations influenced by years of conflict, strategic calculations, and changing alliances.

Ultimately, the events and progress in Afghanistan spanning from 2015 to 2021 have showcased the intricate and demanding nature of the nation's pursuit for stability, security, and peace. The transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces emphasised the ongoing need for US assistance and the difficulties of constructing a proficient Afghan military force. The succession of leadership within the Taliban, transitioning from Mullah Omar to Mullah Mansour and ultimately to Haibatullah Akhundzada, demonstrated the group's ability to adjust and make strategic

changes. The US's choice to sustain a military presence in Afghanistan was driven by the unstable security conditions and the imperative to avert the country from becoming a sanctuary for terrorist organisations. The issuance of an open letter by the Taliban to President Donald Trump, followed by direct negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, signified a notable change in the United States' strategy towards the conflict. The historic accord in February 2020 sought to terminate the United States' military engagement and delineated obligations for the removal of soldiers, as well as the Taliban's assurance to obstruct the utilisation of Afghan territory by terrorist organisations. Nevertheless, the peace process encountered obstacles such as impeded negotiations and the Taliban's persistent military offensives. The anticipated withdrawal of American soldiers created a void that was subsequently occupied by the Taliban, resulting in their re-emergence and assumption of power in August 2021.

1.3 Seizure of power: 2021

By October 2018, the Taliban had gained significant territorial dominance, with control over approximately 40 percent of Afghanistan's total land area. Over time, they have consistently gained momentum.

In the beginning of May 2021, the Taliban initiated a swift military campaign, capturing extensive rural territories and strengthening their hold in places where they were already influential. In July, the Taliban initiated the seizure of border districts contiguous to Tajikistan, Iran, and Pakistan. The Taliban exercised dominion over 200 districts while falling short of capturing the provincial capitals where Afghan forces were concentrated.

Zaranj's provincial capital was captured by the Taliban on August 6, 2021. After capturing Jalalabad in the east and Mazari-Sharif in the north, the Taliban managed to take control of the last important cities and eliminate the remaining strongholds of the Afghan government. The Taliban initiated their incursion into Kabul on August 15, 2021, thereby gaining dominion over the entire nation. After seizing control of Afghanistan, the Taliban obtained a significant amount of equipment that had been supplied by the United States to the previous Afghan government.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Taliban, made his first public appearance on September 7, 2021. He named 33 individuals who were appointed as “acting” ministers and formed the “cabinet of temporary executors” tasked with managing the nation. Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzadeh was declared as the group's emir and had supreme authority in the country (Schroden, 2021).

The main factor that led to the country's seizure was the complete collapse of the American plan. Regarding the task of nation building, the United States and NATO first adopted a simplified viewpoint while dealing with the situation in Afghanistan. This limited perspective rendered them inadequately equipped to tackle the internal conflicts and challenges within Afghanistan. The main cause of political conflict in the country centres on the matter of authority. The key question at hand is the future character of Afghanistan—whether it should persist as a Pashtun nation-state, as it has traditionally been, or grow into a federal organisation that guarantees fair allocation of resources and authority among the northern minority.

The Soviet incursion in Afghanistan caused a significant disruption to the established political and ethnic balance in the country. During the 1980s and 1990s, the northern ethnic groups obtained military and economic assets and became unwilling to accept the political dominance of the Pashtun majority. The Pashtuns vehemently refused to accept the new circumstances and the military-political alliance. A significant number of Pashtun tribes maintain their support for the Taliban movement, as they perceive it as the foremost force capable of establishing peace within the nation.

Upon their arrival in Afghanistan, the Western powers aimed to restore the country as a cohesive Afghan state, mostly influenced by Pakistan's position and the belief that ethnic minorities would face challenges in maintaining control over the entire Afghan territory. Therefore, initially, the US approach focused on supporting the restoration of Pashtun power in the government and law enforcement forces. The United States of America devised a plan to eliminate the Northern Alliance as early as the mid-2000s.

The Karzai and Ghani administrations, with the support of the United States, made substantial endeavours to fragment the Northern Alliance. Both presidents consistently pursued a programme aimed at advancing the predominance of Pashtuns in the administrative apparatus and law enforcement agencies in the provinces of the North.

Furthermore, the leadership successfully diminished the military prowess of the former factions within the Northern Alliance, deeming them the foremost threat to the nation's stability.

The problem arose since the only NATO ally working at the regional level was the Northern Alliance, which advocated for the interests of ethnic minorities. In contrast, the Taliban, who were in opposition to the Western coalition, historically depended on the Pashtun majority. As a result, the Northern Alliance has been completely eliminated today, while the Pashtun majority continues to support the Taliban (Buriev, 2021). Thus, the process of re-Pashtunization culminated with the ascent of the Taliban to authority.

It is crucial to emphasise that none of the four US administrations has effectively reduced the amount of corruption in Afghanistan. On the contrary, by 2021, corruption would have reached an alarming level, affecting all sectors, including government institutions and law enforcement. The above events caused deep anger and bitterness among the people, resulting in a substantial decrease in the government's prestige nationwide.

The United States' attempt to promote the process of national settlement ultimately proved to be futile. After the Obama administration took office, the United States implemented a new approach to dealing with the situation in Afghanistan. This involved starting negotiations with the Taliban. In order to convince Pakistan to cease its support for the Taliban, the United States offered significant financial assistance to the country and agreed to all the demands made by the Pakistani leadership regarding the future arrangement of Afghanistan (Buriev, 2021). As a result, the peace settlement plan largely reflected Pakistan's positions and concerns, as they strongly advocated for the reinstatement of the Taliban in power.

The convergence of these factors finally created favourable conditions for the Taliban to seize power shortly after the start of the United States' withdrawal.

Nevertheless, the Taliban's rise to power in August 2021 fundamentally altered regional politics. The Taliban's viewpoints towards Afghanistan's neighbouring nations and their diplomatic ties are diverse and anticipated to undergo further changes as the

party takes control of governance. Pakistan has repeatedly played an assertive and disruptive role in Afghan affairs, causing destabilisation.

Experts broadly perceive the Taliban's assumption of power as a significant triumph for Pakistan, strengthening its influence in Afghanistan and advancing its ongoing efforts to limit Indian influence in the region.

Despite numerous pro-Taliban statements from senior Pakistani officials, the rise of the Taliban to power has the capacity to create challenges and complexities for Pakistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan have a protracted dispute over their contiguous border, which extends for a distance of 2,600 kilometres. The Taliban, similar to past Afghan governments, refused to recognise the validity of the “Durand Line”. The existence of these issues has the capacity to escalate Pashtun nationalism within Pakistan, which may serve as a potential catalyst for future conflicts in bilateral relations. Pakistan strongly expresses concern over the possibility of the Taliban's seizure of power increasing the influence of Islamist extremists who consistently operate within Pakistan's territory.

The presence of the Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan has the capacity to undermine the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban. Both parties have encountered friction, as seen by the suspension of Pakistan International Airlines' state charter flights from Kabul in October 2021. The suspension was imposed due to the Taliban's “inappropriate conduct” (Gul, 2021).

China's border with Afghanistan is small and sparsely inhabited. In recent years, China has had limited engagement in Afghan affairs. Chinese investments in the development of minerals and resources in Afghanistan have generated commercial interest. Nevertheless, issues such as instability, insufficient infrastructure, and other constraints have impeded the execution of substantial projects. The omission of Afghanistan from “China's Belt and road initiative” and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor can be partially attributed to the tense relations between Pakistan and the former Afghan leadership. Nevertheless, the abundant mineral resources in Afghanistan, along with the Taliban's seizure of power, may lead to more Chinese involvement in Afghanistan.

The Chinese government has openly and clearly shown its support for the Taliban ever since they took control in Afghanistan, participating in meetings with the group both before and after their takeover. Although Chinese officials have stressed the importance of developing an “inclusive political structure” in China, multiple observers have concluded that China is quite likely to accept the Taliban as the governing authority in Afghanistan. China actively supports the Taliban's rule and encourages them to develop a comprehensive political structure.

In September 2021, the Chinese foreign minister supported the end of economic sanctions on Afghanistan, arguing that the country's foreign exchange reserves should be returned to the Afghan people and not be used as a tool for political pressure. The Taliban have conveyed their aim to establish close collaboration with China (Grossman, 2021).

The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan has also influenced Iran, albeit to a lesser degree than Pakistan. The Taliban granted sanctuary to dissidents from Ahli-Sunnah Wal Jamaat, an organization in opposition to the Islamic government in Iran due to its vehement resistance to Shiite doctrines. They also provided refuge to members of Mujahedin-i Khalq, another group opposing Iran's government for similar reasons.

Due to Iran's predominantly Shiite population, the influence of the Taliban does not present a substantial threat to its socio-political structure.

The interests of Iran in Afghanistan include maintaining its historical influence in western Afghanistan, protecting the Shiite minority in Afghanistan, and managing the flow of migrants into Iran. The Iranian government endorsed the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, which President Ebrahim Raisi described as a setback, and called for the consolidation of the nation. The Iranian government condemned the Taliban's capture of Panjshir in September 2021 and expressed concerns about the composition of the Taliban's governing body (Sofuoglu, 2021). Several analysts say that Iran is unlikely to engage in any action against the Taliban as a means of averting further instability. Instead, Iran is expected to remain in its efforts to reach a compromise with the group.

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the surrounding Central Asian nations of Afghanistan, exhibited contrasting reactions to the Taliban's rise to power. Turkmenistan

and Uzbekistan place great importance on their economic ties, specifically focusing on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. Additionally, they maintain formal communication with the Taliban, as evidenced by the October agreement made during the visit of Uzbekistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs to Kabul in 2021.

In contrast, Tajikistan rejected the Taliban administration and became the main regional opponent of the group because of Tajikistan's previous confrontation with Islamist terrorists. Furthermore, there exist ethnolinguistic affiliations with the Afghan Tajiks, who strongly oppose the authority of the Taliban. Tajikistan has purportedly offered refuge to prominent Afghan leaders who are in opposition to the Taliban, such as Amrullah Saleh and Ahmad Masood. Tajikistan's authorities have voiced their dissatisfaction with the Taliban administration, prompting the Taliban to warn Tajikistan against interfering in Afghan affairs.

Russia has frequently expressed concern about the instability in Afghanistan and the possible spread of radical Islam, narcotics, and refugees in Central Asia and within its own territory. Initial Russian statements suggest that the Russian government intends to strengthen its relations with the Taliban, possibly by inviting the organisation to participate in international talks in Moscow in October 2021. Nevertheless, Russia expresses concern about the potential ramifications of the Taliban's takeover of power for Russian interests.

In a news conference held on September 25, 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explicitly declared that there are no ongoing discussions on the international recognition of the Taliban movement. Additionally, he noted that Russia, in conjunction with China and Pakistan, is cooperating to guarantee that the Taliban fulfils its obligations to implement inclusive administration. Tajikistan, the country where Russia's largest military base abroad is situated, also gained backing from Russian authorities (Lederer, 2021).

1.4 Recognition and diplomatic representation

The Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan on September 27, 1996, and maintained their governance until June 2002, when a transitional administration was established with the assistance of the United States.

Despite exerting control over 90 percent of Afghanistan's territory, the government of Afghanistan only acknowledged its authority through Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan was the inaugural nation to acknowledge the administration and has subsequently exerted unwavering endeavours to ensure the country's inclusion in the UN for the Taliban. In an effort to counter the increasing Iranian influence in the country, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have acknowledged the Taliban. In August 1998, Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties following the refusal of Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar to hand over Osama bin Laden (Korgun, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the absence of recognition and diplomatic ties between the Taliban and non-recognised states, the Taliban did establish the government of Afghanistan during that period in compliance with international law.

Presently, the Taliban possess extensive regions of Afghanistan, encompassing its capital and provincial capitals, and they exert authority over the state machinery. President Ghani has departed the country and explicitly acknowledges that he no longer holds power. His post-departure remarks acknowledge the Taliban's de facto authority and attribute the responsibility of administering the nation to them. However, Amrullah Saleh, the first vice president of the Ghani administration, has organized a resistance movement and claims to be the legitimate acting president. Additionally, Ahmad Masood, a notable tribal leader and the leader of the recently declared National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, is also part of this movement. Both individuals have sought sanctuary in the Panjshir Valley, which served as a safe haven for the Rabbani regime during the 1990s. They are currently seeking external assistance to face the Taliban or compel them to agree to a power-sharing arrangement (Anderson, 2021). It is uncertain if they will present any substantial opposition to the Taliban. During his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on September 13, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken referred to the Taliban as the "de facto government" of Afghanistan, acknowledging the increasing acknowledgment that they exercise effective authority over the area. In its most recent decision, the EU acknowledged that the Taliban are effectively the 20th

administration and emphasised the need for practical engagement with them. However, the EU made it clear that they would not officially recognise the Taliban (Anderson, 2021).

As of February 2024, the Taliban government has not received official recognition from any other government. Nevertheless, it has been stated that a number of embassies, such as those representing Russia, China, Iran, Qatar, Turkey, and the Central Asian republics, are still operational in Kabul. Furthermore, other high-ranking regional figures, such as the director of Pakistani intelligence and the Foreign Ministers of Qatar and Uzbekistan, conducted official discussions with top members of the Taliban movement and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

The Taliban's quick seizure of both the national capital and the capitals of all provinces suggests that they have a sizable amount of support from the Afghan people. Nevertheless, considering the apprehensions over human rights and the increasing number of refugees, it remains to be seen if this consistent compliance will prove to be dependable and enduring.

The Taliban's rise to power, following years of fighting, lacked democratic legitimacy, as they did not come to power by legal or constitutional means after removing the existing government. The Ghani administration has encountered challenges about its legitimacy. Abdullah Abdullah, Ghani's main rival, accused him of engaging in electoral misconduct, which damaged his chances of winning re-election in 2019. The voter turnout in the recent elections in Afghanistan has been remarkably low. Specifically, in 2019, barely 20 percent of eligible voters participated, and there is a lack of impartial documentation from election monitors. The likelihood of the Taliban conducting elections remains uncertain due to their historical opposition to elections that do not adhere to Sharia law, as stated in their prior constitutions. Individuals from various ethnic backgrounds make up the Taliban's interim government. However, it is not surprising that Taliban-affiliated people hold the majority of cabinet positions. Nevertheless, the absence of democratic legitimacy might endanger the acknowledgment of numerous governments worldwide.

Recognition and diplomatic ties are distinct concepts and do not depend on one another for their creation. The legal need for diplomatic relations does not include the recognition of the government. Diplomatic relations primarily comprise the customary

interchange of ambassadors and diplomatic personnel between states. States can engage in diplomatic relations with another state without formally recognising its government, as long as they refrain from taking actions such as appointing a new ambassador, which would necessitate the explicit approval of the other state's government. It is widely acknowledged that diplomats continue to have a purpose even after a revolutionary regime transition.

Nevertheless, diplomatic recognition facilitates access to development assistance and loans from states as well as organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom have currently halted their aid initiatives to the nation, while the overseas holdings of Afghanistan's central bank have been immobilised. The IMF retained 400 million US dollars that were intended to be disbursed to the previous administration. There are discussions about providing assistance through the United Nations or a potential new fund established by the World Bank in order to avoid governments directly supporting the Taliban (Anderson, 2021). As the Taliban is in the process of establishing its new government, ambassadors overseas are representing the ousted government. In the event that the new government is not acknowledged, Afghan ambassadors and diplomats will persist in representing the vanquished authority. Nevertheless, it is improbable that countries like the United States will designate an ambassador to Afghanistan, as the approval of a recognised government is necessary to dispatch an ambassador.

It is premature to determine if the Taliban's effective rule over Afghanistan will surpass its official control over the country. However, the crucial criterion of effective control has been mostly met, as the Taliban possess autonomy, command the customary compliance of the populace, and govern the city. The long-term viability of their ability to retain power is uncertain. Nevertheless, the rapidity of their victory over the Afghan government, coupled with the absence of any organised resistance or foreign backing, indicates that this consolidation of power by the Taliban may perhaps be feasible. If this scenario occurs, it is probable that additional states will tacitly acknowledge the Taliban without explicitly stating so. This might be achieved through diplomatic relations or bilateral treaties. Hence, the acknowledgment of governments is entirely discretionary, and the potential for withholding the government's entitlement to engage in the community of states lies solely with the states themselves. It remains uncertain whether

the Taliban will alleviate or intensify the concerns of governments regarding their governance.

Conclusion.

This chapter has presented a thorough examination of the Taliban movement, exploring its beginnings, rise to power, downfall, revival, and ultimate reestablishment of control in Afghanistan. The key elements explored shed light on the intricate socio-political and geopolitical dynamics that have influenced the Taliban's journey from 1994 to 2021. A group of Afghan clerics and Sunni students, mainly of Pashtun descent, gave rise to the Taliban in the early 1990s.

A significant number of these individuals were former Mujahideen fighters who became disenchanted with the internal conflicts that arose after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan government in 1992. The movement rapidly garnered support by offering stability and upholding the strict cultural norms of the Pashtun majority, in stark contrast to the corruption of the ruling administration.

In 1996, the Taliban gained control of Kabul and the majority of Afghanistan, implementing a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Their rule was characterized by harsh limitations on women, public executions, and the obliteration of cultural heritage, resulting in widespread international criticism. Significantly, the Taliban offered refuge to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, leading to far-reaching consequences on a global scale.

The swift military response following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States resulted in the removal of the Taliban. Despite their swift decline in authority, the Taliban did not vanish completely. Instead, they withdrew to rural regions and sought refuge in Pakistan, where they reorganized and adjusted their strategies. Over the next decade, they took advantage of the widespread disillusionment with the Afghan government, which was plagued by corruption and inefficiency. As a result, they initiated an insurgency that gradually reclaimed territory.

In 2015, following the passing of Mullah Omar and the emergence of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the Taliban underwent a transformation, becoming a more politically educated organization. Mansour's tenure was marked by significant military successes and a notable shift towards diplomatic negotiations. However, his untimely demise in a U.S.

drone strike in 2016 resulted in Haibatullah Akhundzada assuming leadership. During President Obama's tenure, the United States acknowledged the limitations of relying solely on military tactics and instead pursued a more diplomatic approach. This shift in strategy resulted in the initiation of peace talks, which set the stage for future negotiations.

The chapter then explores the period from 2015 to 2021, characterized by notable geopolitical maneuvers and the Trump administration's direct negotiations with the Taliban, leading up to the Doha Agreement of February 2020. This agreement detailed the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the Taliban's obligations to prevent terrorist activities on Afghan soil. Nevertheless, the peace process encountered numerous obstacles, such as the impasse in intra-Afghan negotiations and the continuous Taliban offensives.

In 2021, the hasty departure of U.S. forces resulted in a void of power that the Taliban wasted no time exploiting, ultimately leading to their seizure of Kabul in August. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan was made possible by a complex interplay of factors within the country, such as the disintegration of Afghan security forces and the pervasive corruption within the government. Additionally, the strategic errors committed by international actors further contributed to this outcome.

Ultimately, the evolution of the Taliban from their beginnings to their current resurgence highlights the complex and diverse political environment in Afghanistan. Through their remarkable adaptability and the shortcomings of both Afghan and international attempts to establish a stable state, they have managed to regain control. The return to power has far-reaching implications, impacting not only Afghanistan's future but also regional and global security. This analysis emphasizes the importance of comprehending the long-standing and persistent difficulties in Afghanistan, which have enduring effects on its population and the global community.

Chapter II – Taliban's Regional Engagements.

Introduction.

The United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the following rise of the Taliban have brought about a period of geopolitical changes, impacting not only Afghanistan but also Central Asia as a whole. The focus of this chapter, titled "Taliban's Regional Engagements," is to analyse the consequences of these significant transformations, outlining the emerging geopolitical, security, and socio-economic difficulties currently faced by Central Asia. The resurgence of the Taliban has introduced a multifaceted level of geopolitical ambiguity, prompting significant inquiries over Afghanistan's autonomy, the stability of its nations in Central Asia, and the wider ramifications for global peace and security.

This chapter argues that the revival of the Taliban and the subsequent establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan signify a significant transformation in both regional and global contexts. This alteration adds complexity to Afghanistan's sovereignty and intensifies the pre-existing geopolitical and economic difficulties encountered by the Central Asian countries. The many intricacies of this scenario necessitate a thorough comprehension and planned reaction from both regional actors and the global community.

The chapter commences with a concise historical summary to provide background for the Taliban's comeback, followed by an in-depth examination of the immediate and subsequent impacts on Central Asian countries. This study investigates the strategic actions undertaken by these nations in light of the modified geopolitical environment, with a particular focus on the involvement and objectives of these actors – namely, Russia, China, and Iran – following the withdrawal of the United States. These analyses, because they are the most relevant, illuminate the consequences of these changes for regional security, diplomacy, and economy, establishing a foundation for evaluating the forthcoming obstacles and possible approaches for Central Asia in light of the persistent instability in Afghanistan.

Through this comprehensive examination, the chapter endeavors to offer a nuanced understanding of the current geopolitical landscape in Central Asia, shaped by

the Taliban's resurgence, the implications of shifting power dynamics, and the critical environmental challenges posed by initiatives like the Qosh Tepa canal project.

2.1 Taliban's Impact on Central Asia

The long-standing conflict in the Afghan region, over a period of two decades, between the United States and the Taliban organization ended in August 2021. Following the withdrawal of the American military, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who had previously tendered his resignation, fled the nation. The Taliban assumed control. The events occurring in Afghanistan elicit a sensitive response from the entire Central Asian area. The challenges surrounding the establishment of Afghan sovereignty following the Taliban's rise to power and its geopolitical implications for Central Asian nations remain unresolved. Upon assuming power, the Taliban declared their objective of transforming Afghanistan into an Islamic emirate.

The issue pertaining to Afghanistan has emerged as a significant challenge for numerous states within the realm of international affairs. The divergent interests of several nations have engendered conflicts within the geographical boundaries of Afghanistan. Pakistan has strategically aligned itself with the Taliban and the 'fight against extremism' in an effort to secure substantial financial aid from the United States. This strategic approach aims to secure consistent backing in its foreign policy engagements with India. Furthermore, the establishment of peace in Afghanistan is heavily contingent upon the interplay between the two nuclear-armed nations, namely Pakistan and India. Following the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, Russia, China, and Iran also became participants in the global arena. This explains the recent high-level discussions with Taliban delegations in Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran. The Moscow-Beijing-Tehran coalition, which opposed American influence, played a role in the downfall of Kabul by indirectly endorsing the Taliban. Due to similar circumstances, the embassies of the aforementioned three nations have commenced operations in the capital city of Afghanistan, while other countries have expeditiously undertaken the evacuation of their staff.

Regarding the present situation, the emerging Afghan paradigm is significantly altering the entire political terrain of Central Asia. Representatives from these countries' political elites, as well as experts with professional expertise in the field of Afghanistan, discuss this issue. According to K-Zh. Tokayev, the president of Kazakhstan, 'the situation in Afghanistan at the moment and the rising global tensions call for the resumption of the military-industrial complex and military doctrine. We must make arrangements for unforeseen external disruptions and the most unfavorable outcome'.¹ The Secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, Marat Imankulov, expressed significant apprehension about the Afghan threat, highlighting the presence of numerous terrorist and extremist entities in close proximity to the Taliban, including ISIS and other similar groups.²

The nations that share a direct border with Afghanistan encountered a challenging predicament. Basic differences in these states' priorities and foreign and domestic policy positions toward Afghanistan, as well as their individual goals, determine the specific circumstances of each of these nations.

Following the seizure of Afghan financial reserves by Western powers, the economy of the country was on the brink of a severe collapse (Stevenson, 2021). When a society lacks internal resources, it tends to respond to challenges by expanding externally. In the case of the new Afghan elite, their primary answer is to engage in war or pose a military threat. It is important to mention that the border between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries was already tumultuous prior to the Taliban assuming power. Tajik border guards alone document over 30 conflicts in border regions annually.

Furthermore, it is important to note that in November 2019, a terrorist group entered Tajikistan and executed a substantial assault on the border station, which was met with minimal resistance. An additional illustration of the volatility of the situation is the aggressive assault on the border forces of Turkmenistan in July 2018, resulting in the loss of almost 20 lives (Mendkovich N., 2018). In early 2021, a faction of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization, commanded by Sheikh Osama Mahmoud, was active in the regions

¹ <https://kaztag.info/en/news/tokayev-about-afghanistan-we-must-prepare-for-external-shocks-and-worst-case-scenario>

² <https://ru.sputnik.kg/20210812/afganistan-boeviki-kyrgyzstan-opasnost-1053521567.html>

under Taliban control. Additionally, there are reports suggesting that the critically ill leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is currently seeking refuge in Afghan territory. Recent sources indicate that a minimum of 500 Al-Qaeda members are collaborating with the Taliban, assuming roles as military experts and trainers.

Furthermore, the Islamic Party of East Turkestan, led by Abdul Haq and boasting a militant force of over 1,000 individuals, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, led by Jafar Yuldash with 700 militants, Khatib Imam al-Bukhari with a minimum of 100 militants, and Jamaat Ansarulloh with a combat force of up to 200 fighters, have been subject to bans in numerous countries (Mendkovich N., 2021). The concentration of these tribes is observed in the northern provinces, including Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Badghis, which are primarily inhabited by ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks. Moreover, as per certain accounts, Jamaat Ansarulloh exercises influence over the illicit transportation of drugs into Tajikistan through the Taliban. Following the seizure of Afghan Badakhshan, the Taliban delegated the administration of five border regions to M. Sharifov, a Tajikistani member of Jamaat Ansarulloh, who is currently sought after by law enforcement agencies in his home country. It is important to note that this particular gang has been implicated in numerous acts of terrorism within the borders of Tajikistan, hence eliciting significant apprehension among the Tajik authorities (Mumin Ahmadi, 2021). Therefore, it can be inferred that the Taliban movement is not only acknowledged as a terrorist organization without cause since it significantly disrupts the governance of all Central Asian nations. A minimum of five transnational terrorist organizations, which operate within the countries of the region, have become deeply entrenched within their organizational framework.

Under the new administration, there is a strong likelihood that they will spread to the border areas and then exert control over them. Hence, it might be posited that the authorities of the Central Asian republics are confronted with a novel political landscape, necessitating a corresponding response.

Although the Taliban has made a commitment to refrain from expanding into Central Asian nations, the dangers that originate in Afghanistan continue to persist in various parts of the region. Within this framework, it is important to reflect on the cohort

of the Taliban Movement throughout the 1990s, their characteristics, and the impact they had on global society.

The policy decisions implemented by the Taliban during the 1990s resulted in their formation of alliances with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The latter phenomenon is linked to the military operations conducted on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan between the years 1999 and 2000. Subsequently, the IMU has experienced a decline in strength, and its leaders have been demolished.

The withdrawal of this movement from the arena of conflict can be attributed to the scarcity of material resources and the absence of key decision-makers. Based on certain accounts, it has been suggested that in August 2021, the Taliban extended refuges to certain extremist factions, thereby raising doubts about the resumption of the Taliban Movement's policy trajectory reminiscent of the 1990s (Patrick Knox, 2021).

Simultaneously, in alignment with their doctrine, the Taliban do not prioritize the acquisition of additional areas, unlike the Islamic State. Nevertheless, by providing refuge, the Taliban incentivizes other factions to engage in subversive activities. In essence, it remains plausible that, through his support, the proliferation of terrorism and religious extremism, together with the endorsement of radical Islamic doctrine, may occur within the nations situated in the Central Asian region. It is plausible that these events could potentially jeopardize the secular political systems of the nations within the region. In the present perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge the occurrence of the civil war in Tajikistan during the period of 1992–1997.

During the 1990s, the Northern Alliance, acting as a shield, effectively isolated the countries of Central Asia from the acts of the Taliban. The preservation of the buffer zone in northern Afghanistan was objectively favorable for the former USSR countries in Central Asia (Akimbekov, 2003, pp. 138). Currently, the Taliban exercise direct authority over the borders of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Despite their apparent loyalty and willingness to make compromises, the Central Asian countries choose not to acknowledge them, viewing them as one of the potential actors capable of establishing a government. The nature of the government is a topic that can be debated. Given that the movement is rooted in the Pashtun community, originating from Afghanistan, it implies that they possess complete entitlement to establish their own

sovereign nation. The countries of Central Asia, including Russia and China, assert that the involuntary imposition of Western democratic ideas without due consideration for local customs is destined for failure. The military approach employed to address the issue was ineffective, resulting in the United States' loss and the subsequent rejection of any endeavors to exert influence over the political dynamics in Afghanistan.

2.2 The Escalating Threat of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Central Asia and the Taliban

In the 1990s, Central Asian nations faced the potential threat of terrorists infiltrating their borders with the intention of triggering a governmental transformation (Cornell, 2006, pp. 36–37). Due to their near geographical proximity to Afghanistan, the Central Asian countries saw a more significant influence from extremist Islam. Within the Central Asian setting, the assertion that ‘Afghanistan serves as a sanctuary for terrorists’ pertains specifically to the IMU and Al-Qaeda. The leaders of these parties have a clear and direct connection with the Taliban movement.

The presence of the Islamic State and its allies in Afghanistan poses a heightened threat to the nations of Central Asia in the year 2021. The aim of their endeavour is to expand the regulated area, commonly known as Khorasan. Their aim is to promote worldwide unity among Muslims by reestablishing the caliphate and rejecting state boundaries.

In the current situation, a state of hostility exists between the Islamic State and the Taliban. A gap in their ideological orientations is evident. The Taliban is characterised by their adherence to Hanafi Islam, adherence to the Pashtunwali tribal code of honour, and their status as an incompatible Salafi sect inside the Islamic State (Kazancev A, 2021).

The Islamic State (IS) and the Taliban display a notable degree of hostility within the intricate geopolitical landscape of Afghanistan, mostly stemming from their fundamental ideological differences. The Taliban strongly advocate for Hanafi Islam, which is one of the four prominent Sunni schools. Hanafi Islam is renowned for its flexibility and dedication to the legal traditions of ancient Islamic jurisprudence (Brown,

2015). Their strict commitment to the *Pashtunwali* tribal code of honor enhances their conservative approach, as it governs the social structure inside Pashtun communities through concepts such as hospitality, sanctuary, and fairness (Edwards, 2002). Conversely, the Islamic State adheres to an extremist interpretation of Salafism, a sect of Sunni Islam that aims to revert to the original Islamic customs as observed by the early generations (the *salaf*). They vehemently oppose any deviations (*bid'ah*) in religious rituals (Wood, 2015). Their ruthless strategies and aspiration for a worldwide Islamic caliphate form the basis of their philosophy, which sharply contrasts with the Taliban's nationalist stance and comparatively more moderate government goals centered on Afghanistan. This classification is incompatible with the hierarchical structure of the Taliban. The divergent objectives and methods of the Taliban and the Islamic State vividly illustrate their deep-seated ideological conflicts. The Taliban's strategy is centered around establishing a governance framework in Afghanistan that is in alignment with Islamic law, specifically adhering to Hanafi principles, and intertwined with Pashtun tribal traditions.

Ideological differences had an impact on the future course of events. Given the persistent struggle with the Taliban, it becomes apparent that the Islamic State poses a substantial risk to the countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Russian language had the third position among the languages used within the Islamic State. The analytical investigation conducted by the Soufan Centre indicates that the total number of Central Asian terrorists who have relocated to Syria and Iraq exceeds 5,000 individuals. The group consists of around 500 people from Kazakhstan (11.90%), Kyrgyzstan (11.90%), Tajikistan (1300 individuals (30.95%), Turkmenistan (9.52%), and Uzbekistan (35.71%). The substantial representation of individuals from Central Asian nations inside the Islamic State necessitates proactive recruitment efforts in these countries (Barrett, 2017). Given the intensifying situation in Afghanistan, it is conceivable that the inactive fractions within extremist groups may experience increased levels of engagement.

2.3 The menace posed by Islamism

The Islamic faith had a significant influence on Central Asia. Islam's introduction in this region was unique due to its moderate disposition, which set it apart from the pre-existing Islamic inclination in the Arab world (Haghayeghi, 1995, p. 105).

Before the formation of the Soviet Union, the demographic makeup of this specific region had few differences in comparison to Afghanistan. The entire way of life was established based on Sharia, which covers the conventions of Islam. The policies implemented by the USSR facilitated the transition of nations towards a secular development paradigm. Nevertheless, this development led to the disruption of connections between Central Asia and the nations and territories located to the south. The countries located in Central Asia encountered quite advantageous conditions. Afghanistan endured as an Asian feudal state, characterised by a profound interconnection between the Islamic faith and other aspects of societal existence.

After the conclusion of the Soviet Union, there was a significant increase in the resurgence of Islam. Concurrently, there was a notable increase in the developmental trajectory of extreme Islam. While a considerable segment of the Muslim populace in the Central Asian region did not express support for the spread of radical Islam, there were individuals who showed solidarity with the radicals in their endeavour to establish an Islamic caliphate. Nevertheless, each state within the region endeavoured to maintain a system of secular rule, supported by the general population. Nevertheless, a distinct convergence exists between tradition and Islam (Peyrouse, 2007).

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan were particularly concerning. Kazakhstan does not own a physical border with Afghanistan, but it nevertheless maintains substantial relations and shares a border with Russia. In the past, the nomadic Kazakhs showed somewhat diminished levels of religious commitment in contrast to the settled population residing in adjacent countries. Turkmenistan places considerable importance on conventional practices, giving precedence to the preservation of national identity over religious association.

According to Omelicheva (2007, p. 26), the prevailing circumstances of Islamization among the Uzbek and Tajik communities facilitated the process of

radicalising Islam and its widespread propagation in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The facilitation of diplomatic relations with nations in the Middle East and South Asia was made possible by the liberalisation of borders and the promotion of unrestricted migration. Many people started leaving in order to pursue education. Nevertheless, in the end, a subset of individuals emerged as fervent proponents of Islamism.

Therefore, the 1990s provided a significant lesson for all nations in Central Asia, emphasising the potential risks associated with the spread of radical Islam, especially in the context of increasing religious enthusiasm.

With the growing proclivity of the younger generation towards religious affairs and the predominant predisposition towards religious observance, formulating a comprehensive array of tactics to mitigate the spread of Islamism poses a significant challenge. The introduction of stronger regulations and the process of liberalisation do not ensure improvement in the scenario. P. Goble argues that the strong opposition to religion in the region can worsen the rise of religious fanaticism.

The presence of American forces, with the main objective of eliminating the threat of global terrorism, was not adequately justified (Kepple, Milelli, & Ghazaleh, 2008, p. 48). Furthermore, alongside the United States' endeavours to counter terrorism, they launched a drive to penetrate the region that is rich in fossil fuel resources (Brzezinski, 2000, . 168). The pursuit of territorial control by the United States in relation to the extraction and transportation of hydrocarbons from Central Asia did not result in advantageous consequences. Although the threat posed by Al Qaeda has diminished in the last two decades, its capabilities have progressively grown more constrained (Korgun, 2010, pp. 239–248).

As a result, the existence of Islamism within Central Asian countries poses an internal threat, which Afghanistan's strategic influence exacerbates. As a result, the adjacent nations in the northern region view Islamism as a potential catalyst for security concerns.

2.4 Tajikistan

Tajikistan sets itself apart from other nations in Central Asia due to its notable encounter with a civil war, wherein one of the sides affiliated themselves with Islamism. The significance of the conflict in Afghanistan lies in the involvement of the Mujahideen's military fight against the perceived 'infidels' (Murtazin, 2018, p. 15).

According to Malashenko (1998, p. 64), the rise of Islamism began during the period of 'perestroika' in the USSR, which subsequently served as a catalyst for the ensuing phase of political Islam. When analysing the underlying causes of the civil war in Tajikistan, it is crucial to take into account the clan-centric societal structure prevalent in Tajikistan. The complex interplay between the governing bodies in Dushanbe and indigenous clans is intricately connected to the Tajik populations in Afghanistan, hence exerting influence on the security of Tajikistan. Tajikistan has shown a greater susceptibility to the terrorist menace in comparison to other countries. The resolution of the civil war may primarily be ascribed to the cooperative efforts of Russia and Uzbekistan, rather than being a fortuitous occurrence. After the civil war ended and peace negotiations were initiated, the Islamic Renaissance Party, which promoted moderate Islam, was formally acknowledged as one of the parties involved in the conflict. According to Kazantsev (2016, p. 101), a decree was apparently issued by the Ministry of Justice in 2015 that prohibited the IRPT due to its spread of propaganda associated with religious extremism. General A. Nazarzoda, a senior member of this political faction, was accused of participating in an attempt to carry out a military coup. The occurrence of disputes in the Rasht district from 2010 to 2011, as well as in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in 2012, preceded the prohibition of the IRPT.

Afghanistan has a greater population of Tajiks than Tajikistan, which enhances the connection between these two countries. The potential impact of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan during the 1990s on the rights of the Tajik minority is said to have influenced the strong position taken by Tajik President E. Rahmon against the Taliban in August 2021. The rapid radicalization of the Tajik community in Afghanistan, where Tajik individuals associate themselves with extremist forces of the Islamist resistance in countries such as Syria and join ISIS, presents a substantial threat to the democratic structure of the nation. The story of OMON Colonel G. Khalimov, a notable

militant, is of particular significance. In 2015, he made the decision to disengage from Tajik law enforcement agencies and instead embarked on a combat career with ISIS in Syria. The Prosecutor General's Office of Tajikistan released a statement claiming that 1,094 people from Tajikistan were involved in ISIS operations (Panarin & Kazantsev, 2017, p. 18). In 2014, a total of twenty individuals affiliated with the IMU were captured on charges of plotting to execute terrorist activities in the northern region of Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has recently strengthened its military cooperation with Russia, both within the China-Singapore Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and on a bilateral basis with China. Cooperation includes both border issues and the full defensive infrastructure of the nation. Based on the essential characteristics of Tajik-Afghan collaboration, efforts to strengthen defence capabilities and cooperation, and remarks made by the head of state, it may be inferred that Dushanbe is making preparations for a worst-case scenario.

2.5 Turkmenistan

The nation of Turkmenistan is geographically adjacent to Afghanistan. In the 1990s, Mr. Saparmurad Niyazov, the first president, made efforts to maintain friendly relations with the Taliban while simultaneously devising plans for the creation of a transnational pipeline that would link Afghanistan with South Asia. According to Kazantsev and Lin (2017, p. 58), Turkmenistan exhibited a conscious avoidance of engagement in conflicts, while the proliferation of extremist Islamic ideas was partially impeded by the impact of personality cults and nationalism.

The governing bodies exercised rigorous oversight over the entire clergy. The security forces conducted thorough surveillance of the operations conducted by religious organisations. In spite of the recent upsurge in the recruitment of Turkmenistan individuals into terrorist organisations, the prevailing circumstances have exhibited few alterations during the tenure of the incumbent President, G. Berdimuhamedov. According to the data presented by the Sufan Group organisation, a total of 360 individuals hailing from Turkmenistan were involved in fighting as members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) throughout the year 2015. Moreover, according to Barrett (2017, p. 13), the quantity of Turkmen militants exceeded 400 in 2017. A

significant proportion of Turkmenistan's population migrated to Afghanistan, and a subset of them joined the ISIS (Kazantsev & Lin, 2017, p. 59).

In 2016, X. Soyunov, a military specialist, made an observation regarding the weakness of the Turkmen army and highlighted the potential for any foreign threat to Turkmenistan to exacerbate the situation. The geopolitical boundary between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan represents a highly susceptible area within the Central Asian region in terms of its susceptibility to acts of terrorism. Turkmenistan's leadership is expected to seek agreement with the Afghan government or with the governing bodies of the neighbouring regions along the Afghan-Turkmen border. In favourable circumstances, Ashgabat possesses the capacity to implement the long-lasting TAPI project by enhancing gas export routes to South Asia.

2.6 Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan does not possess a defined territorial boundary with Afghanistan; yet, the matter of radical Islam significantly impacts the country's current situation. Islamic organisations operating in Central Asia demonstrate a significant level of radicalism within the framework of secular political governments. The proliferation of radical Islamic ideas poses a huge security issue due to the internal political instability and ongoing conflict between the northern and southern portions of the nation.

Furthermore, there is a possibility for radical extremism to manifest itself within the country. The occurrence can be attributed to the notable social hierarchy and the inherent 'inequity of authority'. The official statement from the Kyrgyz Republic expressing its position on the transition of power in Afghanistan has not been issued as of yet. Bishkek is clearly unlikely to promptly recognise the Taliban government and is likely to wait till Russia and China set a precedent.

2.7 Kazakhstan

The present situation in Kazakhstan concerning the potential dangers presented by radical extremists seems extremely encouraging. To begin with, Kazakhstan has a

superior degree of economic advancement in comparison to other nations. Furthermore, it does not have a common border with Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Kazakhs have traditionally adopted a nomadic way of life before the formation of the USSR, which has influenced their religious convictions. Finally, the law enforcement agencies of the nation have significant capacities for mitigating potential dangers.

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has not been immune to the threat that terrorism poses. A series of terrorist attacks took place in Aktobe, Atyrau, Almaty, and the Almaty region, namely in Taraz, during the period of 2011–2012 (Shibutov & Abramov, 2012). In light of the enduring ambiguity and projected intensification of strain, it is crucial for Kazakhstan to embrace a regional outlook when evaluating security vulnerabilities. It is imperative to acknowledge that the destabilisation of a singular state presents a substantial peril to the whole of the region.

2.8 The Qosh Tepa canal project in Afganistan.

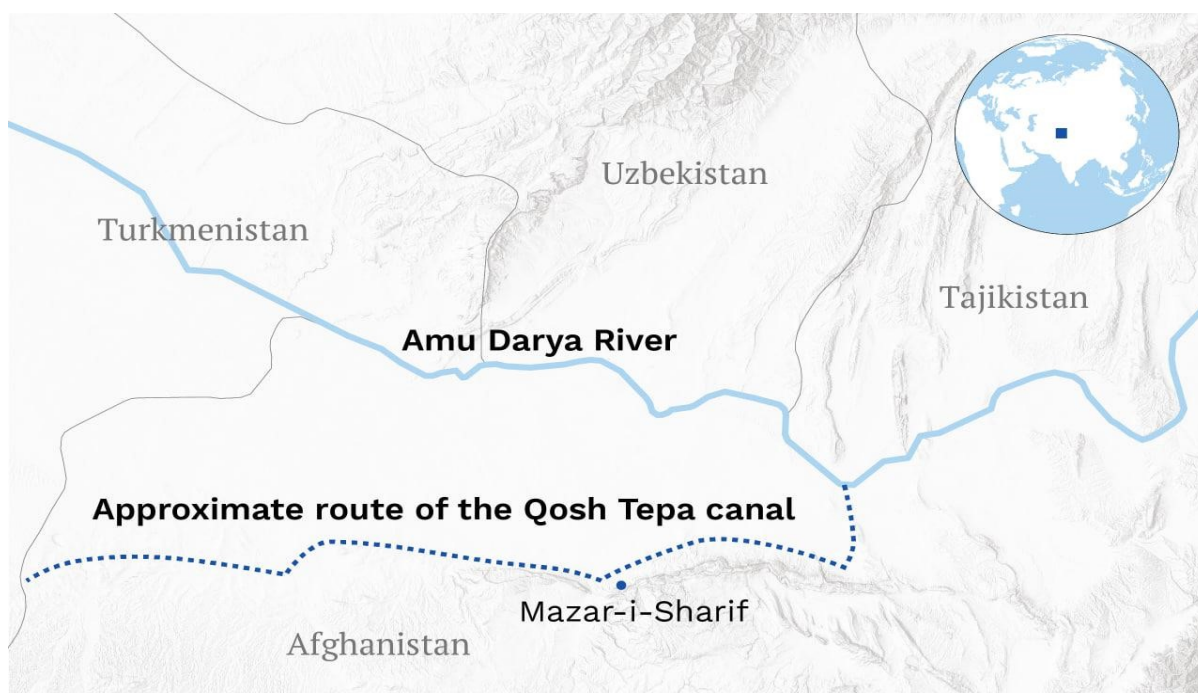


Foto: The Third Pole

Since March 2022, the Taliban regime has initiated the construction of the expansive Qosh Tepa canal in Balkh Province. The potential consequences of the Qosh Tepa canal project in Afghanistan hold considerable importance for the water security of Central Asia, particularly for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The purpose of this route is

to redirect a substantial volume of water away from the Amu Darya, a crucial river for the agricultural and economic activities of Central Asia. Approximately 80% of the water resources in the region are derived from the Amu Darya (Adylbekova K., 2023). The Panj River, which has its source in the upper regions of the Pamir mountain range in Tajikistan, traverses the northern border of Afghanistan with Tajikistan before passing through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It serves as a vital water source for Central Asia. The presence of expansive canals, such as the Karakum Canal, spanning over 800 miles, plays a substantial role in bolstering the economic and agricultural sectors of the region. The use of the Amu Darya River for irrigation of agricultural crops contributes to 17% of Uzbekistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 10% of Turkmenistan's GDP (Adylbekova K., 2023).

The new channel is projected to span a distance of 285 km, with almost 100 km already drilled. It will have a width of 100 metres and a depth of 8.5 metres. The estimated cost of the project is approximately 684 million dollars. According to reports, the construction of the canal is being financed using public funds. The project is expected to be fully completed by 2028. Approximately 6,000 individuals were engaged in the construction activities.

The primary objective of the canal construction is to facilitate the irrigation of 3 million yeribs (1 yerib = 2000 square metres) of land in the provinces of Balkh, Jauzyan, and Farib. Additionally, it aims to generate employment opportunities for around 250 thousand citizens. Nevertheless, this ambitious endeavour also gives rise to apprehensions over water depletion and environmental ramifications in nations located downstream, particularly in light of the historical excessive utilisation of Amu Darya waters, which played a role in the desiccation of the Aral Sea.

Najibullah Sadid, an Afghan engineer residing in Germany, harboured doubts regarding the Taliban's competence in handling intricate engineering projects, particularly the construction of aqueducts and bridges. He raised apprehension regarding the presence of an earthen bed in the canal.³

³ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2023/02/16/the-taliban-are-digging-an-enormous-canal>

The construction of the canal is expected to result in a 15-20% decrease in the volume of the Amu Darya, exacerbating the issues of salinization and dust storms in the area. Historically, the Amu Darya river flowed towards the Aral Sea. However, as a result of the significant reliance on the river for agricultural purposes in Central Asia, the river's reach to the Aral Sea has ceased. The canal project in Afghanistan necessitates the annual extraction of 10 billion cubic metres of water from the Amu Darya, resulting in a diversion of approximately 20% of its natural flow. The observed volume significantly surpasses the earlier projections, which were predicted to be 2.1 billion cubic metres annually (Seamus Duffy, 2023). According to analysts, the water level in the Amu Darya in the Lebap region of Eastern Turkmenistan in June 2023 showed a 70% decrease compared to previous years. However, the escalation of water leakage originating from Afghanistan is anticipated to further intensify water scarcity and heightened levels of stress within the region.

The primary cause of the current challenges is the absence of mutually agreed-upon agreements between the Central Asian States and Afghanistan about the utilisation and allocation of Amu Darya water. In 1946, the Soviet Union and the Afghan Government would engage in negotiations on the Amu Darya in Kabul, resulting in the attainment of a deal (Ikramuddin K, 2021). However, the matter of allocating the waters of the Amu Darya was not initially taken into account, and in subsequent agreements, this component was also disregarded.

The Almaty Agreement, agreed in 1992 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, now governs water relations in Central Asia. The Interstate Coordination Commission assumes a pivotal role in the management of water resources since it is responsible for the formulation and endorsement of a comprehensive and enduring water supply programme.

The United Nations Convention on Transboundary Watercourses and the International Convention on the Protection and Use of Lakes of 1992 additionally govern the regulation of water utilisation in the region. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan have all ratified the Convention (Abduboyev Sh, 2023). In contrast, Afghanistan has refrained from participating in any of the aforementioned agreements pertaining to the utilisation of water resources in the Central Asian region. It is important

to note that Afghanistan's right to utilise the Amu Darya is undeniable. However, the fact that Afghanistan does not participate in global and regional accords does not grant Afghans any rights or obligations for water usage. This has the potential to generate strain in bilateral relations.

Furthermore, due to the Taliban's lack of recognition as a governing body, it becomes unfeasible to acknowledge its existence and reach a consensus with the interstate committee responsible for coordinating water resources among the Central Asian nations.

The region of Central Asia has a unique interconnection between water safety and various other domains such as energy, food, and the environment. Water resources hold significant strategic relevance in this context. It is noteworthy that the initial prominent urban centres of the area, namely Samarkand and Bukhara, were constructed along the Zarafshan River, while Urgench and Khiva were established along the Amu Darya.

Based on initial assessments, the completion and implementation of the Kushtepa Canal project by the Government of Afghanistan may potentially result in a reduction of around 15 percent in the influx of water into Uzbekistan. The Khorezm, Bukhara, Surkhandarya, and Navoi regions, the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and Turkmenistan will face significant repercussions as a result of this.

The alteration in water flow from the Amu Darya river has the potential to worsen the existing adverse conditions in the northern areas of Uzbekistan. The decline in water levels in the Aral Sea, along with the worsening living conditions of the population residing in the Aral Sea regions, led to the emergence of many health issues. The local economy has experienced a downturn, particularly in businesses such as fishing and short-term tourism, resulting in a decrease in living opportunities. Consequently, there has been a rise in population movement. The decrease in water flow within the Amu Darya makes the problems worse.

The implementation of the Qosh Tepa canal project may give rise to the subsequent adverse outcomes:

Firstly, it is important to consistently remove the salts present in the agricultural areas in the northern region of Afghanistan. Only the Amu Darya transports salt-eroded wastewater. The ecological condition in the middle sections of the Amu Darya is further

complicated, particularly at its lower levels, where significant and occasionally disastrous developments have already occurred. Farming downstream of the canal is challenging due to water scarcity and elevated salt concentrations. In other words, the salinity level can rise as a result of the flow of water.

Secondly, the region of Northern Afghanistan, where the construction of the Qosh Tepa canal is underway, is regarded as an unstable area where the complete control of the Taliban has not been established. Specifically, in recent months, the extremist group ISIS-Khorasan has executed multiple assaults on Balkh province, resulting in the demise of the region's governor (Aljazeera). Furthermore, the escalation of an armed conflict between Iran and the Taliban government regarding the use of the Helmand River might potentially serve as a negative indication for neighbouring nations in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, it may be necessary to rebuild or reconstruct hydraulic structures in certain regions in response to alterations in water volume, thereby incurring further expenses.

Conclusion.

Central Asia is currently facing a new phase of geopolitical uncertainty and security challenges due to the rise of the Taliban and their formation as an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. The present chapter has thoroughly examined the diverse consequences of these advancements, providing insight into the complex regional dynamics, the impact of external actors, and the emerging risks that currently shape the political and security environment of the area. The story has highlighted the strategic adjustments made by Central Asian nations as they deal with the immediate and indirect consequences of Afghanistan's changes, exposing an intricate security and diplomatic landscape influenced by past events, ethnic connections, and strategic necessities.

The varied views of Central Asian governments, including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, towards the new Afghan regime are a significant aspect that is examined. The aforementioned perspectives are shaped by a

convergence of several elements, encompassing historical ties, ethnic associations, and strategic goals. Each nation is navigating its own unique trajectory in light of the evolving geopolitical landscape. The chapter has initially emphasised the significant involvement of external countries, particularly Russia, China, and Iran, during the period following the exit of the United States. Their involvement with the Taliban, which includes diplomatic efforts and economic endeavours, demonstrates a larger competition for power and stability in the area. This indicates a strategic move towards the Moscow-Beijing-Tehran alliance as a means to fight Western dominance.

Furthermore, the widespread existence of terrorist and extremist groups, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, within the boundaries of Afghanistan poses significant security obstacles, not only for the Taliban's rule but also for the overall peace and stability of the area. These entities contribute to the escalation of security concerns in Central Asia, adding complexity to the geopolitical landscape and requiring a diligent and well-coordinated approach.

In summary, the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan carries substantial ramifications for the Central Asian region, exerting influence over regional security, geopolitics, and the global strategic arena. The dynamic circumstances necessitate a collaborative and strategic response from Central Asian nations and the global community in order to effectively tackle the intricate problems that lie ahead. To achieve regional stability and reduce the risks linked to Afghanistan's uncertain future under Taliban governance, it is necessary to adopt a well-rounded approach that integrates diplomatic involvement with strong security measures. The chapter promotes the idea of a unified regional and global endeavour to traverse these tumultuous circumstances, highlighting the significance of communication, collaboration, and a mutual dedication to peace and security in the midst of unparalleled difficulties.

Moreover, the commencement of the Qosh Tepa Canal initiative by the Taliban administration in Afghanistan presents a significant aspect of the regional and geopolitical complexities confronting Central Asia. The proposed infrastructure project, which seeks to move significant amounts of water away from the Amu Darya, gives rise to significant apprehensions regarding water scarcity, environmental deterioration, and the intensification of pre-existing conflicts among Central Asian nations reliant on these

crucial water sources. The canal's capacity to substantially diminish water accessibility for Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and neighbouring nations highlights the pressing necessity for cooperative water management strategies and diplomatic communication to alleviate the hazards of conflicts arising from resource scarcity.

This trend underscores the convergence of geopolitics with environmental and resource security, demonstrating the potential for infrastructural investments to yield consequences that extend beyond their immediate economic or developmental goals. The scenario necessitates a sophisticated comprehension of the environmental risks at hand and the implementation of a proactive strategy to guarantee sustainable water utilisation and collaboration among all parties involved. The forthcoming reaction to the Qosh Tepa canal project will serve as evidence of the region's capacity to address and negotiate intricate obstacles by means of collaborative efforts and a mutual dedication to maintaining regional stability and sustainability.

Chapter III – The Case of Uzbekistan.

Introduction.

Within the complex geopolitical landscape of Central Asia, Uzbekistan assumes a significant role as a crucial nation, characterised by its substantial population, considerable military capabilities, and advantageous geographical location along the renowned Silk Road. This chapter explores the intricate and diverse relationships between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, examining the origins of their interdependence that predates contemporary geopolitical boundaries. Located along the Amu Darya, these countries have developed strong connections, including language, culture, tradition, and religion, which have endured political turmoil and the rise and fall of empires.

The Soviet era was a notable period in Uzbek-Afghan relations, defined by the utilisation of Uzbek knowledge and skills in several areas of Afghanistan, which improved bilateral interactions in education, culture, and commerce. Following its independence, Uzbekistan experienced a gradual transformation in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan as it grappled with the challenges of state-building and regional security. This transition was shaped by the changing dynamics of regional politics and the presence of extremist elements. The relationship between the Taliban, diplomatic engagement, and regional security has been shaped by the establishment of the Taliban, highlighting the need for a careful balance between collaboration and caution.

In light of these interconnected factors, the significance of enhancing transport infrastructure, as demonstrated by the ambitious Trans-Afghan railway initiative, emerges as a monument to Uzbekistan's proactive stance on regional integration and economic progress. Uzbekistan's dedication to promoting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan is demonstrated through this programme, as well as by cooperation efforts in energy and humanitarian projects. This reflects Uzbekistan's broader goal of building solidarity and advancement throughout Central Asia.

This chapter endeavours to offer a full comprehension of the historical backdrop, diplomatic and security concerns, and economic cooperation prospects that influence the future of the regional collaboration between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

3.1 Unity Across the Amu Darya: A Historical Perspective on Uzbek-Afghan Relations

Uzbekistan, situated in close proximity to Afghanistan, boasts a population of around 36 million individuals, rendering it the most populous and militarily formidable nation in Central Asia. Situated in the heart of the Great Silk Road, a vital trade route linking Europe and Asia, this state holds immense cultural and historical importance.

The historical connections between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan predate the establishment of these nations. The establishment of these connections brings us back to a time when Uzbekistan and Afghanistan were not yet geographically separated and were seen as a unified region. In the past, individuals who shared the same languages, customs, traditions, and culture, as well as a religious community, coexisted on both banks of the Amu Darya for an extended period (Poliakov, 1992).

Uzbekistan was formerly a constituent of the Russian Empire and subsequently transitioned into one of the republics of the former Soviet Union. The tsarist and subsequent Soviet army's presence in Central Asia and Uzbekistan inevitably influenced the destiny of Afghanistan (Sahadeo & Jeff, 2007). Due to concerns about the potential Russian presence in India, the Russians made multiple attempts to capture Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan served as a physical barrier separating British-conquered Hindustan from Central Asia, which was under Russian control.

Despite the various political fluctuations, the interrelationships among the populations residing on both sides of the Amu Darya have consistently maintained a harmonious and amicable relationship. Uzbek nationals have sought asylum in Afghanistan on multiple occasions, while Afghans have occasionally selected Uzbekistan as their place of domicile. Afghanistan, under the communist dictatorship during the Soviet period, was regarded as a 'friendly and fraternal state' by the Central Asian countries (Tomsinov, 2001).

During the Soviet era, individuals with expertise from Uzbekistan were deployed to Afghanistan with the purpose of engaging in various sectors such as agriculture, oil and gas industries, academia, and research. These specialists assumed teaching positions at universities and research centres, as well as conducting scientific research within

Afghanistan (Poliakov & Barnett, 1992). Several individuals from Uzbekistan have held advisory roles within various ministries and departments in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan emerged as the primary destination for Afghan tourists. It is important to acknowledge that a significant number of Afghan pupils and students were educated and engaged in scientific activities in Uzbekistan. Additionally, the intellectual elite of Afghanistan frequently travelled to Uzbekistan for employment or leisure purposes. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan emerged as one of the initial nations to acknowledge the sovereignty of Uzbekistan.

In the autumn of 1992, shortly after Uzbekistan's declaration of independence, Afghanistan initiated diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan at the embassy level, marking a significant shift in bilateral relations between the two nations (Rubin & Barnett, 2002). Presently, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan are geographically divided by a border of 137 kilometres, which runs parallel to the Amu Darya River.

3.2 Post-independence Afghan-Uzbek relations

Following the disintegration of the USSR, the ruling class of the recently established sovereign nations was preoccupied with the fundamental tasks of constructing their own states and asserting their own autonomy. The issues pertaining to regional security appeared to be of lesser importance, as the Afghan orientation of the foreign policy of the emerging Central Asian nations, including Uzbekistan, continued to exhibit a lack of progress reminiscent of the final years of the Soviet Union. The security system in the Afghan region following the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan was founded upon two key principles. There are two primary reasons for this action: firstly, to ensure potential isolation from the events occurring in Afghanistan, and secondly, to provide support to the Najibullah administration, which was intended to serve as a buffer state (Akimbekov, 2003).

The transfer of the security system of the late USSR into a new regional security system of the Central Asian states was carried out slowly and inconsistently due to inertia and the localization of the Afghan conflict in 1992–1994. The primary determinant of the

efficacy of this security system was its consistent separation from the fighting zone in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, under the altered circumstances, it became unfeasible to completely uphold this principle. The ascension of the Taliban in Kabul in September 1996 compelled the leaders of the regional nations (excluding Turkmenistan, which assumed a distinct role) to adopt a more proactive approach towards neighbouring countries embroiled in armed conflict.

Overall, the revised and frequently nominally coordinated strategies of the countries in the region continued to be disorganised, situational, and primarily focused on the previous isolation from Afghanistan, with only a few exceptions.

A further component of this policy entailed the provision of assistance to anti-Taliban forces, concurrently impeding any engagement with the Taliban government. The prevailing conditions surrounding the civil war in Tajikistan compelled the primary stakeholders in the regional security framework during that period, namely Uzbekistan and Russia, to seek strategies for mitigating the adverse consequences stemming from the Afghan territory. The endeavour aimed to establish a framework of protective formations wherein Russia and Uzbekistan engaged in interactions with Afghan anti-Taliban factions until the conclusion of the 1990s. Uzbekistan primarily provided assistance to the Uzbek faction under General Abdul Rashid Dostum (Knyazev, 2004). Additionally, Tajikistan facilitated communication with the Tajik government under the leadership of Burhanutdin Rabbani. However, the comprehensive sequence of events in Afghanistan towards the conclusion of the 1990s provided evidence of the limited efficacy of the selected plans and techniques. One crucial error during this era should be regarded as the reliance on ethnopolitical categorizations of ethnic minorities, both in the political landscapes of Russia and Tajikistan as well as in the political landscape of Uzbekistan.

In May 1999, Uzbekistan initiated its initial efforts to develop bilateral relations with the Taliban. During the summer of 1999, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan unexpectedly visited Afghanistan, specifically Kandahar, as part of his visit to Pakistan (International Crisis Group, 2017). During this visit, he had a meeting with Mullah Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban. This meeting marked the first instance of a Taliban leader having a meeting with an official of the CIS countries

of such authority. The matter of the involvement of Taliban representatives at the 6+2 format meeting on the Afghan settlement, held in Tashkent, was deliberated during the discussion. Kamilov conveyed a communication from Uzbek President Islam Karimov to Mullah Omar, urging the establishment of amicable relations between Uzbekistan and the Taliban (Knyazev, 2004). However, Mullah Omar expressed that the Taliban would only engage in the Tashkent talks if they were extended an invitation to become an officially recognised government of Afghanistan.

The primary concern of the authorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan during that period revolved around the co-optation of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into the ranks of Taliban allies. However, the events of 2001 disrupted the trajectory of this conversational pattern, primarily as a result of the internal process of radicalization's success and the allure of numerous foreign combatants, such as the IMU, within the Taliban movement.

By 2001, the Taliban's integration with international terrorist groups and their use of religious fundamentalist slogans to carry out aggressive actions against the entire subregion, with the active involvement of non-Afghan forces, were driven by external isolation and the ongoing intra-Afghan conflict (Rubin & Barnett 2002). The aforementioned development signified a significant shift in the position of Afghanistan, particularly in relation to the security concerns of nations in the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. The situation also served as the basis for gaining support in the region's nations, including the Republic of Uzbekistan, for the military operation that the United States and the United Kingdom carried out in October 2001. It is worth noting that this operation entailed the complete disassociation from the Taliban movement for a significant duration. In 2008, Uzbekistan proactively reestablished the 6+2 group to address the Afghan problem. They suggested adding a NATO representation to the group, resulting in the formation of the 6+3 group. Nevertheless, the concept of establishing such a collective has not garnered extensive endorsement due to a multitude of factors. Tashkent was unable to get Moscow's backing on this issue, as Moscow expressed scepticism regarding the group's efficacy in the absence of Afghanistan.

According to reports, Uzbekistan supported a particular side in the Afghan civil war, namely the northern Afghan-born General Abdul Rashid Dostum's group. General Dostum governed nine provinces in northern Afghanistan during that period.

According to Tashpulat Yuldashev, Uzbekistan kept its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan alive during the start of the country's civil wars by cooperating with some opposing factions, most notably the General Dostum-led party and other factions (Fahim, 2013).⁴

According to John McCartney, a former British diplomat and expert in Central Asian affairs, Uzbekistan's interactions with certain political factions within Afghanistan were primarily driven by concerns regarding the potential infiltration of mobile groups into its borders, despite the presence of a national and linguistic community. Consequently, Uzbekistan was compelled to provide assistance to certain factions within Afghanistan in order to safeguard its southern borders (Fahim, 2013).

The Afghan direction holds significant importance in Uzbekistan's foreign policy, with direct engagement with the Taliban movement dating back to approximately 2015. Uzbekistan has acquired significant expertise in the execution of rebuilding initiatives in Afghanistan, making it a logical candidate to undertake projects that are crucial for the socio-economic advancement of the country (Ergashev, 2010). During this particular era, Uzbekistan exhibited a lack of preparedness to assume accountability for a thorough resolution in Afghanistan. However, given its proximity and significant regional influence, Uzbekistan anticipated its involvement in the extensive Afghan settlement endeavours of that period (Knyazev, 2018).

In addition to other endeavours aimed at involving Taliban representatives in diverse negotiating initiatives during the period of 2018–2020, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the endeavours made to initiate processes of region-wide engagement in the development of Afghanistan. A forum named ‘Peace Process, Security Cooperation, and Regional Cooperation’ was organised by Tashkent in March 2018. Subsequently, in July 2021, a comparable high-level event titled ‘Central and South Asia: Regional

⁴ <https://afghanistan.ru/doc/57523.html>

Interconnectedness. Challenges and opportunities' took place.⁵ These and several other global events were clearly (and will continue to be) directed towards attaining the primary Afghan objective of Uzbekistan. Afghanistan holds significant importance as a market for several sectors within the Republic of Uzbekistan. Additionally, it serves as a crucial communication hub connecting South and Southeast Asian countries, the Persian Gulf region, and the Indian Ocean basin. The nation's shift after 2016 is the main factor driving the escalation of the Afghan trend. The 'Strategy of Actions in Five Areas of Further Development of Uzbekistan for 2017-2023' aims to transition the economy from an import-substituting model to an export-oriented one.⁶

Simultaneously, when juxtaposed with nations such as Turkmenistan or Iran, Uzbekistan exhibits a relatively lower degree of reticence in its interactions with the Taliban administration subsequent to its assumption of power in Kabul in August 2021. Tashkent, in contrast to Ashgabat, Beijing, Islamabad, Doha, Ankara, and Moscow, abstains from granting accreditation to Taliban diplomats, even at the 'chargé d'affaires' level. The prevailing sentiment against this regime can be characterised as highly broad, with the activities of the Taliban being widely condemned by external players, the media, and public speech in the Republic of Uzbekistan, albeit to a minimum degree.

Uzbekistan's stance during the pre-Taliban era in Kabul, spanning from spring to summer 2021 and extending to August 2021, is marked by heightened military and border security measures, as well as concurrent engagements with both the Afghan government and the Taliban movement (Knyazev, 2021).

The establishment of a new negotiation group on the Afghan settlement, comprising the United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, was announced during the conference 'Central and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness: Challenges and Opportunities,' held in Tashkent in July 2021. However, in the ensuing period, the implementation of this American proposal was not carried out due to its failure to consider the fundamentally evolving circumstances in Afghanistan. The interconnectedness initiative can be regarded as a component of the multifaceted American C5+1 project.

⁵ <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/fr/news/tashkent-host-high-level-conference-afghanistan-global-and-regional-powers-afghanistan%E2%80%99s>

⁶ <http://strategy.regulation.gov.uz/uz/document/1>

The Republic of Uzbekistan's participation in this initiative is driven by its strategic objective to align its priorities with the interests of global centres of influence within the context of a multi-faceted foreign policy framework.

The Uzbek Foreign Ministry issued an official statement on August 17, 2021, expressing its endorsement of the Afghan forces' declarations regarding their preparedness to establish a government that encompasses all members of society. We declare our aspiration for the peaceful transition of power within the nation, grounded on universal consensus and in accordance with widely accepted principles of international law. "Uzbekistan's diplomatic missions in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif are functioning normally. The Uzbek government maintains frequent communication with Taliban representatives regarding border protection and the maintenance of peace in the border area" (MFA of Uzbekistan, 2021).

Simultaneously, Uzbekistan is actively engaging in collaborative military endeavours aimed at upholding security along its border with Afghanistan. The Harbmaydon military training site in Tajikistan concluded joint exercises on August 10, 2021, which involved a total of 2.5 thousand personnel from Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (Freund, 2022).⁷ The Republic of Uzbekistan did not exhibit any inclination to rejoin the CSTO, as it had suspended its membership in 2011. From a military standpoint, Uzbekistan exhibits a higher degree of self-sufficiency in countering threats emanating from the Afghan direction, in contrast to Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The Uzbek leadership likely comprehended that the threats posed were not of a direct transnational nature. Furthermore, the establishment of bilateral military cooperation with Russia served as an additional assurance of military security. The military alliance between Uzbekistan and Russia, established under the treaty on allied ties of May 6, 2006, has been confirmed to be effective during the summer and early autumn of 2021. This alliance also includes the participation of Tajikistan, another member country of the Comprehensive Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

The following period warrants consideration of the historical instances of collaboration in counterterrorism efforts between the pertinent institutions of the Republic

⁷ <https://caspiantpolicy.com/research/regional-central-asia/uzbekistan-and-tajikistan-conduct-joint-military-exercises-amid-afghanistan-border-concerns>

of Uzbekistan and leaders of the Taliban. Following the bombardment of the Republic of Uzbekistan's territory by ISIS terrorists from the Afghan side in August 2022, a collaborative investigation was conducted, and precautions were implemented to prevent a similar occurrence. This precedent is significant, considering the Taliban movement's exclusive opposition to ISIS activities in Afghanistan from 2015 until the present.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, articulated Uzbekistan's overall stance on the situation in Afghanistan during that period. He emphasised the absence of a military resolution to the Afghan crisis. Furthermore, it is of utmost significance that Afghanistan assumes a crucial role within the Central Asian region. According to Kamilov, it is imperative that the peace process in Afghanistan have a cohesive regional and international approach.⁸

3.3 Typical characteristics of engagement with the Taliban movement

In the realm of diplomacy, Uzbekistan asserts that in Afghanistan, it is imperative to attain comprehensive political representation of all sectors of Afghan society within the realm of public administration. Additionally, Uzbekistan emphasises the need to uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms, with a special focus on safeguarding the rights of national minorities. Simultaneously, the diplomatic efforts of the Republic of Uzbekistan emphasise the significance of averting the isolation of Afghanistan and its potential status as a 'rogue state.' It is suggested to release Afghanistan's assets held in foreign banks to avoid a significant humanitarian disaster and a rise in the number of refugees. Additionally, this measure aims to support Kabul in its economic recovery and address social issues. The conduct of numerous foreign actors in the field of politics has an impact on Uzbekistan, which in turn shapes the direction of its policy. This specifically pertains to the matter of acknowledging the Taliban government on the agenda. Simultaneously, efforts to revive the economic operations of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan are being scrutinised. The implementation of Uzbekistan's Afghan policy adheres to consistent principles and can be characterised as balanced and practical.

⁸ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/06/26/taliban/>

When considering Uzbekistan, it is imperative to acknowledge its notable and constructive proactive approach towards Afghanistan. The conversation between the Foreign Ministers of Uzbekistan and Germany is noteworthy in this context. During the German Minister's visit to Tashkent, Vladimir Norov emphasised the need for international assistance in repatriating Afghan assets that have been frozen overseas and in restoring the infrastructure in Afghanistan. Annalena Baerbock observed that Germany and Uzbekistan hold divergent perspectives on this matter: "We maintain that the Taliban have unlawfully deprived the people of Afghanistan of their freedom." I would like to seize this occasion to express our opposition to the actions undertaken by the present government of Afghanistan.⁹ The German Minister's abstract demagoguery regarding freedom in the context of the humanitarian crisis and the risk of instability in Afghanistan serves to underscore Uzbekistan's positive stance. The recognition of the situation in Afghanistan as a question of security and development is acknowledged in Tashkent.

The consistent and proactive efforts of Uzbekistan in addressing the situation in Afghanistan have been repeatedly affirmed. For instance, during a meeting held in China from March 30-31, 2022, the Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, Sardor Umurzakov, put forth a proposition to establish mechanisms and criteria for the international acknowledgment of the interim government of Afghanistan.¹⁰ The acknowledgment of the present government of Afghanistan is expected to expedite the nation's assimilation into both the regional sphere and the global community. During the recent visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, the leaders of both nations engaged in deliberations over the potential establishment of a "regional consensus" pertaining to the acknowledgment of the Taliban government (Knyazev, 2023). In several nations that express a desire to engage in productive collaboration with Afghanistan, the official accreditation of diplomats dispatched by the Taliban government is observed to occur in the year 2022. These diplomats are employed at the embassies of Afghanistan located in Beijing, Islamabad, Ashgabat, and Moscow, assuming the role of "charge d'affaires" as of April 6, 2022. Accreditation has been granted by the Russian Foreign Ministry to Javal Nasir Garhwal, the newly appointed

⁹ <https://kun.uz/en/news/2022/11/01/taliban-has-stolen-peoples-freedom-in-afghanistan-foreign-minister-of-germany>

¹⁰ <https://m.kun.uz/en/news/2022/04/01/uzbekistan-proposes-to-develop-a-mechanism-for-international-recognition-of-afghanistans-interim-government>

head of the mission (Vishnovskaya, 2022).¹¹ In several major cities, such as Tehran, Ankara, and Doha, alternative solutions have been identified. For instance, in Iran, the ambassador of the previous Afghan government consented to act as a representative for the Taliban government. Officially, Taliban government representatives are not employed in Tashkent. However, there are ongoing interactions occurring at both the higher government level and at the local, sectoral, and interdepartmental levels.

The conference titled "Afghanistan: Security and Economic Development" took place in Tashkent from July 25th to 26th, 2022, and it is imperative to take into account the aforementioned backdrop.¹² The primary distinction between the new conference and the numerous international meetings on Afghan subjects during this era lies in its focus on the economic advancement of Afghanistan rather than primarily addressing security concerns in the country.

Furthermore, the summit could be regarded as a strategic move by Tashkent to regain its position as the primary regional instigator and intermediary in the negotiating procedures concerning Afghanistan under the altered circumstances in the nation. Additionally, the goal was to reinstate the procedure that the July 2021 conference on the connectivity of Central and South Asia had started. In the summer of 2022, amidst the prevailing long-term uncertainty in Afghanistan, there arose a compelling imperative to recommence the diplomatic endeavours pertaining to the region. The presence of diverse anti-Taliban factions in Afghanistan, which exhibit a lack of inclination towards engaging in political resolutions, instead opting for guerrilla and sabotage strategies, does not contribute to the process of stabilisation inside the nation. The words made by Afghan politicians from foreign countries have a similar response (Knyazev, 2023).

In practical terms, the aforementioned activities are intertwined with operations conducted within the borders of Afghanistan by non-Afghan terrorist organisations, hence increasing the probability of a fresh destabilisation of the nation. This phenomenon will inherently result in an increase in the level of danger and risk faced by neighbouring nations.

¹¹ <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/06/14/17931488.shtml>

¹² <http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/9318-statement-released-following-international-conference-on-afghanistan>

The proposal made by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan to enhance practical cooperation between the special services, the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS, and the CSTO Secretariat regarding the situation in Afghanistan during a meeting held in Dushanbe on September 17, 2021, is not a mere coincidence. However, the President of Uzbekistan also suggested a gradual shift towards acknowledging the newly established Afghan government. The SCO and the CSTO were encouraged to collaborate in formulating a shared approach. Mirziyoyev suggests that it is imperative to sustain the ongoing socio-economic and infrastructure initiatives in Afghanistan (Mirziyoyev, 2021).¹³ Hence, a significant driving force behind Uzbekistan's actions is the establishment of favourable circumstances in Afghanistan, enabling the initiation of infrastructure, transport, and energy initiatives targeted towards South Asia and the Middle East.

3.4 The collaborative initiatives between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

With the assumption of office by the newly elected President Sh. Mirziyoyev, the relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have experienced a significant transformation and are now progressing in a more dynamic manner, aligning with the objectives outlined in the Development Strategy for 2017–2021. This strategy aims to foster mutually beneficial and amicable relations with neighbouring republics while also enhancing stability and security within the region. In its revised foreign policy idea, Uzbekistan maintains a consistent principle: Tashkent will persist in its practical and constructive approach towards Afghanistan. This change does not imply that the newly elected president refutes potential dangers originating from Afghanistan; rather, it signifies a shift in perspective, characterised by increased loyalty towards the neighbouring state. Within a brief timeframe, the state's leader successfully attained a notable augmentation in trade volume between the nations. There has been consistent annual growth in both exports and total trade turnover. Sh. Mirziyoyev expresses optimistic expectations for the Afghan market, with a strategic objective of augmenting

¹³ <https://central-asia.news/uzbekistan/politika-uzbekistan/na-vstreche-shos-odkb-mirziyoyev-ozvychil-poziciu-uzbekistana-po-afganskomy-voprosy>

trade turnover to \$2 billion by the conclusion of 2024. Uzbekistan has commenced the provision of automobiles, food, and medicinal goods to the next nation.

The interconnections within the energy, cultural, humanitarian, and transport sectors have experienced substantial enhancement. Starting in 2018, Afghan candidates have been provided with the chance to receive education and receive specialised training in a dedicated educational facility for Afghan citizens. This centre is located in the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Termez. The establishment of the centre was in compliance with the Resolution issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on November 13, 2017, which pertains to the establishment of an educational centre for the purpose of training Afghan citizens under the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Uzbekistan government has explicitly stated that Tashkent will establish communication with the new leadership of Afghanistan, citing several grounds for this decision.

Initially, Tashkent is left with no alternative. The Taliban exert significant control over Afghanistan, and the strained relations between the two nations pose a direct military threat to Uzbekistan. Consequently, Sh. Mirziyoyev will make every effort to avert this situation. Furthermore, Uzbekistan derives economic advantages from various factors, including the exportation of Uzbek products to Afghan markets, the execution of trans-regional initiatives by Uzbekistan, and the enhancement of transport infrastructure across Afghanistan's territory. Negotiations pertaining to the establishment of a railway traversing Afghan territory commenced at the conclusion of October 2021. The projected expenditure for the project is approximately \$5 billion. The proposed route aims to establish connectivity among the European Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and various Southeast Asian nations. The European Union and Uzbekistan are currently engaged in negotiations for the establishment of a humanitarian hub in the city of Termez. The European Union's decision to engage in this matter signifies the relaxation of Brussels' stance on Afghanistan and its inclination towards fostering additional collaboration with Uzbekistan in the pursuit of peace and stability within Afghanistan.

On one hand, the successful implementation of Uzbekistan's trans-Afghan projects and its contribution to resolving the Afghan issue would undoubtedly provide Sh. Mirziyoyev with leadership and enhanced regional recognition. This, in turn, would contribute to the improvement of already positive relations with both fraternal republics and major global actors. Consequently, Uzbekistan is poised to emerge as a pivotal nation in the Central Asian area owing to its dynamic political standing and robust economic engagement. Uzbekistan must maintain its stance on the Afghan matter, emphasising the importance of not isolating itself from Afghanistan. Instead, Uzbekistan advocates for a cohesive approach to engaging with the new government and assisting them in constructing a contemporary state that complies with international norms and standards. It is imperative that we persist in executing collaborative initiatives. An example of a significant undertaking involves the establishment of a novel power transmission infrastructure in Afghanistan. The construction agreement was signed in 2017. The building commenced in 2018 under the auspices of ACWA Power, a Saudi corporation. On October 20, 2020, an agreement was signed between Afghanistan and the Asian Development Bank about the funding of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power line project, with the Government of Uzbekistan in attendance. A sum of 110 million US dollars has been allocated within the parameters of the agreement.¹⁴

Tashkent has served as a power provider to Kabul for over 15 years. In the year 2018, there was a reduction of 35% in the price of power. The implementation of a novel transmission line will provide a 70% augmentation in the electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.¹⁵ Therefore, the resolution of this issue not only addresses the issue of power outages in rural regions but also presents novel prospects for establishing firms and generating employment possibilities. Simultaneously, the transmission line would establish a connection between Kabul and the integrated energy system of Central Asia. This development will create a potential avenue for other Central Asian nations to contribute electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India as part of the CASA-1000 initiative.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://fergana.media/news/121189/>

¹⁵ <https://fergana.media/news/121189/>

¹⁶ <https://isrs.uz/ru/smti-ekspertlari-sharhlari/afganistan-strategiceskaa-vozmnost-dla-ekonomiceskogo-razvitiya-centralnoj-azii>

Conclusion.

The bilateral relationship between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan encompasses a complex narrative of historical connections, common obstacles, and cooperative initiatives with the objective of promoting stability and progress within the area. This chapter has examined the intricate and multifaceted nature of Uzbek-Afghan relations, focusing on historical, diplomatic, security, and infrastructure development. It has emphasised Uzbekistan's strategic position in Central Asia and its subtle involvement with Afghanistan.

The historical context of unity along the Amu Darya River provides a foundation for comprehending the long-lasting bonds between these nations, which have been strengthened by centuries of cultural exchange and reciprocal support. The linkages between the Soviet era and the subsequent period of freedom became more intricate as they introduced additional aspects of political and military involvement within the tumultuous context of regional security and the emergence of the Taliban.

Over the past few years, Uzbekistan has exhibited a proactive and pragmatic stance towards its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, placing significant emphasis on fostering economic collaboration, enhancing infrastructure, and providing humanitarian assistance. The strategic vision of Afghanistan is seen in its emphasis on the development of transport infrastructure, including the massive Trans-Afghan railway project. This vision aims to utilise Afghanistan's geographical location to improve regional connections and promote economic integration.

Furthermore, the joint endeavours undertaken by Uzbekistan in the domains of energy, education, and cultural exchange demonstrate a collective dedication to bolstering Afghanistan's socio-economic progress, with the aim of fostering a future characterised by stability and prosperity for both countries. The aforementioned endeavours, in conjunction with a well-balanced and constructive diplomatic position, serve as a demonstration of Uzbekistan's significance as a prominent participant in the Central Asian area. This posture promotes a complete and inclusive strategy for tackling the obstacles and capitalising on the prospects that await in the realm of Afghan relations.

In summary, "The Case of Uzbekistan" offers significant contributions to the comprehension of the complex dynamics of Uzbek-Afghan relations. It presents a comprehensive framework for comprehending the influence of historical connections, strategic interests, and collaborative endeavours on the trajectory of regional involvement in Central Asia. The activities undertaken by Uzbekistan in managing its relationship with Afghanistan are expected to have significant consequences for the stability, security, and prosperity of the area.

Chapter IV – Global Activities

Introduction.

The objective of this chapter, entitled "Global Activities," is to examine the intricate dynamics of diplomacy, power, and international relations within the framework of the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan after the year 2021. The primary objective of this chapter is to analyse the strategic movement of the Taliban, a group that has historically been isolated on the world scene, towards the adoption of diplomacy as a crucial means of cultivating regional support and overcoming global isolation. The story undertakes an analytical exploration, scrutinising the intentional interactions of the Taliban with significant countries such as Uzbekistan, Iran, Russia, Turkistan, China, and Pakistan. These engagements are seen as a deliberate endeavour to establish a fundamental support system in the face of geopolitical obstacles.

The analysis presented in this study examines the various strategies employed by the Taliban in their diplomatic efforts. It sheds light on their efforts to establish legitimacy, the significant influence of economic interests on political relationships, and the complex dynamics of seeking international recognition in the face of concerns regarding governance and human rights standards. This chapter seeks to analyse the consequences of diplomatic efforts, such as the strengthening relationship between the Taliban and China, on global security, regional stability, and the changing dynamics of international alliances and conflicts.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategic foundations of the Taliban's global activities by examining various sections, including strategic diplomacy, the intricate network of Russian-Chinese relations following the Taliban's acquisition of power, and the changing dynamics of Russian-American relations. The objective is to elucidate the manner in which these movements not only mirror the prevailing geopolitical circumstances but also exert an impact on the worldwide arrangement, hence questioning conventional frameworks of international relations and security deliberations. This chapter aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationships among diplomacy, global politics, and the pursuit of stability and legitimacy within a constantly changing international context. Moreover, we will analyze the consequences of the Taliban's resurgence on various levels. It will scrutinize

the humanitarian impact of the Taliban's governance, focusing on the deterioration of human rights, the plight of women and ethnic minorities, and the broader social regression.

4.1 Strategic Diplomacy and International Engagement

The Taliban's strategy in the realm of foreign diplomacy subsequent to their resurgence in 2021 highlights a deliberate transition towards utilising diplomatic avenues. The aforementioned "world tour," which encompasses trips to countries such as Uzbekistan, Iran, Russia, Turkmenistan, China, and Pakistan, is a purposeful endeavour to foster a wider foundation of regional backing and confront their diplomatic seclusion. The shift towards diplomacy demonstrates an acknowledgment of the geopolitical circumstances that require a combination of soft power tactics in addition to their traditional dependence on military force.

The pursuit of legitimacy is a vital aspect of the Taliban's foreign strategy. Their interactions, especially with China, demonstrate a sophisticated comprehension of the worldwide geopolitical environment, where economic interests frequently take precedence over political ideologies. China's engagement with the Taliban, centred on industrial investments and economic prospects, is a practical position that could establish a model for other countries grappling with the choice between involvement and seclusion (Pantucci, 2021).

The international community's cautious approach to recognising the Taliban depends on the complex interaction of a number of factors, including human rights, governance standards, and counterterrorism obligations. The acting prime minister of Afghanistan's appeal for acknowledgment, particularly from Islamic nations, highlights the Taliban's aspiration to liberate itself from worldwide seclusion. However, the Taliban has a diplomatic challenge due to the conditional nature of prospective recognition, which is contingent upon inclusive administration and pledges of human rights (Borger, 2021). The international hesitancy, led by Western governments, to establish formal connections without significant governance reforms demonstrates a wider doubt regarding the Taliban's commitments compared to their actual actions.

The Taliban undertook a strategic realignment by moving from diplomatic isolation in the late 1990s to active interaction with several states. The global trend of interacting with entities that have de facto authority even in the absence of official recognition has influenced the aforementioned transition to some extent (Grant, 1999). The difficulties of legitimising government that arises via non-traditional channels to power are highlighted by the international legal system surrounding recognition.

The diplomatic endeavours undertaken by the Taliban have significant ramifications for both global security and regional stability. The interactions with countries such as China and Russia indicate a possible shift in Afghanistan's international relations, which might potentially affect the strategic interests of the United States in the region (Galeotti, 2021). Furthermore, the intricate involvement of regional actors implies a shared concern for averting Afghanistan from being a focal point of instability. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these diplomatic endeavours in guaranteeing an all-encompassing, secure, and human rights-oriented system of administration in Afghanistan remains doubtful.

One significant diplomatic endeavor by the Taliban was their interaction with China, which has met with Taliban officials more often than any other country. This relationship underscores the geopolitical significance of the Taliban's rule, transcending traditional counterterrorism concerns to encompass economic and industrial investments. China's engagements, focusing on business opportunities and infrastructure projects, signal a cautious but strategic approach towards the Taliban, aiming to integrate Afghanistan into broader regional initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (Small, 2022).

China maintained diplomatic ties with all Afghan administrations, with the exception of the pro-Soviet regimes that existed from 1979 to 1989, as China declined to recognise their authority. While Beijing expressed its disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it maintained an official state of inactivity in Afghanistan during the period of Taliban governance. Nevertheless, according to Afghan scholar Malik Setiz, there existed informal relations between China and the Taliban government (Dyakonova, 2017). China has provided financial and political support to the newly established government in Kabul since 2002. China holds a significant position as a major foreign

investor in Afghanistan. As an illustration, Logar Aynak, a copper mining venture, stands as the most substantial foreign investment in the nation.

Prior to the collapse of Kabul, the official stance of Beijing was to endorse the process of reconciliation among the conflicting factions, despite its official engagement with the Taliban since 2019 and its prior informal interactions spanning several years. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi extended a cordial welcome to Taliban representatives on July 28, inviting them to Beijing for meetings. This event serves as a prominent indication of the improving relations between China and the Taliban. Following the collapse of Kabul, Beijing's remarks were amicable, although cautious. On August 16, subsequent to the collapse of Kabul, Hua Chunying, an official from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, was queried over the potential occurrence of a confession. The speaker expressed the aspiration for the Afghan Taliban to demonstrate unity with all factions and ethnic groups within Afghanistan, thereby fostering the establishment of a comprehensive and all-encompassing political framework (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks, 2021). On the same day, Geng Shuang, China's representative to the United Nations, reiterated the remark while also emphasising the need to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a haven for terrorists in the future. It is our aspiration that the Taliban in Afghanistan will genuinely uphold its responsibilities and fully disengage from terrorist entities (China & UN).

Beijing expresses apprehension regarding the potential resumption of drug trafficking by the Taliban as a means to fund their regime and revert to endorsing terrorist activities outside the borders of Afghanistan (Pantucci, 2021). Beijing expresses concern about the potential empowerment of individuals associated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a separatist and terrorist group in the north-western province of Xinjiang, due to the Taliban's notable achievements. Thus far, China has predominantly depended on its "iron brother," Pakistan, which has diligently undertaken the task of thwarting the infiltration of terrorists into Xinjiang or providing any form of support to the prohibited group.

The Taliban, in response, provided China with assurances that Afghanistan would embrace infrastructure and investment initiatives in the aftermath of the conflict. On July 10, the Taliban made a commitment to recognise China's amicable nature and expressed

their support for the reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. If individuals possess investments, it is imperative that we prioritise their safety (Kuo, 2021). Following their seizure of power on August 19, the Taliban restated their acceptance of Beijing's involvement. In the event that Afghanistan achieves a satisfactory level of security, it is probable that China will endeavour to extend its "One Belt, One Road" plan, a measure that the previous Afghan government refrained from in order to avoid provoking Washington. This expansion would involve the construction of road and rail connections within Afghanistan and its borders (Downes, 2021).

Despite Beijing's inability to establish trust with the Taliban, it is improbable that the latter will persistently decline official recognition (Zimmerman, 2021). He desires to prevent the cultivation of suspicion, which may result in the group renegeing on its commitments. Furthermore, it is plausible that China, a significant global power competing with the United States, wants to highlight its unique perspective on world affairs, which typically and frequently deviates from Washington's strategy. Significantly, recognising the Taliban's control over Afghanistan would enhance the idea that Beijing, rather than Washington, is the one responsible for determining the agenda and shaping the future regional arrangement (Small, 2021).

China will employ soft power to exert its influence in Afghanistan. He prioritises peaceful coexistence and collaboration over rivalry in his foreign policy. Beijing is exhibiting a lenient position towards Afghanistan, expressing its willingness to collaborate with the Taliban regime on the condition that they guarantee the safeguarding of human rights (Clarke, 2021). China previously withheld recognition from the Taliban government due to its adherence to fanaticism and its affiliations with insurgents. There is potential for China to adopt a similar approach to economic corporation and prosperity as observed in Africa. This initiative has the potential to enhance China's soft power in the region while simultaneously mitigating the influence of India in the area.

In an alternative scenario, China may choose to refrain from officially declaring recognition and instead choose to engage in de facto recognition. China's actions in relation to the junta that took over Myanmar in early 2021 have been observed. However, this situation is essentially distinct: in contrast to Myanmar, there appears to be a lack of significant opposition to Taliban governance. China did not recognise the Taliban

throughout the initial period of the group's reign in Afghanistan, from 1996 to 2001. In contemporary times, China exhibits notable distinctions.

Primarily, it possesses genuinely global interests and finds itself engaged in a geopolitical rivalry with the United States. The significance of Afghanistan's natural resources has escalated in relation to China's economic advancement.

Furthermore, it is probable that China intends to leverage its alliance with Afghanistan, in conjunction with Pakistan, as a means to counter India, a significant regional competitor that engaged in a military confrontation with China just in 2020.

Ultimately, despite China's genuine apprehension regarding the Taliban's commitment to uphold its commitments, the immense geostrategic and economic advantages of bilateral relations are too significant for Beijing to disregard. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that a potential delay in bestowing the Taliban with the recognition and legitimacy they desire has the potential to incite discontent within the group, posing a significant threat to Beijing's security interests. The various hazards and benefits associated with the expansion and reinforcement of Chinese-Taliban relations are evident.

Presently, China possesses the potential to enhance its sphere of influence within Afghanistan and the broader regional context. The main objective of this entity is to mitigate regional instability and address security challenges in its western territories. China's primary objective is to hinder Afghanistan from becoming a stronghold of support for the Uighur and other Muslim minority groups opposing Chinese governance in Xinjiang. In spite of the global condemnation of China's treatment of the Muslim community in Xinjiang, China received favourable indications regarding this matter in late July when it hosted a delegation from the Taliban. As per the report from the Chinese Foreign Ministry regarding the meeting, the Taliban made a commitment to prevent any force from utilising Afghan territory to carry out activities that would harm China.

In July, a representative from the Taliban made a commitment to abstain from intervening in the internal affairs of China. During its reign from 1996 to 2001, China refrained from officially recognising the Taliban. However, it now has the ability to do so by providing economic incentives in order to secure the movement's backing. China,

like Russia, established diplomatic relations with the Taliban before the latest coup and even hosted the previous delegation in 2019. China has the potential to pursue economic interests in Afghanistan alongside its endeavours to safeguard the security of its western territories. Despite the fact that production had not yet started, a group of Chinese businesses acquired the Mes-Aynak copper mine concession in 2008. Afghanistan is potentially endowed with mineral resources valued at about \$1 trillion, encompassing rare earth minerals. China has the potential to establish a connection between Afghanistan and its "One Belt, One Road" plan. As an illustration, China intends to construct a thoroughfare spanning from Peshawar to Kabul, establishing a vital link between Afghanistan and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Brian G. Carlson, 2021).

China is now constructing a primary thoroughfare along the Wakhan Corridor, aiming to establish a connection between Xinjiang, Pakistan, and Central Asia. China has the potential to establish connections with Iran and Southwest Asia by means of Afghanistan. In response, the Taliban has expressed its willingness to engage with Chinese investment in infrastructure.

Nevertheless, the success of these investments relies on a stable and protected environment in Afghanistan, and the likelihood of this happening is now doubtful. A terrorist incident in Pakistan in July resulted in the deaths of nine Chinese citizens, highlighting the perils that China is exposed to. China exhibits a hesitancy to employ military force beyond its territorial boundaries as a means to safeguard its national interests. Ensuring the security of one's own borders is imperative; however, a more delicate matter is establishing a substantial security presence to safeguard investments outside. Security factors have the potential to impede or significantly diminish Chinese investment in Afghanistan.

4.2 Russian-Chinese relations against the background of the seizure of power by the Taliban.

At the political rhetorical level, both China and Russia have strategically capitalised on recent events with the aim of undermining the credibility of the United States. As the Taliban approached and ultimately attained victory, both nations censured

the United States for its shortcomings in Afghanistan during the preceding two decades, which encompassed its disorderly retreat. While acknowledging the United States' role in promoting regional stability and combating terrorism, China and Russia expressed their desire to avoid an indefinite deployment of U.S. military forces in the area. The aforementioned objective was essentially accomplished several years ago, subsequent to the cessation of American military outposts in Uzbekistan in 2005 and Kyrgyzstan in 2014.

Following the exit of the United States from Afghanistan, the potential resurgence of regional instability might foster collaboration between China and Russia. In August, as the imminent triumph of the Taliban drew near, Russian forces participated in the intra-Chinese military exercises for the first time (Joint Western, 2021). The exercises, conducted in Ningxia Province, were specifically aimed at combating terrorism. In September, a series of joint military exercises, known as Peace Mission 2021, were carried out by Russia and China. These drills took place on Russian territory, in close proximity to the border with Kazakhstan, and were organised by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (Dyankova). In addition, these drills encompassed counter-terrorism missions. Since 2005, Russia and China have engaged in collaborative military exercises within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), with a particular focus on counterterrorism efforts. China and Russia can leverage their experience to coordinate a collaborative military intervention in Central Asia in the event of regional instability, potentially involving terrorist threats originating from Afghanistan.

China and Russia may consider collaborating through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), an organisation that maintains its initial objective of combating the "three forces of evil" encompassing separatism, extremism, and terrorism. The SCO leaders convened a hybrid summit in Dushanbe in September, during which they granted approval to Iran's application for full membership. The summit declaration emphasised the importance of achieving stability in Afghanistan and the establishment of a comprehensive government that encompasses the diverse ethnic, religious, and political factions inside the nation. Nevertheless, the SCO will face significant challenges in formulating a unified strategy towards Afghanistan, particularly following the inclusion of competing nations India and Pakistan as full members in 2017. The approaches of

Member States towards regional issues and their interrelationships predominantly adhere to bilateral agreements (Brian G. Carlson, 2021).

Notwithstanding the potential for China-Russian collaboration, there exist latent tensions pertaining to both Central and South Asia, which may progressively escalate. Russia is endeavouring to establish itself as the preeminent actor in the region; however, the increasing influence of China poses a danger to Russia's standing. Currently, both nations are effectively managing this situation. In 2015, a consensus was reached to establish a connection between the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia, and the Silk Road Economic Belt. The objective of China was to persuade Russia and the 34 republics in Central Asia that its primary focus is on fostering economic development and connectivity rather than exerting political dominance over the region. Based on a widely held viewpoint, it is posited that China and Russia have implicitly established a bilateral agreement in the region, wherein a division of labour is established. This arrangement designates Russia as the primary external provider of security, while China assumes the role of driving economic development (Shams S, 2017)

Nevertheless, this argument has never proven entirely persuasive. China has consistently been able to acquire political influence and justifications for expanding its security engagement in the region as its economic interests have expanded. China initiated collaboration with Pakistan, Tajikistan, and the former government of Afghanistan in 2016 with the aim of safeguarding regional security. According to reports, the Chinese experts affiliated with the analytical centre initiated communication with their Russian counterparts in order to elucidate China's goals pertaining to this particular format. China has consistently prioritised the establishment of security measures along its 91-kilometre border with Afghanistan in the eastern region of the Wakhan Corridor, as well as along its 477-kilometre border with Tajikistan, which serves as a potential transit point for extremists or terrorists originating from Afghanistan (Dyankova, 2017). In recent times, China has provided assistance in the construction and enhancement of Tajikistan's border checkpoints with Afghanistan, bolstered the capacities of Pakistan's security forces, and established a military station for Afghan mountain troops in Badakhshan, in close proximity to the Wakhan Corridor.

Such acts have the potential to generate strain in diplomatic ties with Russia. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that China's security collaboration with Pakistan and Tajikistan, as well as its current engagement with the Taliban, signifies a deliberate effort to marginalise Russia's role in regional security (Kaczmarek, 2021). China's primary objective is to guarantee security in its most critical sector, specifically in the vicinity of its western border. China and Russia may establish a division of labour inside the security sector, rather than dividing it between the economy and security. Each country would concentrate on specific sectors. By means of this agreement, Russia would concur with China's endeavours to fortify its border through collaboration with adjacent nations. Nevertheless, over time, China has the potential to enhance its regional security influence in a manner that diminishes Russia's position (Cooley, 2020). The inquiry over Russia's response to the substantial Chinese security presence in the region, with the objective of safeguarding substantial investments beyond its own boundaries, remains unresolved.

The emergence of joint Chinese and Russian dominance in Central Asia is a significant concern for Western countries, prompting Western politicians and strategists to actively avert such a scenario. The Greater Central Asia Strategy was initiated by the administration of former US President George W. Bush with the objective of achieving stability in Afghanistan (Laruelle, 2021). This strategy attempted to create a favourable environment for Central Asian states to enhance their economic connections with South Asia. The aforementioned result would afford the landlocked Central Asian States significant economic and strategic prospects, therefore diminishing their susceptibility to influence exerted by Russia and China. This goal has consistently lacked sufficient political backing and financial commitments to achieve success, and it is currently further off from reality than ever before. Central Asian governments are currently engaged in efforts to retain their autonomy in the realm of foreign policy. However, it is plausible that they may encounter a growing reliance on Russia and China.

4.3 Russian-American relations against the background of the Taliban takeover of power.

The Afghan agenda holds significant importance in the current foreign policy of both Russia and the United States. The cyclical nature of Russian-American contacts is

characterised by the replacement of trusting and collaborative exchanges with acts of antagonism and a mutually unfavourable attitude. Although there are numerous divergences about stability and security in Afghanistan, Moscow and Washington share several common goals, including combating terrorism, upholding peace in the nation, and resolving conflicts. Russia and the United States are actively engaged in efforts to mitigate the disorder and thwart the transformation of Afghanistan into a sanctuary for extremist organisations.

In the preceding 18-year period, the United States has implemented a diverse range of measures in Afghanistan with the aim of countering terrorist activities and fostering the establishment of a stable governance structure. The United States has successfully created a substantial military presence consisting of about 100,000 American troops, under the guidance of President George W. Bush, President Barack Obama, and President Donald Trump (Jones, 2021). The United States has allocated substantial financial resources to provide economic aid for the purpose of promoting development in Afghanistan. Additionally, it has collaborated with regional and international stakeholders to contribute to the stabilisation of the situation.

Every administration has prioritised the eradication of terrorism and the prevention of Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for terrorists. However, the underlying issue has consistently been the absence of a stable Afghan government exercising authority over its territory. Consequently, there is no assurance that terrorists will not seek refuge in Afghanistan, and no Afghan government has been able to independently safeguard the nation's security (Rashid, 2021). Pakistan's involvement in providing assistance to terrorists and militants in Afghanistan was another significant concern. The absence of soldiers in Afghanistan hindered the United States' ability to adequately address this danger, hence increasing its reliance on Pakistan for military supplies and assistance in discussions with the Taliban.

Russia participated in the military action by granting NATO access to airspace for the purpose of transferring weaponry. The nations established the "northern route," which traversed the Russian Federation's borders. The transit route in question served as a replacement for the notoriously costly and time-consuming Pakistani "southern route." In 2009, a series of agreements were reached between the Russian Federation and the United

States regarding the transportation of humanitarian goods to Afghanistan via Russian territory. The decision to support the Russian Federation was made, taking into account economic factors (Ziya A, 2019).

The provision of Russian weaponry to the Afghan army is a significant aspect of collaboration between the Russian Federation and the United States in Afghanistan. The only equipment and weapons still in use after the Soviet-Afghan conflict were those that the USSR had left behind. Consequently, it became imperative to re-equip the Afghan army in accordance with the criteria set by the United States. In order to address this issue, the United States has devised two alternatives: first, substantial financial investments in retraining the Afghan army in accordance with NATO standards, which would incur significant expenses and necessitate a considerable amount of time. In light of the prevailing conditions, the second alternative was endorsed, which entailed the acquisition of Russian weaponry and equipment. This strategic move aimed to enable Washington to save on costs associated with the retraining of Afghan military personnel. In response, Russia consented to engage in cooperation, gaining several benefits, including collaboration with the Afghan government, exerting influence on American military operations, and generating substantial cash through the sale of local weapons.

Another crucial aspect of collaboration pertains to the endeavour to combat drug manufacturing. The issue of drug manufacture in Russia has persistently been a significant concern, as Afghan drugs not only enter the global market through the Russian Federation's territory but also persist within it. Nevertheless, the United States exhibited a reluctance to engage in proactive measures against drug manufacturing. Consequently, Russia and the United States pursued divergent objectives in their efforts to combat drug production. The primary objective of the Russian government was to achieve a decrease in the influx of Afghan narcotics into the borders of Russia. During that period, the United States exhibited a lack of enthusiasm for engaging in active combat against them. In 2011, Russia initiated a project called "Rainbow-2" to address drug manufacturing in Afghanistan as a result of the conflicts between the United States and Russia (Ziya A, 2019). The programme was terminated by the United States on the grounds that it included a provision about the eradication of poppy crops, a provision that was deemed unacceptable by both the United States and its allies.

The third Paris Pact Conference took place in February 2012, during which the United States introduced its programme aimed at addressing drug production. This project, known as the "Central Asian Anti-Drug Initiative," aimed to establish specialised units dedicated to combating drug trafficking. The aforementioned notion encompassed a total of five nations, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. According to the United States programme, it was intended for these units to be under the authority of the American command. Russia was deeply concerned about the United States' potential access to the covert bases of these countries, as these five nations are of significant importance to Russia. Consequently, the Russian Federation sought to prevent the United States from exerting influence over their policies. Consequently, Russia successfully persuaded its partners to decline involvement in the American anti-drug initiative within the Central Asian region. According to Russian representatives, the US plan is not related to the combat against drug production but rather seeks to enhance Washington's military and political sway in the region (Goodhand J, 2008).

Nevertheless, Afghanistan has emerged as a platform where seemingly incompatible adversaries such as Russia and the United States have managed to engage in collaborative efforts. This demonstrates that the United States and Russia possess the capacity to reach consensus on numerous matters; nonetheless, it is imperative to establish a shared foundation in order to formulate mutually satisfactory resolutions.

In 2017, Russia made a formal request for the departure of United States forces from Afghanistan, citing their perceived inability to effectively address the responsibilities allocated to them by the United Nations Security Council in 2001. Despite their efforts, they were unsuccessful in vanquishing the Taliban or transforming Afghanistan into a functional nation. In fact, their actions merely incited internal strife within the country (Mankoff, 2021).

The evaluation of the diplomatic relations between Russia and the United States over the Afghan issue reveals that both nations employed diverse forms and approaches to engage in diplomatic interactions. Ultimately, the collaboration between Russia and the United States comes to a halt, with a significant decline in diplomatic representation, a cessation of contacts at different levels, a rapid deterioration of sanctions, and the

already delicate bilateral cooperation between the two countries ultimately collapsing (Giles, 2021).

The abrupt withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in 2021, which resulted in the swift downfall of the Afghan government supported by the US, had catastrophic consequences for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. As a consequence, the United States has been devoid of substantial influence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it altered the equilibrium of global sway in the area, a matter of equal significance to the United States, Russia, and global security as it did during the American troops' invasion in 2001 or the US-supported Mujahideen's resistance against the Soviet occupiers in the 1980s (Rashid, 2021). Consequently, the United States has provided Russia and China with substantial prospects to interfere and position themselves as feasible or even preferable alternative global allies.

The United States, under the leadership of Donald Trump and subsequently Joe Biden, has unambiguously delineated a strategy for the removal of military forces from Afghanistan. However, the swift disintegration of the Afghan government and the expeditious ascent of the Taliban resulted in the transformation of this withdrawal into a state of disorder. The United States exhibited a lack of coordination and competence, thereby garnering support from its allies. Several nations encountered difficulties in evacuating their people and Afghan counterparts due to the worsening situation surrounding Kabul Airport. All individuals had to consider the fact that, following two decades of casualties and substantial financial investments, there remained a scarcity of resources.

Consequently, there were reciprocal allegations made by the leaders of London, Berlin, and Brussels against each other, as well as the United States. In March, it was well acknowledged that some NATO countries expressed dissatisfaction with President Biden's choice to withdraw. Certain countries, like the United Kingdom and Germany, have publicly expressed their worries. The extension of the mandate of German troops in Mazar-i-Sharif, located in northern Afghanistan, until 2022 was recently approved by the German Bundestag. The slow pace of progress in securing and reconstructing Afghanistan was recognised by numerous allies. However, they eventually came to the realisation that remaining in Afghanistan was the only feasible option due to the persistent

threat posed by the Taliban and ISIS, as well as the evident vulnerability of the Afghan government in Kabul (Goodhand. J, 2008).

The allies expressed apprehension regarding Biden's withdrawal, since it created no motivation for the Taliban to engage in power-sharing negotiations with the Afghan government in Doha. Furthermore, it provided ample grounds for the Taliban to assume that they could attain complete control by achieving victory on the battlefield. Simultaneously, the Afghan army, experiencing a decline in morale, would lack motivation to engage in combat and make personal sacrifices if it perceived a lack of support from its international allies and backers. The Allies expressed their dissatisfaction with the corruption and venality exhibited by the Afghan government and elite. However, they acknowledged that the provision of international aid to Afghanistan for a span of two decades has yielded numerous advantages for the nation. These include enhanced life expectancy, the liberation of women, improved education for girls, and the establishment of various individual, political, and media liberties.

The European allies held the belief that the United States exhibited a delay in formulating a comprehensive evacuation strategy for Western citizens and Afghan civilians employed by the alliance's armed forces, Western non-governmental organisations, or the previous Afghan government. Additionally, they believed that the United States failed to adequately address the specific needs of individuals seeking to depart from the country (Goodhand J, 2008). Assurances were provided to ensure their well-being, and mounting evidence indicated that the Taliban were specifically focusing on them as "collaborators." The evacuation commenced subsequent to the departure of nearly all troops from Afghanistan, necessitating NATO nations to promptly deploy forces to Kabul in order to coordinate departure planes from the country. The act of improvisation resulted in a state of disorder for several days at Kabul International Airport.

The current challenge faced by NATO pertains to the fact that the nations exerting influence in Afghanistan, namely Pakistan and Iran, do not align with NATO's interests. Turkey stands as the sole exception, as it maintains amicable relations with the Taliban and intends to establish a substantial embassy in Kabul. Hence, the extent of the alliance's remaining influence in Southwest Asia will primarily rely on Turkey's judgement and be

influenced by Ankara and Turkish perspectives. NATO had initially intended to engage in a conversation over Afghanistan as a component of its forthcoming negotiations with Beijing and Moscow. However, given the significant decline in its authority within the country, these capitals are likely to exhibit diminished enthusiasm or motivation to engage in negotiations with NATO (Ezgi Yazici, 2021). If Beijing and Moscow perceive a security threat originating from Afghan soil, the most favourable outcome would be a diplomatic conversation aimed at addressing terrorism.

Hence, the US's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan raised doubts about the unwavering dedication of the US to its position in the realm of global security. Biden's presentation of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as a repudiation of the U.S. involvement in nation-building and overall stabilisation has led to this apprehension.

4.4 Human rights and humanitarian crises under the Taliban regime.

In mid-August 2021, the Taliban movement declared their control over the majority of Afghanistan's territories. The withdrawal of NATO coalition troops sparked a political crisis, with the president and members of the government fleeing to foreign countries, further exacerbating the situation. The Taliban seized this opportunity and declared their intention to establish an Islamic Emirate based on Sharia law. Afghanistan, worn out from years of conflict, was already grappling with a dire humanitarian crisis, and the present circumstances have only exacerbated domestic issues. The current situation has the potential to set back an entire country by many centuries, with its vast territory and population, and create a "zone of instability" on the map. The implications for the rest of the civilized world remain uncertain. During the transition of power, the international community has made repeated appeals to the Taliban movement to uphold and honor fundamental human rights in the midst of armed conflict. Regrettably, the statements were not considered by the leaders of the movement.

Yesterday, Afghanistan possessed a range of essential qualities that are typically associated with a democratic nation. The state guaranteed equal rights to all its citizens in various aspects of life, including education, medical care, profession selection, employment opportunities, and the protection of their rights. In addition, the country

successfully forged connections with international organizations to rebuild the war-torn state, import essential goods for the population, and ensure the support and safety of international medical organizations.

As stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every individual is inherently entitled to freedom and equality in terms of their dignity and rights. Articles 2 and 3 emphasize the importance of upholding the rights and freedoms outlined in the Declaration, ensuring that they are universally applicable to all individuals, irrespective of various factors such as race, skin colour, sex, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status (UDHR) These articles specifically highlight the fundamental rights to life, liberty, and personal immunity. The Declaration acknowledges the importance of recognizing the legal personality of individuals, emphasizing their rights and legal capacity, regardless of their location (UDHR).

Panjshir province has become the final stronghold to fiercely resist the advances of the Taliban movement. However, in this context, the situation is still difficult. According to Ali Nazary, a representative of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, reports suggest that the Taliban movement is allegedly involved in ethnic cleansing activities in the province. They unlawfully enter the homes of officials, village heads, and clergymen, carry out searches and interrogations, and inflict harm on local residents without due process. Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that the global community has assumed the role of a spectator. In light of this, Ali Nazary, the representative of the Front for National Resistance in Afghanistan, has urged the international community to intervene and put an end to the atrocities being committed against innocent civilians.¹⁷

Inspired by Article 13, which upholds the right to freedom of movement and choice of residence, Afghans, driven by concerns for their safety and lack of opportunities, have sought to leave their country in search of a better future for themselves and their families. However, the situation resulted in a severe disruption of traffic and widespread chaos at Kabul airport. There were no unfamiliar individuals present at the airport. Those who left the country had some connection to labour relations involving the

¹⁷ <https://www.interfax.ru/world/789483>

American military mission, the US embassy, and other allied NATO states, as well as non-profit organizations based in Afghanistan. During their interviews with foreign television channels, they shared their deep worries about the safety of their lives and the well-being of their loved ones. For several days, individuals attempted to gain access to the transports leaving Kabul. The opening day stampede tragically claimed numerous lives. Disturbing footage has gone viral, capturing the horrifying moment when individuals desperately holding onto the aircraft lose their grip and tragically plummet to the ground during the plane's ascent (The Guardian). Amidst the Taliban's brutal executions of those they deem undesirable or traitors, individuals are desperately seeking to flee the country, disregarding the potential tragic outcomes.

As per Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, it is mandated for states to acknowledge the fundamental right to work. This includes providing individuals with the freedom to choose or consent to their employment while also establishing an environment that guarantees the realization of this right (ICESCR).

The ruling Taliban has announced a ban on entertainment for Muslims living in the Islamic Emirate. Members of the movement confronted an Afghan singer and folk music performer in Baghlan province, northeastern Afghanistan, during clashes with residents (Ritchie, 2021). This alarming development is causing growing apprehension and doubt regarding the prospects for the Afghan people under the Taliban regime.

Despite the seemingly tolerant statements made by Taliban leaders regarding women's rights, the reality on the ground paints a completely different picture, as seen in the TV interview.

The path for women to build their political careers in government, hold public service positions, and receive education remains uncertain. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Taliban, clarified that women will not hold ministerial positions in the new government. They will have the opportunity to work in various government sectors, such as ministries, the police, and the judicial system, albeit in assistant roles.¹⁸ Girls must study in separate same-sex classes in schools and universities, and they must wear a black

¹⁸ <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210817-taliban-say-afghan-women-will-be-allowed-to-work-and-study-according-to-islamic-law>

abaya and niqab (Tanno, 2022). Only female teachers will be involved in the education of girls. According to the Ministry of Education, there is currently a limited availability of vacant rooms in Afghan educational institutions to facilitate single-sex classes, along with a shortage of female teachers. The Taliban suggest using teachers of different age groups. If it is not feasible to arrange the learning process, then consider separating the female portion with a curtain.

Girls at universities face more restrictions than just studying in same-sex classes. Female students will now be required to wait in designated areas until their male counterparts and other men have left the premises. Only after ensuring that there are no males present can they exit the university.

Such limitations will result in a notable decline in women's education, as there is a lack of female experts and the unavailability of highly qualified male instructors for female students. Girls often struggle to acquire practical skills for their future professions due to the lack of opportunities to participate in practices, master classes, and seminars with professionals. In this day and age, women often face restrictions when it comes to going out without a male companion. They may feel more comfortable venturing out alone while wearing a hijab.

Any sport that involves women revealing their faces or body parts or emphasizing their figure is also not allowed. According to Ahmadullah Wasik, the deputy head of the cultural movement commission, there was a ban on women participating in sports in Afghanistan, including athletes from national teams (The Guardian).

This situation is not ideal for Afghan women, and the lack of clarity regarding their rights only contributes to tension in society. Regarding this matter, in early September in Kabul, the women made the decision to rally together and protest against the encroachment on their rights by the radical Taliban movement. Heading to the presidential palace, the women passionately advocated for the inclusion of their political rights in the Constitution of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, their voices went unheard as the armed Taliban resorted to using tear gas to disperse the protesters (Latifi, 2021).

Article 13 of the ICESCR acknowledges education as a fundamental right. Highlighting the importance of one's education in fostering personal growth. All citizens,

regardless of their nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion, have the right to access education in their country of citizenship or residence.

The second paragraph of the article emphasizes the importance of states ensuring that every child has access to free compulsory primary education and that secondary education, including vocational options, is open and accessible to all. It is crucial to ensure the accessibility of secondary education, especially when it comes at no cost. Additionally, it is important that higher education be equally accessible to all students, taking into consideration their mental and intellectual capabilities. Moreover, students should have the right to receive scholarships, while the teaching staff should be able to improve their financial situation through fair salaries.

Article 10 of the Covenant establishes marriage through the mutual agreement of the individuals involved. You have complete autonomy when it comes to choosing your life partner. Society allows no external interference in the affairs of the family, which is a self-contained entity. It appears that the widely accepted norms incorporated into Afghanistan's internal family legislation are quite reasonable. However, the Taliban has recently implemented a new policy requiring families to provide information about unmarried girls and widows (Aljazeera, 2021). The Taliban will force all women into marriages. The imposition of new rules and traditions in family relations in Afghanistan, particularly regarding marriage, is resulting in a significant setback for women's rights. The lack of consideration for individual will and consent is deeply concerning.

Since August 15, 2021, the global community has been closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan, pondering the complexities of establishing international relations with the current regime. There is uncertainty surrounding the continuity of previous diplomatic engagements, considering that most countries worldwide recognize this group as a terrorist organization. The World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN have suspended the provision of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan due to this matter. "Due to the current situation in Afghanistan, WFP has temporarily halted planned deliveries of humanitarian aid along the corridors," stated the permanent mission. "However, the organization plans to persist in their efforts in the country, considering the current circumstances and prioritizing the well-being of their personnel and collaborators."(Kovaleva, 2021).

Assessing the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi highlighted the imminent challenge of a significant influx of refugees from the country.¹⁹ Today, a significant number of Afghans are compelled to seek refuge as a result of cultural, political, and social limitations imposed by the government.

Unfortunately, these restrictions have the potential to fuel violence and create tension within society. The temporary suspension of population evacuation due to a measles outbreak affected individuals seeking asylum in foreign countries or holding dual citizenship. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United States has implemented this measure in response to the detection of disease cases among refugees (Gul, 2021). The shortage of doctors and vaccines poses a significant risk to the well-being and survival of the population.

Undoubtedly, as the situation unfolds, the humanitarian crisis will only deteriorate, leading to a rise in the number of refugees seeking shelter in neighbouring nations. The European Union countries declined to accept large numbers of refugees from Afghanistan, citing concerns about the potential presence of individuals who may pose a security risk in the host countries.²⁰ In light of this, NATO is formulating a strategy to support Afghan refugees in Asia.

In today's society, it is challenging to initiate a fresh chapter and begin crafting a new narrative for the nation without infringing upon the rights and liberties of individuals. When building an Islamic Emirate based on Sharia law, it is crucial to remember that the Koran doesn't explicitly support the internationally recognized values established by post-World War II treaties. This scenario will not adequately respect the interests of the country's citizens. There may be concerns about a potential shift in the global balance of interests, with Iran seeking to establish multiple communication channels for coordination and interaction on the international stage.

It is important to consider the historical context of Afghanistan's role as a major producer and supplier of narcotic drugs in the eastern hemisphere. Drugs in Afghanistan

¹⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/un-high-commissioner-refugees-completes-three-day-visit-afghanistan>

²⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/jha/2021/08/31/>

have played a significant role in the state's underground economy since the close of the 20th century. In the year 2000, this particular state was responsible for a staggering 70% of the global opium production. Since 2003, Afghanistan has dominated the global market for heroin production. Opium poppy cultivation requires the participation of a large number of individuals, reaching up to 3 million people. In 2004, experts from UNODC revealed that the profits generated from the sale of opiates reached a staggering 2.8 billion US dollars annually. This accounted for a significant 60% of Afghanistan's GDP (World drug report, 2004). In 2018, Afghanistan dominated the global heroin market with a staggering 92% share.²¹ During the Taliban's rule in 1996, there was a significant increase in drug crops, leading to the establishment of heroin supply routes to the EU via the northern and Balkan regions.

How will recent events, as well as the looming humanitarian catastrophe, impact this aspect?

Unfortunately, we should anticipate a continued rise in violence and disregard for human rights. Modern geopolitics is currently grappling with a unique challenge that requires a fresh approach: exploring ways to influence the Taliban by leveraging their economic power or desire for international recognition. This is a result of various protocol issues within the Foreign Ministry of prominent Western nations. These issues have impeded the implementation of specific measures to address the situation and hindered communication with Ta Liban's leaders. The international community is lacking in effective instruments of influence, and there are legitimate concerns about the presence of political will.

Conclusion.

The analysis of the main points presented in this chapter pertaining to "Global Activities" reveals that the Taliban's strategic transition towards diplomatic involvement represents a pivotal moment in the realm of international relations. This chapter highlights the importance of the Taliban's "world tour" as a strategic endeavour aimed at reducing diplomatic isolation through the cultivation of wider regional backing. The

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_production_in_Afghanistan

aforementioned project exemplifies a sophisticated comprehension of the geopolitical landscape, wherein economic considerations frequently overshadow political schisms, as evidenced by the Taliban's engagements with China. An examination of China's practical approach towards the Taliban, with a specific emphasis on industrial investments and economic prospects, reveals the intricacies of global diplomacy where interests and ideologies converge.

The subsequent chapter delves deeper into the consequences of the Taliban's diplomatic endeavours on global security and regional stability, with a specific emphasis on the possible alteration in Afghanistan's international relations and its influence on the strategic objectives of global powers, including the United States. The complex participation of regional stakeholders highlights a collaborative effort to avert the occurrence of instability in Afghanistan. However, there are concerns regarding the efficacy of these diplomatic initiatives in promoting a governance framework that is secure, inclusive, and focused on human rights in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the deliberations concerning the relations between Russia and China, as well as the intricate dynamics of interactions between Russia and the United States, offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding the geopolitical changes brought about by the rise of the Taliban. This analysis elucidates the strategic calculations and inherent tensions among prominent global powers, thereby examining the impact of the evolving situation in Afghanistan on global power dynamics and the endeavour to achieve regional and worldwide stability.

Moreover, this chapter on "Global Activities" provides a comprehensive examination of the Taliban's strategic diplomacy and international involvement, as well as its wider ramifications. This statement underscores the intricate equilibrium between the pursuit of legitimacy and the management of the contingent aspects of international recognition while simultaneously addressing the apprehensions of the international community over human rights and governance. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of these worldwide endeavours, the chapter enhances our comprehension of the present geopolitical environment, emphasising the complex dynamics between diplomacy, security, and international relations.

Ultimately, in the chapter, we explored how the Taliban's governance in Afghanistan has led to significant human rights violations and humanitarian emergencies. The administration's strict application of Sharia law has resulted in the restoration of numerous freedoms, particularly for women and ethnic minorities. The international community's largely ignored calls for human rights have resulted in increased instability and violence. The global halt of aid, combined with economic and social limitations, has made the Afghan people's misery worse. The desperate state of the people is shown by the chaotic and deadly images that result from attempts to flee the brutal government. The situation is still evolving, so strategic involvement is still necessary to lessen the deteriorating humanitarian conditions.

Chapter V – USA and Russia: Navigating Interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Introduction

Geopolitics is the study of the effects of geography (human and physical) on international politics and international relations. It examines how political power is distributed and exercised over geographical spaces and how the physical and human geography of regions influences political actions and outcomes.

The geopolitical landscape of Central Asia has been significantly influenced by major world powers for centuries, with the Russian Federation and the United States playing crucial roles in the region. In the ever-changing landscape of the 21st century, these two nations find themselves grappling with the complexities of Afghanistan and Central Asia, sometimes with conflicting goals. This chapter delves into the geopolitical manoeuvres of the USA and Russia in this region, shedding light on their goals, arguments, and the intricate interplay of their policies.

This chapter aims to offer a thorough examination of the geopolitical tactics that the US and Russia have used in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The aim is to gain an understanding of how these strategies have developed over time, especially in relation to changing global power dynamics and regional factors. The chapter will discuss how the USA and Russia have utilized a combination of military, economic, and diplomatic strategies to safeguard their interests, resulting in a complex and occasionally tense power dynamic in the region.

Firstly, we will explore the historical background and policy development of Russia and the USA in the region. Secondly, we will examine military strategies, security concerns, and the impact of key events like NATO presence and the US troop withdrawal. Furthermore, we will analyze economic strategies, focusing on energy resources and pipelines, and initiatives like the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Moreover, we will look at diplomatic efforts and regional integration, including involvement in organizations like CSTO, SCO, and initiatives like C5+1.

5.1 USA's geopolitical direction

The C5+1 is a diplomatic platform established to enhance cooperation between the United States and the five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Initiated in 2015 by Washington, the C5+1 addresses shared regional challenges, promotes economic development, and strengthens security cooperation. Regular meetings are organized between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central Asian countries and the US Secretary of State, facilitating high-level meetings and collaborative projects to improve regional stability, economic connectivity, and the sovereignty of the Central Asian states, while countering the influence of other major powers in the region, such as Russia and China (Yunushkina, 2021).

In February 2020, the document "The US Strategy in Central Asia for 2019–2025," adopted by the administration of Donald D. Trump, was made public. The strategy aims to support the sovereignty and independence of Central Asian countries while promoting regional connectivity, economic growth, and security. Key priorities include countering terrorism, advancing U.S. business interests, and promoting good governance and human rights in the region. The US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia was initially driven by the goal of impeding the Russian Federation's reintegration efforts in the post-Soviet space and limiting its influence in the region. With China's increasing economic and military power, the United States is challenged by the need to curb the further growth of the PRC in this region. The region's significance and complexity are expanding, particularly in terms of trade and investment (Ryazantsev, 2019). This is a significant aspect of the escalating global tension between the United States and China, which is intensifying on a larger scale.

The approach to countering reintegration processes with Russia at the forefront is often framed as a means of safeguarding independence and individual sovereignty. The US geopolitical strategy in Central Asia focuses on bolstering the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian states, both individually and collectively. This involves the active involvement of the United States in various areas such as the economy, energy, security, democracy, and governance of the region. According to this document, the United States aims to enhance its influence in Central Asia by claiming to assist in

"mitigating the terrorist threat" to the countries in this region. This is being presented as a joint endeavor to promote understanding, detect, prevent, and combat "violent extremism." The document also discusses the collaborative efforts between the United States and Central Asian countries to address the challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters and their families. It aims to support the reintegration of these individuals into society and enhance the capabilities of law enforcement and security services in Central Asia to safeguard borders and combat terrorism and human trafficking.²²

For a significant period, the US foreign policy strategy has been intricately tied to the military operations conducted by the United States and its allies and partners in Afghanistan. These actions were undertaken as part of Operation Enduring Freedom following the devastating acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001. Since the start of the operation, Washington has primarily viewed the Central Asian countries as a strategic access point to Afghanistan. It is in Afghanistan that the United States and its allies have conducted extensive military operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronsky, 2016). The military operations conducted by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan persisted with fluctuating levels of intensity until August 2021.

Following the events of September 11, the United States promptly initiated negotiations with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan regarding agreements on the utilization of existing bases and the deployment of troops in Afghanistan. The focus was on the Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan and the Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan, which were designated to provide crucial support for the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.²³ In due course, the United States entered into several agreements encompassing military bases, airspace utilization, and logistical assistance for its contingents stationed in Central Asia (Kuli, 2021).

According to Kuli (2021), Uzbek President Islam Karimov saw his collaboration with the United States as a chance to strengthen his stance against Islamist extremist militants and gain domestic legitimacy. In May 2005, there was an attempt by Islamists

²² <https://www.state.gov/united-%20states-strategy-for-central%20asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>

²³ <https://www.brookings.edu/events/united-states-foreign-policy-in-the-states-of-central-asia/>

to seize power in the city of Andijan, amidst ongoing anti-government protests. The response from I. Karimov and law enforcement agencies was swift and forceful. Following the actions of the Uzbek authorities in Andijan, Washington emphasized the importance of conducting an impartial investigation into the events at the OSCE level. Karimov reacted strongly to this, insisting that the American presence in Uzbekistan should be reduced by December 2005 (Daly, 2006). The United States had no choice but to meet this demand. Due to the outcome, Washington suffered a significant loss of a crucial military facility. A number of personnel from the Karshi-Khanabad base were relocated to Manas International Airport in Kyrgyzstan. Relations between the United States and Uzbekistan have been strained for over ten years.

An agreement was reached with Kyrgyzstan on December 4, 2001, to allocate a portion of the Manas civilian airport for the deployment of military personnel and equipment involved in the operation in Afghanistan. The initial agreement was for a one-year period, with the option of an automatic extension. Bishkek also permitted the passage of American aircraft through its airspace. Bishkek has also agreed to station forces and assets in Manas, not only in the United States but also in 11 other countries. Typically, there were always around a thousand military personnel stationed at this airbase, along with several military transport aircraft and tanker aircraft.²⁴ In 2014, the US base in Manas was eventually closed. And so, the United States' long-standing military presence in the region came to an end.

Looking at the relations between the United States and Uzbekistan, it's worth mentioning that they started to improve after the passing of I. Karimov. Sh.M. Mirziyoyev took over and made a visit to the United States in September 2017. During this visit, he participated in the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly and had meetings with President D. Trump, as well as with the leadership of several prominent American companies.²⁵ The meetings led to agreements on investments in the economy of Uzbekistan totaling \$2.6 billion (Izteleulova, Lapenko, 2021). In May 2018, Sh. Mirziyoyev made his inaugural visit to Washington. After the negotiations, a joint statement was adopted by the heads of both states, signaling the start of a new era of

²⁴https://tass.ru/info/751517?utm_source=yandex.ru&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=yand%20ex.ru&utm_referrer=yandex.ru

²⁵ <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/1074>

strategic partnership between the United States of America and Uzbekistan. Several agreements have been signed to foster collaboration in different areas. One of the initiatives includes a 5-year military cooperation plan.

Following Mirziyoyev's visit to Washington, there has been a significant increase in the number of joint military exercises between Uzbekistan and the United States. The primary objective of these exercises is to enhance security cooperation and foster better interaction between the two nations. In January 2019, military personnel from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Defense participated in the joint exercise "South Strike" at the Camp Shelby military base in Mississippi.²⁶ In September of that year, American and Uzbek pilots participated in joint exercises at the Chirchik garrison near Tashkent. In March 2020, the United States and Uzbekistan once again conducted the joint exercise "Invincible Sentry 2020" on Uzbekistan's territory.²⁷ Training Uzbek military personnel in the United States is conducted on a substantial scale, with American military instructors providing instruction at military educational institutions in Uzbekistan.

When it comes to Kazakhstan, the United States has been actively involved in making significant political and military contributions in this region. In 2000, prior to the commencement of Operation Enduring Freedom, the KAZBAT battalion was established in Kazakhstan.²⁸ This battalion was formed from the third airborne assault battalion of the Kapshagai Airborne Assault Brigade in order to align with NATO standards and collaborate on shared objectives with the alliance. This battalion participated in two projects: deploying a unit to Iraq and conducting the annual peacekeeping exercises in Kazakhstan, "Steppe Eagle," alongside NATO contingents. In August 2003, Kazakhstan deployed KAZBAT military personnel to Iraq as part of the US-led coalition (Stein, 2018). In December 2006, KAZBAT underwent a transformation and became KAZBRIG, with the addition of two more battalions that were armed and equipped in accordance with NATO standards (Stein, 2018). From 2003 to 2019, the United States and Kazakhstan conducted regular joint exercises called "Steppe Eagle," which involved

²⁶ <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/47518>

²⁷ <https://uz.usembassy.gov/uzbekistan-united-states-conduct-joint-crisis-response-drills/>

²⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KAZBAT>

contingents from other countries as well. Kazakhstan receives the highest amount of military assistance from the United States among all the Central Asian countries.²⁹

In May 2021, the Wall Street Journal reported that the United States is exploring potential deployment options for its troops following the withdrawal from Afghanistan, with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan being key considerations. According to sources who provided information to the newspaper, the deployment in these countries will enable the United States to swiftly respond to events in Afghanistan due to their shared borders (Salama, 2021). Later, the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan released a statement stating that the United States had reached out to Tashkent, but the possibility of US military facilities being established in the country was ruled out.

5.2 USA's Economic Interests

For the United States and American businesses, the primary focus lies on the raw materials of Central Asian countries, particularly the hydrocarbon resources in Kazakhstan. There are instances where consideration of the geopolitical use of these resources in the interests of the United States arises.

In 2019, Kazakhstan achieved an impressive ranking of 12th globally for its proven oil and gas condensate reserves. The country's production volume reached an impressive 90.5 million tons of oil, with a significant portion of the extracted liquid fuel being exported, accounting for 72.4% of the total. In 2019, Kazakhstan secured the 22nd position globally for its proven natural gas reserves, with gas production reaching 56.4 billion cubic meters. Kazakhstan is a global leader in coal production, ranking 8th in the world. Kazakhstan's total recoverable reserves of fuel resources, including oil, gas, coal, and uranium, are estimated to be around 32 billion tons of oil equivalent (Zhanbulatova, 2021). According to the Energy Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy, Kazakhstan is recognized for its significant oil reserves and production, ranking second among the former Soviet republics after Russia.³⁰

²⁹ <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84968>

³⁰ https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Kazakhstan/background.htm

The US position in Kazakhstan has been significantly strengthened due to N. Nazarbayev's approach of maintaining a balanced relationship with various countries, including Russia, while also actively promoting Eurasian integration. Meanwhile, numerous estimates suggest that the Russian Federation holds a dominant position in Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a whole, surpassing the United States and other Western countries.

There is a growing movement in both the United States and the EU to promote Turkmenistan's gas as a viable alternative to Russian gas. The proposed trans-Caspian pipeline aims to cater to the European market, extending its reach through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and beyond. There is optimism that this will be made easier by the agreement reached in 2021 (following extensive and challenging negotiations) between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan regarding the shared utilization of gas fields along the border of the Caspian Sea.

5.3 Examining the ways in which the USA utilizes the Taliban to further its foreign policy objectives.

The United States' political focus on Afghanistan is driven by its strategic significance as a crossroads between the Middle East and South Asia. Given its strategic geographical location, the American leadership views this state as an important factor in maintaining a balance of power and fostering stability. This, in turn, has significant implications for the economic and political progress of Asia as a whole.

During World War II, Afghanistan maintained a policy of neutrality, which was actively supported by the United States. This was due to the potential risks of expanding the theater of operations, which would have necessitated additional resource expenditures from America—resources that were already needed in other war-torn regions. Following the conclusion of World War II, US foreign policy towards Afghanistan focused on containing the USSR's attempts to expand its political influence. Afghanistan was seen as a crucial region in the USSR's sphere of influence, given its strategic location. Simultaneously, the course adopted by the Afghan leadership towards a "policy of non-alignment" was well comprehended and endorsed in the USSR.

Recognizing the significance of Afghanistan's geopolitical position in the late 1950s, the United States made efforts to involve Afghanistan in the military-political alliance of SENTO. However, despite employing coercive measures like threatening to terminate military assistance agreements, these attempts did not yield the desired outcome (McMahon, 1994).

Due to domestic political pressure from the United States, Afghanistan's foreign policy shifted towards closer ties with the USSR. As a result, by the mid-60s, the American political agenda had lost its significance for the Afghan leadership. In 1979, the Soviet Union responded to the United States' aggressive policy by deploying a small number of troops to Afghanistan. As a response to this military-political decision, the United States implemented a foreign policy tool known as sanctions. The goal was to pressure the USSR into changing its foreign economic policy towards Afghanistan while providing full support to the armed opposition (Saikal, 2012).

During this period, the US approach to Afghanistan was more concerned with the complete depletion of the USSR than directly addressing Afghan issues. This strategy ultimately had a significant impact. Regarding this matter, American researchers highlight the significance of the economic factor during the final phase of the Cold War. They point out that the White House relied on economics and technology to restore US political influence in Afghanistan as part of their strategy to counter the USSR (Westad, 2005). Simultaneously, Afghanistan was viewed by the United States as a region that was actively consuming human and military resources, with the aim of causing an economic and political crisis for the USSR.

The escalation of the Afghan crisis and its emergence as a key battleground during the Cold War led to the implementation of American sanctions against the USSR. These sanctions served as a primary means of countering Soviet policy in Afghanistan. The recent reimplementation of sanctions reflects a continuation of this policy, which has the potential to inflict significant damage and ultimately compel the Soviet leadership to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 1989.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States entered into a heightened state of conflict with Afghanistan. During this time, the US expressed its commitment to promoting security, stability, and democracy in Afghanistan while also

emphasizing the importance of upholding human rights, including women's rights. The objective was also to eliminate terrorist organizations that had sought sanctuary in Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, the dynamics of American politics were more distinct. US President George W. Bush held a firm stance: individuals who did not align with us were considered to be supporting the terrorists. Consequently, in October 2001, America embarked on its longest war to date. During this period, the objectives of the US military presence in Afghanistan were to eliminate the Taliban regime and significantly reduce its influence in Afghanistan and neighboring areas. Additionally, the goal was to deal a decisive blow to Al-Qaeda and bring terrorists to justice (Riedel, 2014).

It is worth noting that in order to address these challenges, the United States successfully formed a military-political coalition consisting of 48 countries, with a majority being NATO members. Despite the United States having the largest number of armed forces involved in the war, they were able to rally support from various nations.

At the outset, military operations show great success. Over the past few weeks, US-led forces have been working to remove the Taliban from power, a regime that has held control since 1996. However, by mid-2002, it became evident that military operations in Afghanistan would not be a swift and triumphant endeavor. They would demand substantial resources from the United States and other coalition nations, particularly the need for a sizable military presence in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2010). Furthermore, it became evident that the pursuit of military expansion would result in a substantial loss of military personnel, leading to a notable decline in the United States' faith in the validity of the selected military approach.

Regarding this matter, during his first year as president, Barack Obama recognized the need to alter the military strategy in order for the Afghan government to ultimately overcome the Taliban independently. This concept gained traction among the US leadership, despite the fact that Obama's administration increased the number of military personnel and provided greater material support for the operation in Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, the US military leadership had concerns about the potential for resolving this issue. They recognized the Taliban's strong military training and motivation

while also acknowledging the government troops' reluctance to engage in intense combat operations, despite their technical advantage.

Regarding this matter, the American approach to Afghanistan has taken on a fresh perspective. The American leadership has recognized that relying solely on military force is insufficient for resolving intricate geopolitical issues. Instead, they have realized the importance of engaging all relevant parties in the negotiation process.

In early July 2019, the U.S. Special Representative for Reconciliation in Afghanistan, Z. Khalilzad, convened a meeting in Beijing with senior diplomats from Russia, China, and Pakistan to discuss the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. After the meeting, the participants expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the negotiations. They reached an agreement on the importance of a ceasefire, which will pave the way for intra-Afghan negotiations.³¹ Simultaneously, both the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, acknowledged the importance of the US-Russia dialogue on Afghanistan. Although they were discussing a substantial solution to this issue, they managed to outline the primary framework for a peaceful resolution.

Simultaneously, the countries engaged in a constructive dialogue that helped alleviate tensions surrounding the Afghan issue. This dialogue led to a shared understanding of the necessity for the withdrawal of American troops, accompanied by political assurances from the Taliban regarding intra-Afghan politics and efforts to combat terrorism.

In 2018, Washington and the Taliban initiated discussions in Doha, the capital of Qatar, with the objective of reaching a consensus on the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The negotiations were extremely challenging and faced constant threats of disruption (Lackenbauer, 2019). However, despite these obstacles, the parties managed to reach a consensus, leading to the creation of an "Agreement on achieving peace in Afghanistan." The agreement stipulated the full withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021, on the condition that the Taliban met all other requirements

³¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/23/c_137918082.htm

outlined in the agreement. These requirements included renouncing support for Al-Qaeda and initiating peace talks among Afghans.

Despite the Taliban's lack of urgency in fulfilling the agreement's terms, American and allied troops proceeded with their withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the final dates for the complete withdrawal of troops were also delayed. Simultaneously, efforts to find a political resolution to the issue were accompanied by ongoing military actions between the Taliban and government forces. This led to a situation where regular troops fought until the very end, while the president chose to flee the country. Consequently, the Taliban seized control of Kabul on August 15, 2021. Given the circumstances, it was crucial to promptly evacuate the military contingent from Afghanistan. The evacuation was conducted rapidly and urgently, concluding by the end of August 2021. Consequently, the socio-political landscape in Afghanistan has reverted back to its pre-2001 state, reminiscent of the Taliban's rule.

5.4 Russia's Geopolitical Goals

Russia has consistently defended its geopolitical interests in Central Asia for centuries, and the 21st century is no different. This has resulted in a new geopolitical landscape in the region. The Central Asian region has always been a distinct and unique part of the world, with its own rich history and cultural identity. Throughout the extensive history of the people inhabiting this region, there were times when they were subjected to the authority of foreign conquerors.

The Russian Federation is greatly concerned about the potential repercussions of the NATO coalition forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan and the US administration's plans to leave property and equipment in neighboring countries. Kazakhstan may also participate in some capacity. Russian President Vladimir Putin expresses concern about the future of Afghanistan. "As you are aware, we provided support for the military operation to offer international assistance to this country. However, the international military contingent under the auspices of NATO has not achieved its objectives. The ongoing security challenges originating from Afghanistan show no signs of diminishing. After declaring their departure from this country in 2014, the Americans are now involved

in establishing military bases in the region and nearby countries without a defined purpose, objectives, or timelines for their operations. We are extremely dissatisfied with this.”³² The Russian Federation and the Central Asian states, particularly Kazakhstan, continue to have a significant level of interdependence. This country has a border that spans over 7,000 km in length.

Central Asia continues to serve as a major transit route for illegal drug shipments destined for Russia and beyond, reaching Europe. Thus, the collaboration between Russia and Central Asian countries in different formats aims to establish synchronized strategies for addressing these issues. One common task is to support the countries in the region by providing them with resources to combat the transportation of drugs through their territories, particularly towards Russia. Given the magnitude of the Afghan drug threat, it is crucial for the international community to come together and collaborate through organizations such as the UN, CSTO, SCO, and CIS.

Undoubtedly, Russia's geopolitical interests in Central Asia are intertwined with numerous ambitious foreign policy objectives. One of the key factors is Russia's active promotion of different integration mechanisms and organizations to establish itself as a dominant player in its region and a global "great power." Moscow's significant role in post-Soviet integration has contributed to this status (Aris, 2013). If the geopolitical strategy of the USSR in Eurasia was marked by an aggressive and expansionist approach, post-Soviet Russia's geopolitical strategy became more focused on defense. Russia's efforts to preserve its influence in the post-Soviet region are at odds with the interests of major global powers, including the EU and the United States in the west, as well as Turkey, Iran, and China in the east. Pakistan and India have an indirect involvement in this rivalry. As new opportunities arise in Central Asian countries, Moscow is making efforts to establish closer ties with these states and the Russian Federation.

With numerous foreign powers in Central Asia, the Kremlin perceives a challenge to its strategy. Central Asian countries are increasingly distancing themselves from Moscow's influence and shedding their post-Soviet identity. In the Russian Federation's energy strategy, Central Asia holds significant importance in the energy strategy of the Russian Federation. Amidst the rapid development in the early and mid-2000s, the

³² <https://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>

Russian economy surged ahead thanks to soaring energy prices. One of the factors in the equation involved Russia purchasing energy resources from Central Asia at affordable prices, utilizing them to fulfill domestic demands, and exporting its own energy resources to promote national economic growth. Moscow is actively working to maintain control over the pipelines in this region, ensuring that the energy resources of the Central Asian countries remain within its grasp. Central Asia holds significant importance for Russia due to the potential security risks it poses. There is a belief that the rebel and extremist groups in this region have connections to militant organizations in the North Caucasus, posing a threat to the internal security of the Russian Federation (Kuli, 2012).

Today, Moscow cannot overlook the impact of China. The economic power of the PRC is surpassing that of the Russian Federation, leading to its increasing displacement from this region. Nevertheless, when it comes to security, Russia and the multilateral associations it leads remain highly important and significant. Moscow and Beijing's involvement in the SCO is based on an unspoken understanding where Beijing acknowledges the leading role of the Russian Federation in matters of security (Syzdykova, 2012). China sees the SCO as its primary means of exerting influence in the region (Syzdykova, 2012). Moscow is determined to maintain the CSTO and EurAsEC, even though they somewhat overlap with the functions of the SCO. These parallel structures ensure that Moscow maintains its role as the primary supporter of certain Central Asian countries in security affairs.

The United States is actively advocating for the development of a new silk road in Central Asia. The objective of this project is to connect post-Soviet Central Asia with South Asia. This initiative serves as a balance for the Eurasian Union. In an interview with the influential Financial Times newspaper, former US Secretary of State H. Clinton mentioned that a potential new entity could emerge, possibly under names such as "The Customs Union or the Eurasian Union." The US Secretary of State emphasized the Russian authorities' endorsement of this plan to strengthen economic relations with their neighboring countries.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, historical legacies, security concerns, economic interests, and the shifting tides of global power all play a role in the intricate and dynamic geopolitical interplay between the United States and Russia in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This chapter delves into the key elements that shed light on the complex strategies utilized by both nations as they navigate their interests in this strategically vital region.

In the past, Russia's involvement in Central Asia has shifted from a period of aggressive expansionism during the Soviet era to a more defensive and protective stance in the post-Soviet period. Russia's current strategy is centered around maintaining influence through regional organizations, military alliances, and control over energy resources. The Russian Federation views the Central Asian states as crucial for its security, especially in terms of countering extremism and protecting its borders from threats originating from Afghanistan.

However, the United States' role in Central Asia has been greatly influenced by its reaction to global terrorism, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. The US military presence in Afghanistan had the objective of dismantling terrorist networks and establishing a stable democratic government. Nevertheless, the extended military involvement and subsequent withdrawal in 2021 highlighted the difficulties of maintaining long-term military interventions. The US strategy also involves fostering economic development and democratic governance in Central Asian states as a means to counter the influence of Russia and China.

Both nations have significant economic interests in the region's abundant energy resources. Russia aims to retain control over energy supplies and pipelines in Central Asia to strengthen its economic and geopolitical position. On the other hand, the United States is focused on expanding energy routes and decreasing Europe's reliance on Russian gas through initiatives such as the Trans-Caspian pipeline. These economic strategies are closely connected to larger geopolitical goals, showcasing the rivalry for power in the region.

Russia and the United States strategically utilize different mechanisms to establish their presence and exert influence. Russia's participation in organizations such as the

CSTO and its collaboration with China in the SCO demonstrate its dedication to regional integration and cooperation for security. The United States utilizes initiatives such as the C5+1 political format and collaborations with individual Central Asian states to enhance their sovereignty and independence, effectively challenging Russian dominance.

The geopolitical landscape becomes more complex with the impact of global power shifts, especially the rise of China. The rise of China's economy poses a significant challenge to the strategies of both Russia and the United States in Central Asia, requiring them to make adjustments and form new alliances. The implicit agreement between Moscow and Beijing within the SCO underscores the complex dynamics of their relationship in the region, characterized by both cooperation and competition.

The recent events, including the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent Taliban takeover, have significant implications for regional stability and the strategic calculations of both Russia and the United States. These events highlight the unpredictable situation in the region and the ongoing competition for power among major global players.

Overall, the United States and Russia employ a comprehensive approach to their geopolitical strategies in Afghanistan and Central Asia, incorporating various aspects such as military, economic, and diplomatic components. The region continues to be a crucial arena for power struggles, as both nations strive to protect their interests in the face of historical legacies, security challenges, and changing global dynamics. The interaction between these strategies will continue to shape the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia in the years to come, emphasizing the lasting importance of this strategically crucial region.

General Conclusion

The research has deeply investigated the complex consequences of the Taliban's resurgence in 2021 on Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the wider international community. Following 2001, the Taliban underwent a transformation, becoming a more politically-oriented organization that was also receptive to external influences. They are actively pursuing their political objective, which involves seeking to regain power and establish what they refer to as a genuine "Islamic government." They are employing a combination of political and military strategies to achieve their goal. There is no denying that the Taliban's political influence and diplomatic achievements are primarily a result of their formidable military strength, which endured two decades of warfare against a powerful coalition military force. After transitioning from being an isolated international terrorist organization to gaining diplomatic recognition and becoming a participant in negotiations, the Taliban now view themselves as the victorious faction in the ongoing war.

Given the current state of affairs, it is challenging to evaluate the true intentions behind the Taliban's recent policy changes, rhetoric, and behavior. It remains unclear whether these shifts are merely strategic maneuvers or a sincere transformation in their ideology. It is clear that the Taliban is a deeply religious and conservative movement that is unwavering in its commitment to its fundamental beliefs.

The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the rapid seizure of power by the Taliban have become focal points in global geopolitical discussions, presenting various opportunities for many countries. However, these events also have concerning implications for the international community, ranging from agreements with China or Russia to the admission of refugees by the European Union. Since the capture of Kabul became a reality, the two superpowers have responded positively to the imminent recognition of the new Taliban government. Moscow and Beijing expressed their stances, while the West was understandably more focused on the evacuation of embassy staff, translators, and other diplomatic personnel. As a result, China quickly showed its complete support for the Taliban and even extended an offer to assist in the reconstruction of the country. Both countries have significant economic goals in Afghanistan for the long term. China has set its sights on copper and rare earth mineral

resources and is actively working to enhance transport links via the Wakhan Corridor. Russia is optimistic about the potential economic opportunities that could arise from the planned construction of energy and transport infrastructure through Afghanistan, which will extend to the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, the withdrawal of the US also poses significant risks in the medium and long term. It is evident that the emergence of the Taliban has the potential to significantly worsen the existing issue of terrorism and insurgency in South Asia. It is widely recognized that there are strong connections between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Twenty years ago, the Taliban's refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden and other important members of Al-Qaeda led to the United States taking action against them. Given the current situation with the Taliban regaining power, concerns have arisen regarding the potential establishment of a new hub for Al-Qaeda and other foreign fighters in Afghanistan. Despite the U.S.-Taliban agreement's commitment to preventing terrorist organizations from operating in Afghanistan, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the verification and enforcement of this agreement.

The control exerted by the Taliban in Afghanistan has a direct impact on the dynamics of regional security. Central Asian states face a multitude of complex challenges stemming from the Taliban's governance, such as the rise of radicalization, cross-border terrorism, and economic instability. The diverse reactions from neighboring countries highlight the wider consequences for regional stability. In addition, the governance of the Taliban has a significant impact on regional geopolitics. The construction of the Qosh Tepa Canal showcases the intricate connection between political and ecological concerns. This project has the potential to jeopardize the water security of neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, further intensifying the already strained regional dynamics.

In addition, the research is organized around three main questions:

1. What historical and political factors contributed to the rise of the Taliban movement?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the resulting civil war led to a significant power vacuum and widespread instability.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan government in 1992, the country descended into a state of chaos and factional fighting among various Mujahideen groups. In addition, the Taliban originated from a network of religious schools (madrasas) in Pakistan, where Afghan refugees and young men were taught a strict interpretation of Islam. These schools frequently receive funding from sources in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Pakistan played a significant role in the rise of the Taliban, offering military, logistical, and financial assistance. Pakistan saw the Taliban as a way to protect its strategic interests in Afghanistan and counter the influence of India. In addition, the Pashtun ethnic group, the largest in Afghanistan, provided the primary support for the Taliban. Many Afghans, who had grown tired of the lawlessness and corruption of the Mujahideen factions, found solace in the group's commitment to restoring order and upholding traditional Pashtun values.

2. In what ways does the Taliban movement engage in regional (case of Uzbekistan) and international activities, and what impact does it have at these levels?

Since regaining power, the Taliban has been actively working towards establishing diplomatic relations and gaining international recognition. They have been actively involved in discussions with neighboring countries and major powers to gain support and legitimacy. In Chapter 5, the international community has responded in various ways to the Taliban's diplomatic engagements. In addition, the region faces substantial security risks due to the presence of transnational terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. Chapter 2 emphasizes the need for Central Asian countries to strengthen their security measures and regional cooperation frameworks in response to various threats. The Taliban has shown a willingness to engage in regional economic initiatives, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, with the aim of bolstering the Afghan economy and promoting collaboration among neighboring countries. Nevertheless, economic ventures are more complex due to the instability experienced under Taliban rule. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, the governance of the Taliban has resulted in a significant humanitarian crisis, characterized by extensive poverty, food insecurity, and numerous human rights violations.

3. How does the current state of affairs in Afghanistan impact relations within the Central Asian region, and what broader consequences does it pose for stability and the evolving dynamics in Central Asia?

Central Asian countries, especially those neighboring Afghanistan, are confronted with increased security risks due to the potential spread of violence and extremism. As an example, Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive account of Uzbekistan's response, highlighting the measures taken to bolster security and foster regional cooperation in order to address these challenges. The instability in Afghanistan has a significant impact on regional trade and economic initiatives. However, there are also chances for collaboration in fields like infrastructure development and resource management, as exemplified by the Qosh Tepa Canal project discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, the diverse reactions of Central Asian countries to the Taliban demonstrate their distinct geopolitical approaches. Chapter 2 explores the contrasting approaches of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan towards the Taliban, shedding light on the diverse diplomatic strategies employed in the region. Chapter 4 explores the impact of the Taliban's return on regional power balances as major global powers such as Russia and China aim to increase their influence in Central Asia.

The questions were thoroughly examined in the different chapters, each offering valuable perspectives on the historical context, regional interactions, and global dynamics impacted by the Taliban's resurgence.

This thesis offers a thorough examination of the Taliban's historical trajectory and its effects on both regional and international levels. However, there are still certain aspects that require additional investigation. Further investigation could explore the lasting economic effects of the Taliban's rule on Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, specifically in relation to trade, infrastructure development, and resource utilization. In addition, exploring the changing dynamics between the Taliban and other extremist organizations could provide valuable insights into the ongoing global efforts to combat terrorism. Another area that requires further investigation is the impact of international organizations and multilateral frameworks on addressing the humanitarian and security challenges arising from the Taliban's rule. It is crucial to conduct a thorough examination of the Taliban's governance in Afghanistan, specifically regarding human rights, gender

issues, and the potential for civil society. This analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of their rule and enable the development of effective international strategies.

Upon reflection, it is clear that the narrative surrounding the Taliban is intricate and layered, intricately connected to Afghanistan's turbulent past and the wider geopolitical context. The Taliban's remarkable ability to navigate and persevere through long periods of conflict, ever-changing alliances, and shifting global dynamics is a testament to their unwavering determination and resilience. Nevertheless, the governance of Afghanistan presents considerable challenges, not only for the country itself but also for the stability of the region and the world at large. Grasping the complexities of these challenges and formulating well-informed, strategic responses continues to be of utmost importance for policymakers and scholars. In my opinion, this research has emphasized the significance of adopting a sensitive and understanding approach when studying complex political phenomena. It has emphasized the importance of ongoing involvement and examination to effectively navigate the intricacies of global affairs and humanitarian emergencies. The journey through this research has been both intellectually stimulating and profoundly humbling, emphasizing the pressing need for ongoing global initiatives to uphold peace, stability, and human dignity in Afghanistan and other regions.

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