

# Afghanistan



Afghanistan is called as “graveyard of empires” and “land of great games.”

## Modern history of Afghanistan:

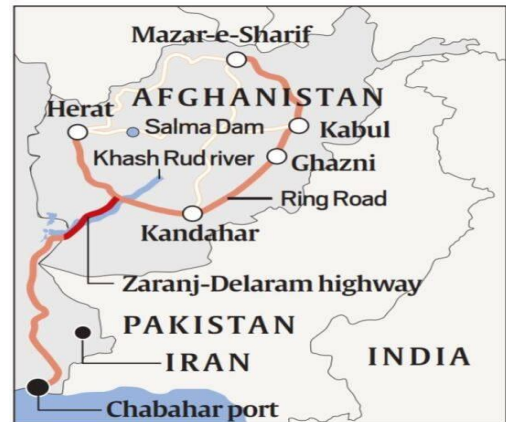
1. Following the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, Afghanistan became free of foreign dominance, and eventually emerged as the independent Kingdom of Afghanistan in June 1926 under Amanullah Khan.
2. This monarchy lasted almost 50 years, until Zahir Shah was overthrown in 1973. In 1973, while the King was in Italy, Daoud Khan launched a bloodless coup and became the first President of Afghanistan, abolishing the monarchy.
3. In April 1978, the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in a bloody coup d'état against then-President Mohammed Daoud Khan, in what is called the **Saur Revolution**.
4. In 1989, Soviet withdrew from Afghanistan and in 1992, the communist government under **Mohammed Najibullah** collapsed.
5. Another civil war broke out after the creation of a dysfunctional coalition government between leaders of various mujahideen factions. In the infighting, Taliban emerged victorious and seized control of Afghanistan.
6. After 9/11 attacks, US Invaded Afghanistan Since Taliban regime refused to hand over **Osama bin Laden** to the US. This resulted in end of Taliban era and establishment of democratic regime in Afghanistan under **Hamid Karzai**.
7. After the imminent US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban got bolstered and started recapture of Afghanistan from Ashraf Ghani government. On 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2021, Taliban took over the control of Kabul. However, none of the nations till date have recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

## India Afghanistan Relations

India and Afghanistan have traditionally enjoyed a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

The Republic of India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s, though relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government. During Taliban regime, India didn't recognise it and rather supported the **Northern Alliance**.

India aided the overthrow of the Taliban by offering intelligence and other forms of support for the Coalition forces led by the USA in 2001. After the overthrow of the Taliban, India established diplomatic relations with the newly established democratic government, provided aid and participated in the reconstruction efforts. India has made key infrastructure projects like new Afghan parliament, Garland highway, Zaranj- Delaram Highway, Indira Gandhi Hospital, Salma dam (India Afghanistan Friendship dam) and has projects going in all the 34 provinces.



India is the biggest regional donor to Afghanistan and fifth largest donor globally with over \$3 billion in assistance. India has built over 200 public and private schools, sponsors over 1,000 scholarships, hosts over 16,000 Afghan students. Relations between Afghanistan and India received a major boost in 2011 with the signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement.

**Trade Relations:** Bilateral trade in 2019-20 was around \$1.5 billion. As a **Least Developed Country (LDC)**, Afghanistan enjoys duty free access to Indian markets for Afghan products like dry fruits. Coming of Taliban has disrupted the trade. However, India has tried to ensure access through Chabahar port.

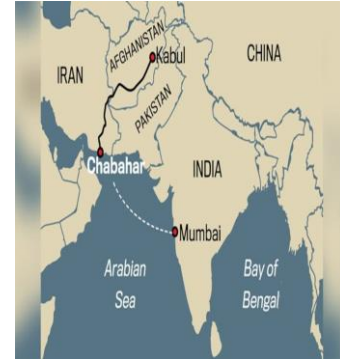
### Challenge:

1. Pakistan unwillingness to provide overland route for trade.
2. Increased security concerns since coming of Taliban and Haqqani network's proximity with the ISI.
3. Fear of opium trade and narcotics trafficking within the Indian borders.
4. Limited engagement of India with Taliban create challenge for exploitation of abundant iron reserves (Hajigak) and copper deposits (Mes Ayank).

**Military Relations:** India provided military training to Afghan personnel and has supplied platforms like Mi 25 attack helicopters for Afghan forces. Since coming of Taliban, these corporations have been halted.

### Positives:

1. India enjoys huge soft power and acceptability among all Afghan tribes and common population.
2. India's development projects have brought noticeable difference to the life of common Afghans and Indian projects are ongoing in all the Afghan provinces. Taliban has asked India to complete the projects and has promised security to them.
3. Iran and Central Asian Republics have affirmed India's stake in the stability of Afghanistan during Delhi regional security dialogue.
4. Activation of Chabahar port and start of trade with Afghanistan and other Central Asian Republics through Chabahar provide opportunity for continued economic engagement.
5. Taliban has asked India to complete its developmental projects, underscoring India's constructive engagement in Afghanistan.



### Current Challenges:

1. After Taliban takeover, India has evacuated its embassies. This has created challenges for the development works undertaken by India in Afghanistan. However, in June 2022, India reopened it with a small technical team. On the other hand, in October 2023, Afghan embassy in Delhi ceased its operations due to lack of resources and discord with Taliban regime.
2. Taliban takeover also provides ungoverned spaces for the terror groups like Laskar-e-Taiba and Jais-e-Mohammed to train and launch attacks against India.
3. Threat to the minorities in Afghanistan have created refugee crisis and India had to evacuate Hindu and Sikh minorities in Afghanistan.
4. Taliban's involvement in opium trade may also lead to illegal narcotics trafficking to India. There have been cases of containers filled with opium caught at the Mundra port.
5. Challenges emerging out of humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, fear of **ISIS** and other terror groups activities in Afghanistan can destabilise the region as a whole.
6. Greater influence and control of Haqqani network in Taliban government and regime limits the scope for trust best relationship between India and Taliban.
7. At the **Delhi Regional Security Dialogue**, absence of Pakistan and China shows unwillingness of both these nations to accept India rule in Afghan affairs and stability.

## Recent Initiatives:

1. India has engaged with Taliban through its Doha office. Taliban has also showed eagerness towards Indian investment in Afghanistan and ask for India to continue them.
2. India has provided medical supplies and food to Afghanistan in the form of humanitarian assistance. India has bypassed Pakistan through Chabahar port in Iran.
3. It has also organised meeting of NSAs under **Delhi regional security dialogue on Afghanistan** to discuss the challenges emerging out of Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.
4. It has increased its engagement at highest level with Central Asian republics through **India Central Asia summit**.

## Key points of Delhi declaration:

1. Afghanistan's territory should not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing of any terrorist acts.
2. There should be cooperation against the menace of radicalisation, extremism, separatism and drug trafficking in the region.
3. There should be an open and truly inclusive government that represents the will of the people of Afghanistan.
4. The United Nations has a central role to play in Afghanistan, its continued presence must be preserved.

Ensuring that the fundamental rights of women, children and minority communities are not violated.

## Pakistan factor in Afghanistan:

- During communist regime in Afghanistan and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was the training ground for the mujahideen fighters who fought against the Soviet army.
- When first Taliban regime took over Kabul in 1996, Pakistan was one of the three nations recognizing it, other two being Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- After fall of Taliban regime in 2001 and establishment of democratic Afghanistan, Taliban leaders found shelter in Quetta, under the protection of the ISI. Although Pakistan denied the claims.
- After fall of Kabul on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 by Afghan Taliban, Pakistani PM Imran Khan describing it as Afghans breaking "the shackles of slavery". ISI also played key role on ensuring peace between different factions and formation of Taliban government.
- Pakistan expected that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan would help it in having a pliable regime and handling TTP (Tehrik-e **Taliban Pakistan**). However, that has not materialized.
- Taliban regime has also not recognized the Durand line as the border, and has uprooted the fencing that has been put up by Pakistan to prevent infiltration. This has

made it easier for militants to cross the border, attack Pakistan and hide on the Afghanistan side of the border.

- The relations have further soured because of Pakistan's criticism of Taliban, Taliban's inability to bring TTP to the negotiation table and Pakistan sending back Afghan refugees. Taliban's willingness to engage with India is another factor.

### **China in Afghanistan:**

Taliban has shown greater interest in engaging with China. In September 2023, China became the first nation to appoint an ambassador to Kabul. China has also talked about extending BRI to Afghanistan. Taliban has also expressed interest in formally joining the same. China is also interested in vast untapped mineral wealth in Afghanistan. **China-Pakistan axis** makes it more convenient for China to engage in Afghanistan. This would limit the diplomatic space available for India.

### **China's interests in Afghanistan:**

- Tackling the threat posed by Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), previously called as East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), blamed by Beijing for unrest in Xinjiang.
- Beijing also continues to worry about instability spreading from Afghanistan into South and Central Asia, where China has significant economic and political interests.
- China's economic interest in the mineral resources of Afghanistan like Iron, Copper, Lithium, Coal etc.
- Greater Chinese influence in Afghanistan with demonstrate its acceptability and soft power beyond its proximity give it upper hand vis-à-vis USA.