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**INDIA-TALIBAN RELATIONS POST-US  
WITHDRAWAL**

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## INDIA-TALIBAN RELATIONS POST-US WITHDRAWAL

### In Context

- The recent meeting between the Indian Foreign Secretary and the Taliban's acting Foreign Minister in Dubai marks a significant elevation in the level of dialogue between India and the Taliban.

### Historical Context and Strategic Realignment

- **India's Traditional Policy:**
  - ◆ Historically, India opposed the Taliban, supporting anti-Taliban forces and the democratically elected government in Kabul.
  - ◆ India's investments of over \$3 billion in Afghanistan's reconstruction included infrastructure, education, and healthcare projects.
- **Shift Post-2021 Taliban Takeover:**
  - ◆ The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 initially seemed to strengthen Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, but subsequent tensions between Kabul and Rawalpindi provided India an opening for re-engagement.
  - ◆ India's dispatch of a technical team to its Kabul embassy in 2022 marked a cautious step toward re-establishing its presence.

### Recent Developments in India-Taliban Relations

- **Elevated Dialogue:** The recent meeting in Dubai represents India's highest-level engagement with the Taliban since 2021, highlighting a shift from a non-recognition stance to pragmatic dialogue.
  - ◆ Discussions included humanitarian aid, trade facilitation, and regional stability.
- **Geopolitical Reality:** Despite the Taliban's controversial governance, India recognizes the need to engage with whichever government is in power in Kabul. This pragmatic approach is driven by the enduring geopolitical reality of the Subcontinent.
- **Economic and Trade Relations:** Strengthening political and economic ties with Afghanistan is a priority.
  - ◆ Discussions have included the use of the **Chabahar port** to support trade and commercial activities.
  - ◆ Chabahar Port provides India with a critical transit route to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.
- **Balancing Regional Influence:** Historically, Afghanistan has looked to India **to balance pressures from Pakistan**.
  - ◆ The Taliban's return to power was initially seen as a gain for Pakistan, but tensions between Kabul and Rawalpindi persist.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** India has supplied essential medicines, Covid and polio vaccines, anti-tuberculosis medicines, surgical items, drug de-addiction hygiene kits, blankets, winter clothing, pesticides, stationery for students as well as large consignments of wheat to Afghanistan.
  - ◆ **The European Union** has focused on humanitarian aid and ensuring stability in Afghanistan, which **aligns with India's interests** in a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Since August 2021, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has granted admissions to over 3,000 Afghan students, including 600 Afghan girls.
  - ◆ Additionally, an online scholarship scheme has been launched to provide accessible educational opportunities to students residing in Afghanistan.

### Concerns and Challenges

- **Core Concerns:** The **Taliban's domestic policies**, particularly its **repression of women and denial of basic rights**, are deeply concerning. The regime has imposed severe restrictions on women's education and personal freedoms.
  - ◆ It raises ethical and moral questions for India in engaging with such a regime. India has a moral responsibility to stand against such oppressive governance and advocate for the rights and freedoms of the Afghan people.

- **Security and Stability Concerns:** Taliban's ties with Pakistan and the potential for Afghanistan to be used as a base for anti-India activities remain significant security concerns.
  - ♦ India's engagement with the Taliban is partly driven by the need to ensure its own security and stability in the region.
  - ♦ However, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has assured that it does not pose a threat to any nation, including India. It is crucial for regional stability and India's security interests.
- **Role and Impact of Western Actors:**
  - ♦ **United States** withdrawal has significantly altered the power dynamics in the region, leading to a vacuum that various regional powers, **including India**, are trying to fill. The US continues to engage with the Taliban on counter-terrorism and humanitarian issues, which **indirectly affects India's approach to the group**.
  - ♦ **Other Regional Actors** like **Russia and China** have increased their engagement with the Taliban, seeking to expand their influence in Afghanistan. This has **implications for India**, as it navigates its relationships with these major powers.
- **Pakistan's Strategic Depth:** Pakistan has long sought strategic depth on its western front, but the return of the Taliban has led to increased volatility.
  - ♦ The **Taliban's refusal to recognize the Durand Line** (*a border established in the 19th century, Taliban referring to it as 'hypothetical'*), the intensification of **insurgencies in Balochistan and Pashtun territories** and its support for **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)** have further complicated the situation.
  - ♦ **Pakistan's role** remains critical, given its historical ties with the Taliban and its strategic interests in Afghanistan. India's diplomatic efforts are often countered by Pakistan's influence in the region.

### India's Approach and Recommendations

- **India's 'Act West' Policy:** It has seen a significant shift in its approach towards the **Taliban regime in Afghanistan**. It aims to strengthen ties with West Asian countries, now includes engaging with the Taliban to safeguard India's strategic interests in the region.
- **Maintain Core Values:** India must continue to uphold its commitment to human rights and democratic values in its engagement with the Taliban. This includes advocating for the rights of women and minorities in Afghanistan.
- **Strategic Diplomacy:** While engaging with the Taliban, India should leverage its diplomatic channels to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a breeding ground for terrorism that threatens regional stability.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** India should continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people, ensuring that the assistance reaches those in need without being exploited by the Taliban regime.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Strengthening ties with other regional players, including Iran and Central Asian countries, can help India balance the influence of Pakistan and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

### Conclusion

- The evolving dynamics of India-Taliban relations are shaped by a complex interplay of historical animosities, strategic interests, and the influence of Western and regional actors.
- India's cautious engagement with the Taliban reflects its need to protect its investments and security interests while navigating the broader geopolitical shifts in the region.
- The role of Western actors, particularly the US and EU, continues to impact India's approach, as they engage with the Taliban on various fronts.

Source: IE



### Mains Practice Question

Critically analyze the evolving dynamics of India-Taliban relations in the wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, examining the role and impact of Western actors in shaping this complex interplay.