



مركز أبحاث السياسات الدولية
Center for International Policy Research

CIPR Policy Brief No.1
October 2022



Afghanistan's Neighborhood: The Mismatch Between Internal Order and Regional Interests

Emirhan Yorulmazlar & Bülent Aras

This policy brief focuses on the policy agendas of Afghanistan's neighbours and their reflexive impact on Afghan politics. It argues that Afghanistan's neighbours have a vital stake and determinant roles in moulding its political trajectory. Taliban's quest for consolidation and centralisation of power is constantly in contravention to the country's ethnic and confessional pluralism, which have different regional patrons with divergent political ends. Explicating the policy agendas and goals of Afghanistan's neighbours may enlighten the regional dynamics of building long-awaited peace and stability in the region. The study ends by offering three possible scenarios for Afghanistan's political course.

A bad neighborhood?

Robert O. Keohane argued that the quality of neighborhood has a significant role in the post-conflict state-building efforts.[1] Afghanistan has epitomized the difficulty of harmonizing its multi-ethnic domestic structure with divergent geopolitical goals of its neighbors and great powers. While the Russian and British imperial goals assigned a buffer-state role, the ensuing attempts at state and nation-building were handicapped again by the Cold War and post-Cold War geopolitical rivalries. Since the 1979 Soviet invasion, during the Taliban rule and America's longest war, Afghanistan has seen the most destructive experiences of invasion, civil war, refugee crisis and breakdown of state order.

The return of a tenuous Taliban regime in Afghanistan does not elevate hopes for a more secure and stable future. Yet it appeared as the mere option for the US to finalize an end to this longest "war of necessity." [2] The inability to ensure a sustainable state order in Afghanistan under US security umbrella and the eventual restoration of Taliban's theocratic regime, which has neither been inclusive nor capable to follow up its commitment to human rights and counterterrorism efforts in the first 9 months, points to a perpetuation of its status as a hot conflict-zone.

Despite an unnerving "Afghanistan fatigue" in the international community, the geostrategic role of the country in the so-called Southwest Asia region has ensured an inability to turn a blind eye. First, Afghanistan still has a determining role in the "big game," this time between China and the US and their allies. Pakistan's security agenda, which trumped all attempts to bring Afghanistan into the Western fold, has been backed up by China, which was also indirectly an instrument to balance US military presence in Afghanistan and a possible rapprochement between Kabul and New Delhi. As such, not only US strategic goals but also Indian ambitions to build a regional bulwark against its arch-rival Pakistan were foiled. Thus, a projected trilateral US-India-Afghanistan alignment against China-Pakistan and partly Russia turned into a pipe dream.

Second, as a neighbor of Iran and Pakistan, the country has also been an arena of broader ideological-sectarian rivalry between Indian-Pakistani Deobandism [3] and secular modernization and later Iran-led Shiism. This rivalry has actually metamorphosed Afghanistan's more accommodative and moderate Hannafi-Sunni heritage and turned the country into a testing ground of sectarian and even extremist rivalry harboring the basis of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida and since 2015 Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K). It also

undermined the basis of national reconciliation between Sunni Pashtuns and ethnic-religious minorities, i.e. Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Shiite Hazaras.

Third, an inability to ensure a functioning state order and security in Afghanistan also disables possible moves towards regional integration and development of intra-regional connectivity. An unstable and even “unfriendly” regime in Kabul is a major impediment against possible energy pipelines between Central Asia and Iran, China, and India. It also hinders Afghanistan’s economic development, as a land-locked country dependent on its neighbors for transit and trade linkages. Moreover, the mineral and natural resources of Afghanistan still remain largely untapped due to the domestic and regional conditions aversive to trade.

Finally, Afghanistan cannot secure itself from repeated conflict cycles mainly due to economic underdevelopment giving rise to opium production, refugee crisis and terrorism. Afghanistan is the world’s largest producer of opium, accounting for more than 80% of the world’s supply. Opium production contributed around 11% of the country’s GDP as of 2021.[4] The country has lost sizeable population to emigration, which has been a big burden on neighboring Pakistan and Iran, and increasingly, on Turkey. There are 5.7 million Afghans living in five neighboring countries and 3.4 million internally displaced, while 24 million people in Afghanistan are in need of vital humanitarian relief.[5] The declining link with the external world after Taliban rule risks further eroding the vital links of expat remittances- which has provided approximately 4 per cent of Afghanistan’s GDP[6] while foreign aid making up more than 40% of country’s GDP.[7] This overall picture of economic malaise together with lack of state authority in broad chunks of

Afghan territory also lays the groundwork for further diffusion of radicalization and terror networks in the country.

Neighbors at watch: Pakistan and Iran with high stakes

Against such a gloomy backdrop, the security perceptions of Afghanistan’s neighbors were elevated to alert level with heightened risks for political instability, insecurity and further refugee flows. Despite the initial goals of the Doha accords between the US and the Taliban, the end game failed to ensure an inclusive reconciliation government in Kabul that could have moderated the concerns of neighboring countries. Rather, Taliban stood as a single political group- even if divided on domestic political order and foreign relations- to claim a centralizing force. Without the support of neighboring countries, however, the prospects for Taliban to chart an orderly course remains low to none.

With retrospect, Pakistan should welcome the Taliban takeover. Particularly since the Soviet invasion, the Pakistani establishment strived to ensure a Pashtun-led Sunni Islamist force to assume power, which turned out to be a group of students in religious seminaries initially from Kandahar, i.e. the Taliban. It is no secret that the Pakistani intelligence and military groomed, strategized and advocated Taliban as a political and military force to realize its strategic goals, above all to inhibit Afghan-led Pashtun nationalism.[8] Despite a post-9/11 volte-face to support the overthrow of Taliban rule, the Pakistani links with their Afghan allies have never been severed as the leadership council of Taliban was given shelter and regrouped militarily in Pakistan after the American invasion. With Taliban’s return in August 2021, Pakistan seemed to have won a geostrategic victory

against both the possibility of a pro-Western Pashtun nationalist government and New Delhi's broader objectives to cooperate with Kabul in its rivalry against Islamabad.

In reality check, however, the Taliban's resumption of power without national reconciliation and international recognition runs the risk of incurring heavy costs on Pakistan. Even while Pakistan is unlikely to give up its links with the Taliban, it has been reticent to solely absorb the burden of the new regime's economic and diplomatic isolation. Therefore, despite all expectations that it would initiate the diplomatic recognition of the new regime in Kabul, Pakistan has deferred to go it alone and risk further straining relations with Western countries. With Kabul under financial and humanitarian duress, Pakistan has been advocating unconditional international assistance and unfreezing of Afghan assets. Pakistani officials have argued that if immediate humanitarian help is not coming, Afghanistan would fall into a new conflict cycle of starvation, economic collapse and eventually new human flows to neighboring and European countries also giving rise to terrorism.[9]

Yet there is more to Pakistan's headaches than international pressures on the Taliban regime. First, the rising cross border attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) against Pakistani targets has moved to the top of Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral agenda. In April 2022, with increasing attacks and casualties, Pakistan Foreign Ministry stated that "Terrorists are using Afghan soil with impunity to carry out activities inside Pakistan." [10] Taliban officials responded with harsh language after Pakistani aerial bombing raids in Afghanistan's eastern Khost and Kunar provinces, killing civilians. The TTP is a major threat to Pakistan's security and political order with its advocacy of overthrow of the Pakistani state and replacement with Sharia

law and Talibanism in general. Taken together with Afghanistan's long-time opposition to the Durand line separating the two countries and the recent disputes on Pakistan's border fencing, the Taliban might also in the long haul instrumentalize the TTP for revival of territorial claims of what has been called "Pashtunistan." [11] Second, Afghanistan's economic collapse and blackmarket economic base has been harming Pakistan's trade and economic welfare. Pakistan saw an emerging possibility to revive trade, which has especially regressed during Ghani's presidency. Yet Western sanctions especially on banking transactions in addition to "repeated border closures as well as security restrictions and poor infrastructure" [12] continue to hold back bilateral commercial relations. Moreover, the growing refugee flows is a major pressure on the political-economic balances in Pakistan, which itself has been under insurmountable economic duress, thus compelling Islamabad to sign an IMF stand-by accord. Since Taliban takeover, 300,000 Afghans arrived in Pakistan and the government repeatedly rebuffed shouldering extra humanitarian burden. Clearly, Pakistan, similar to Iran, showed signs of exhaustion with refugee flows. [13]

Last but not least, Pakistan is concerned about international isolation as a spillover of possible instability and insecurity stemming from the Taliban regime. Having backed the Taliban for the last three decades, the international community has expected Pakistan to nudge the Taliban leadership towards political moderation respecting opposition and minority groups as well as human rights, above all women's rights and girls' access to schooling. Pakistan, in turn, aggrieves its inability to prevail upon and even induce in the new era. In the wake of its power grab, Taliban emerged more and more confident in following a self-steered

course, which indeed has left meagre room for Pakistani inducement. While the international community's reaction to the declaration of "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" has been unexpectedly muted, the recent move to ban girls' education- despite earlier official commitments- prompted international outrage. [14] Pakistan is largely seen as playing a "double game" on Taliban and the prospects for restoring Pakistan-US relations look rather slim beyond "limited engagement on Afghanistan." [15]

Iran has been vocally advocating an end to US military presence and engaged Taliban and reportedly Al-Qaida to fasten Americans' debacle in Afghanistan. Despite this definitive adversity though, Tehran was gradually comforted by the insurmountable task Washington has assumed in its eastern neighbor, which enabled Iran to engage in bold moves in Syria and Yemen on top of Iraq and Lebanon. In that sense, Iran largely put the security and geostrategic threats that would have emanated from Afghanistan on the back burner and strategized rather not to risk direct confrontation with the US at its immediate eastern borders, where its proxy base was not comparatively deep-rooted. Yet precipitous American pullback and Taliban takeover in August 2021 seem to have alerted Iran to revived security challenges, which led to active diplomatic efforts mainly with Taliban for damage control.

Iran shares a 900 km border and hosts around 3.5 million Afghan refugees. It has close historical and cultural-linguistic affinities of common ancestry. In Iranian geopolitical imagination, however, Afghanistan has been a political construct to overturn its wide-ranging socio-cultural clout in the region. The ethnic-religious composition of Afghanistan- which is 80% Sunni- and the political predominance of

Sunni Pashtuns also stood against Iranian interests, despite the far reaching influence of Afghan dialect of Farsi, i.e. Dari language. Therefore, Sunni-Pashtun revivalism amounted to anti-Iran alignment particularly following the end of Cold War, while Taliban turned into Iran's nemesis in the 1990s, which brought the two countries to the brink of war in 1998. The American invasion and the shifting threat perceptions moderated Iran-Taliban relationship, which reached a modus vivendi in the 2010s. [16] Facing a common enemy and more and more discerning the inevitability of Taliban's central role in post-American Afghan politics, Iran rather pursued a pragmatic route to engage and keep channels of communication open, to the degree of providing shelter and backdoor support for the group including weaponry. This engagement of convenience has been deemed to enable Iran to minimize the costs of confronting the threats of political transition, whereby the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) developed a working relationship with the Taliban leadership. [17] Iran also carved out proxy assets in its eastern neighbor, from the Fatemiyoun division [18]- which Tehran implied as a counterterrorism asset [19]- to affiliated Hazara and Tajik groups including the broader elements in the Northern Alliance (NA).

After the Taliban takeover, there has been fierce debate on Iran's official Afghanistan policy. While the establishment, i.e. IRGC and government circles, tried to downplay the possibility of "inescapable" confrontation with Taliban, the reformist channels and clerical circles pointed to the need to face the threat head on before it consolidates power and eventually moves to threaten Iran. The establishment strived to publicly display links with Taliban to allay fears of a surging Sunni threat at its doorstep. This thinking seemed to have assumed that Taliban has changed and

has a gargantuan task ahead to centralize power, which will be made even harder with Iran's expertise and hidden assets on the ground. Taliban was also seen not to pose a direct threat to its neighbors, but rather functional as a counter-force against ISIS and takfiri extremism. [20] Moreover, Iran has sustained dialogue with the Taliban leadership for more than a decade and believes to have developed an understanding with them regarding Iran's red lines. As such, the official Iranian policy has been shaped by a call for an inclusive government, respect for minorities above all the Shiite Hazaras and not giving refuge or springboard for IS-K and Takfiri terror groups. Yet, the early developments, particularly the composition of the interim government and Taliban attack on the NA's "unconquerable" stronghold in Panjshir, pointed to the limits of Iranian ability to enforce its no-go lines. This deficiency has lately been further underlined by growing terror attacks against Shiite mosques and schools as well as the Taliban decision to ban girls' education.

In the wake of Taliban takeover, Iran's worst-case scenarios for refugee crisis and heightened instability in its neighbor did not materialize. Even while the estimated 300,000 more refugees arrived to Iran during this period, [21] Tehran seems to have absorbed the shock once again. Taliban's ability to impose control on territorial borders and NA leadership's departure from the country for Iran, Tajikistan and Turkey also left no room for an alternative political authority. The IS-K threat is alive and strong yet still largely left on the sidelines for the time being. With this background, Iran dwells on bilateral issues with the interim government. First, border security is a hot topic, which led to occasional clashes and diplomatic demarches on both sides. Iranian security officials were accused of harassing Afghan citizens, which recently led to attacks on the Iranian diplomatic

missions in Kabul and Herat. Second, the water allocation and pertinent environmental issues such as drought and dust waves related to Helmand and Hari Rivers as well as Hamun wetlands continue to be matters of diplomatic dispute between the two countries. Iran believes Afghanistan has been using the issue as a political tool, while Afghanistan consistently defends that Iran is given more than its legal share. [22] The most recent events, when Kabul released excess Kamal Khan Dam water to Afghan agricultural lands rather than to Iran, led to protests in Iran's Sistan-Beluchistan province. [23] Third, Iran expects the Taliban-led interim government to control the transit of opium to Europe through Iran, which has brought major security and social costs to Iran. While Taliban has had a tricky history with banning and monetizing opium production, Iran has been on the receiving side of the spillovers of drug trafficking and has largely ineffectively tried to prevent trafficking into its border-even if rogue elements were implicated in the drug trade. [24]

Iran expects a new era of trade and investment in Afghanistan in the aftermath of American withdrawal. This is in line with the Reisi government's priority to expand relations with its neighbors. Afghanistan has acted as a center of sanctions busting, particularly for oil sales, [25] and a top market for Iranian exports reaching 4 billion dollar exports in 2020. [26] Iran also views its geopolitical position as a crucial asset to develop both multilateral and transit ties with China through Afghanistan under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A similar calculus works for the Chabahar port linking Afghanistan and possibly Central Asia with India via Iran, which was accorded a US sanctions waiver to support Afghanistan-India trade.

Overall, Iran considers the current imbroglio in Afghanistan as transitional. Tehran would not risk a head-on confrontation with Taliban at this

moment of heavy pressures on Iran's economy and foreign policy in the neighborhood from the Southern Caucasus to the Levant and the Gulf. It would rather wait for the Taliban to move towards a more conciliatory approach- which is still deemed a low possibility- or let Taliban fail or weaken before Tehran has to make a new calculus on Afghanistan policy.

Central Asian Republics: Accommodate or confront?

Among the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Tajikistan has been the most defiant against Taliban rule. Given the Tajik minority's embedded position both as political elites and second largest ethnic group forming roughly one quarter of the population, Tajikistan has vested interests in supporting its ethnic kinsmen in Afghanistan. Therefore, President Rahmon "has declared that Tajikistan will refuse to acknowledge the Taliban regime so long as they do not include Tajik and minority representation in the government."^[27] Dushanbe has also expressed its concerns about terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime as spillover from Taliban rule in Afghanistan. To demonstrate its seriousness, Dushanbe held its largest military exercises ever before the Taliban takeover in June 2021 and has "mobilized 130,000 men from its military reserve in addition to 100,000 active servicemen for the three-hour exercise."^[28] The issue of more than 80 Afghan warplanes, presumed to be in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, has also been contentious and Taliban officials threatened to take measures to secure their release.

Following the Taliban takeover, there were expectations that mainly Tajikistan and to a lesser extent Uzbekistan will join Iran to prod the Northern Alliance (NA) elements to

revitalize the Afghan opposition. The National Resistance Front (NRF) might have lost the fight in Panjshir, but led by Ahmad Mesoud (with Tajik roots)- the son of late NA leader- is currently based in Tajikistan and appears to be in touch with Iranian authorities and other opposition groups mainly hosted in Turkey. The group "openly states that it is preparing for an offensive in the spring of 2022 and continues to carry out attacks targeting the Taliban government."^[29] On 17 May, Rashid Dostum (with Uzbek roots), who is currently based in Turkey, hosted a meeting of major Afghan opposition leaders and political elites in exile to declare armed resistance to Taliban rule.^[30] With Taliban rule transgressing the Doha Accords and reneging on its political and human rights commitments, the CARs will see further calls for resistance from the Afghan opposition in exile.

A common threat perception in neighboring CARs has been Taliban rule acting as a political model and giving impetus to a revival of ISIS in Afghanistan. With their Soviet and largely secular-authoritarian legacies, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan alongside Tajikistan have been concerned with the long-suppressed threat of political Islam and unlikely to officially recognize the Taliban regime without major steps towards inclusive government, human and minority rights and countering ISIS-led terrorism. Uzbekistan's obsession with this threat, especially after the 2005 Andican events during Karimov years, seems to have been moderated with the Mirzoyoyev administration and Tashkent has appeared more accommodative to seek a working commercial relationship with Taliban. Bishkek and Ashkhabad have also been in favor of not magnifying potential spillover from Taliban rule despite their underlying concerns. Again

Tajikistan has taken the front seat in voicing the need to arrest security threats emanating from Afghanistan particularly among the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states. Tajik President Rahmon stated that "We are extremely concerned that Islamic State militants, and particularly their affiliate groups, are bolstering their positions in Afghanistan. According to our special services, there are over 40 terrorist camps and training centers on the border [...] in the northeastern provinces of Afghanistan. They number more than 6,000 militants." [31] Tajik President also underlined the intra-Taliban skirmishes in the bordering regions and thus proposed forming a security belt around Afghanistan to prevent insecurity defusing to neighboring states. [32] Overall, the recent IS-K rocket attacks across the border to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in addition to IS-K recruits particularly among the Tajiks amplify the jihadist threat in Afghanistan's neighbors. [33]

Connectivity and interdependence marks a possible cooperative route to overcome the security dilemmas with CARs. Afghanistan has a critical geo-economical role in connecting four CARs and Kazakhstan feasibly to India and the sub-continent. As such, completion of both the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan (TAT) Railway system entails good neighborly relations with Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan is an energy poor nation dependent on electricity imports from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is also earmarked to play an essential interlink role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is largely dependent on establishment of security and stability in Afghanistan. [34] Again, "in southern Pakistan, China is developing the port of Gwadar, which is to become a major hub

for energy. However, to be profitable, the new port needs to serve as a terminal for natural gas from Central Asia, through Afghanistan." [35]

Conclusion and possible ways ahead

The political situation in Afghanistan has been volatile ever since Taliban grasped power in August 2021. The early shock of unprepared American withdrawal and the collapse of the Republican regime heightened the security measures and spill over risk into the neighbours. In fact, the gloomy scenarios about Taliban's aggression both at home and in the neighbourhood together with a social and humanitarian catastrophe that was estimated to occur in the winter of 2022 relatively did not materialise. Yet this should not be imbued as depicting Afghanistan on a road to turn a garden of roses. Rather, the internal inconsistencies of Taliban are coming to the fore day by day with hard-liners' ideological preponderance crowding out the vital need for domestic reconciliation and international support. The earlier motive to give Taliban a certain time to put things in order is being replaced with growing concern and frustration. As such, negative thinking will trump seeing Taliban as a threat to be reckoned, not a reality to be accommodated.

Against this backdrop, the following three broad scenarios are emerging that would again depend on the security assessments of neighboring countries as well as the policy choices of major stakeholders such as the United States, China, Russia, India, Turkey, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia which are purposefully omitted in this brief for a closer focus on the policy agendas of Afghanistan's immediate neighbors.

Taliban rule consolidated: The current political trajectory of Afghanistan is overwhelmingly set

for the consolidation of power by the Taliban. This would entail internal accord- which seems quite unlikely with current divergences- or more possibly the prevalence of a certain group within Taliban to monopolize power. Taliban's decision to ban girls schooling and sustained harassment of minorities and former Republican era officials indicate a fundamental policy to defy alternative levers of opposition in the country. However, the question still stands whether enforced centralization of power without reconciliation could work in favor of political stability. Without integration of minority groups' interests and defying international community's expectations towards a broad-based rule, Afghanistan under Taliban will be further isolated and impoverished. Moreover, with financial coffers almost empty, the country runs the risk of reverting back to the vicious cycle of drug based and black market economy, warlordism and terror. Under this scenario, the security dilemmas will be reified and it will be more likely that first Iran, Tajikistan and other neighboring CARs, and later Pakistan would seek ways to alternate Taliban's power grasp. Yet this also runs the risk of Afghanistan originated security risks spilling over to the neighboring countries.

Taliban-opposition accord: From the beginning this has been the ideal political course, also lying at the center of Doha Accords. However, the US-Taliban talks were unable to yield concrete and binding measures to this reconciliatory route. With Taliban's power hunger more and more evident, the possibility of an accord with the opposition is almost nil at the moment which has also to do with the opposition's fragmented and divided composition as much as the erosion of legitimacy by running away from the country. Therefore, the opposition is in need of foreign support and genuine leadership with a feasible program to make a power reclaim. The

opposition elements are mainly based in Turkey, Tajikistan and Iran, which would entail these countries' risk enthusiasm to rise with a view to carve out an alternative to the Taliban.

Taliban-opposition confrontation: Even while this scenario will amount to a revival of Afghan civil war, its likelihood will increase by exhaustion of the first two alternatives. May 17 declaration for armed resistance is an emerging cause, even if still in its initial phase and largely lacking an across the board support from all opposition groups and neighboring countries. The lack of consensual political culture and viewing opposition as treason has laid the groundwork for intra-Afghan schisms in the past. The initial traits of the Taliban rule might also be conducive to such a course, in case the opposition feels strong enough to confront the Taliban. It would also entail neighboring countries' dashed expectations towards a broad-based and stable government in Afghanistan. On a balance sheet, though, the risk of an Afghan civil war would incur heavy costs on regional stability with a renewed ground for refugee flows, further surge in drug trafficking and more favorable base for terror groups. Therefore, the neighboring countries, currently under heavy geopolitical and socio-economic pressures, are better advised to think twice to give further impetus to calls for armed resistance against the Taliban rule.

Endnotes

[1] Robert O. Keohane, "Political Authority after Intervention: Gradations in Sovereignty," edited by J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2003, 275-298.

[2] Richard N. Haas, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney, Simon and Schuster), 2009.

[3] Kamran Bokhari, "The Long Shadow of Deobandism in South Asia," *New Lines*, 23 November 2021, <https://newlinesmag.com/essays/the-long-shadow-of-deobandism-in-south-asia/>.

[4] "Afghanistan: How much opium is produced and what's the Taliban's record?," *BBC News*, 25 August 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58308494>.

[5] UNHCR, "Afghanistan emergency," <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/afghanistan-emergency.html>.

[6] "Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis," *Migration Data Portal*, 6 September 2021, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/blog/remittances-afghanistan-lifelines>.

[7] "They left us behind': Expat exodus robs Afghans of income," *Reuters*, 20 August 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-economy-expats-idAFL4N2PP436>.

[8] Aqil Shah, "What Will Happen to Afghanistan and Pakistan's Uneasy Border?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13 August 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/13/what-will-happen-to-afghanistan-and-pakistan-s-uneasy-border-pub-85152>.

[9] "Afghanistan 'at brink of economic collapse', warns Pakistan," *The News*, 11 November 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/907862-afghanistan-at-brink-of-economic-collapse-warns-pakistan>.

[10] "Deadly border attacks test Pakistani gov't relations with Taliban," *Al Jazeera*, 27 April 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/27/could-pakistan-airstrike-affect-afghanistan-relationship>.

[11] See, Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Afghanistan and its neighbors: An Ever Dangerous Neighbourhood," *United States Institute of Peace, Special Report*, 162, (Washington DC, 2006), 9-10.

[12] "Pakistan's Hard Policy Choices in Afghanistan," *International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 320*, (Islamabad; Brussels; Washington: 4 February 2022), 12.

[13] "Afghan Refugees Get Cold Welcome in Pakistan," *Foreign Policy*, 22 November 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/22/afghanistan-refugees-pakistan-taliban-border/>.

[14] Patrick Wintour, "Taliban reversal on girls' education derails US plan for diplomatic recognition," *The Guardian*, 27 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/27/taliban-bar-girls-education-us-plan-diplomatic-recognition>.

[15] Madiha Afzal, "Post Afghanistan, US-Pakistan relations stand on the edge of a precipice," *The Brookings Institution*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/10/13/post-afghanistan-us-pakistan-relations-stand-on-the-edge-of-a-precipice/>.

[16] Ariane M. Tabatabai, "Iran's cooperation with the Taliban could affect talks on U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 9 August 2019.

[17] This was made public by Taliban's reaction to Soleimani's assassination. See, "Taliban condemn killing of Iran's Qassem Soleimani," *Al-Arabiya*, 5 January 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2020/01/05/Taliban-condemn-killing-of-Iran-s-Qassem-Soleimani->.

[18] Tobias Schneider, *The Fatemiyoun Division: Afghan Fighters in the Syrian Civil War*, *Middle East Institute, Policy Paper 2018-9* (Washington DC, 2018).

[19] "In offering an Afghan militia to Kabul, Iran's Zarif causes outrage," *Middle East Eye*, 23 December 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-afghanistan-zarif-fatemiyoun-brigade-syria-shameful>.

[20] IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News* in a news analysis report argued that Taliban's recovery of Farah province across the Iranian border expired at the expense of "ISIS, takfiri groups and foreign powers." See, "گزارش ویژه: تسنیم: طالبان، ولایت «فراه» و نزدیکترین پایگاه نظامی آمریکا به خاک ایران" *Tasnim News*, 16 Esfand 1396 (7 March 2018).

[21] "Iran Repeats Demand from Taliban to Protect Diplomatic Missions," *Fars News*, 1 May 2022,

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14010211000255/Iran-Repeas-Demand-frm-Taliban-Prec-Diplmaic-Missins>.

[22] Fatemeh Aman, "Water Dispute Escalating between Iran and Afghanistan," Atlantic Council South Asia Center, Issue Brief (Washington DC: August 2016), https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Water_Dispute_Escalating_between_Iran_and_Afghanistan_web_0830.pdf.

[23] Sudha Ramachandran, "Afghanistan-Iran Disquiet Over the Helmand River," The Diplomat, 15 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/afghanistan-iran-disquiet-over-the-helmand-river/>.

[24] Vanda Felbab-Brown and Bradley S. Porter, "Out with the old, in with the old: Iran's revolution, drug policies, and global drug markets," Brookings Institution, 24 January 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/out-with-the-old-in-with-the-old-irans-revolution-drug-policies-and-global-drug-markets/>.

[25] "Defying U.S. sanctions, Iran boosts gasoil sales to neighbors," Reuters, 16 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-oil-products-idUSKBN1ZF1XU>.

[26] "صادرات ایران به افغانستان به حدود 'چهار میلیارد دلار' رسیده است," BBC Persian, 9 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-56333952>.

[27] Karolina Powers, "Unlike Its Neighbors, Tajikistan Refuses to Engage with the Taliban and Bolsters Security," Caspian Policy Center, 5 October 2021, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/security-and-politics-program-spp/unlike-its-neighbors-tajikistan-refuses-to-engage-with-the-taliban-and-bolsters-security>.

[28] "Afghan neighbour Tajikistan holds largest ever military exercise," Reuters, 27 June 2021.

[29] Peter Mills, "Afghanistan in Review: Taliban and Opposition Groups Prepare for a New Spring Fighting Season in Afghanistan," Institute for the Study of War, 9 March 2022,

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/afghanistan-review-taliban-and-opposition-groups-prepare-new-spring-fighting-season>.

[30] "Ankara Gathering of Political Figures Forms the Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan," The Khaama Press News Agency, 19 May 2022, <https://www.khaama.com/ankara-gathering-of-political-figures-forms-the-supreme-council-of-national-resistance-for-the-salvation-of-afghanistan68391/>.

[31] "Tajikistan, Uzbekistan make deals with Taliban, but watch border warily," Eurasianet, 22 January 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-uzbekistan-make-deals-with-taliban-but-watch-border-warily>.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Lucas Webber and Riccardo Valle, "Islamic State in Afghanistan Looks to Recruit Regional Tajiks, Inflict Violence Against Tajikistan," The Diplomat, 29 April 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/islamic-state-in-afghanistan-looks-to-recruit-regional-tajiks-inflict-violence-against-tajikistan/>.

[34] "Does the Belt and Road Have a Future in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan?," The Diplomat, 21 August 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/does-the-belt-and-road-have-a-future-in-taliban-ruled-afghanistan/>.

[35] Ibid.



مركز أبحاث السياسات الدولية
Center for International Policy Research

About the Authors

Dr. Emirhan Yorulmazlar is Foreign Policy Institute (FPI) fellow at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Bülent Aras is Research Director of Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) and visiting professor of international relations at Qatar University.

About Center for International Policy Research

Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) is a research center with focus on economic, political, energy and security issues in the GCC region. Based in Doha, CIPR specializes in political risk analysis, government and corporate advisory, conflict advisory, track II diplomacy, humanitarian/development advisory, and event management in the GCC region and beyond. The CIPR aims at becoming a primary research and debate platform in the region with relevant publications, events, projects and media productions to nurture a comprehensive understanding of the intertwined affairs of this geography. With an inclusive, scholarly and innovative approach, the CIPR presents a platform where diverse voices from academia, business and policy world from both the region and the nation's capital interact to produce distinct ideas and insights to the outstanding issues of the region.

Design and Layout: PYNA

Center for International Policy Research
Laffan Tower, Ambassadors Street,
Doha

www.cipresearch.org
info@cipresearch.org