

The Taliban, the United States, and China: Will the Taliban Become a Victim of South Asian Rivalries?

(Translated)

News:

During the recent trip of Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, to China, he met with the foreign ministers of China and Pakistan. China has announced that both Afghanistan and Pakistan have expressed their desire to enhance diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Comment:

At first glance, this news might seem like a positive diplomatic event for the Taliban; however, at its core, it is actually part of a larger game in regional geopolitics—a game in which the main players are China, India, the United States, and Pakistan—and Afghanistan, lacking strategic awareness, will be turned into a tool at the center of this competition.

China pursues specific objectives in Afghanistan: containing the Uyghur Mujahideen, whose presence in Afghanistan poses a threat to China's domestic security; preventing insecurity in its economic projects in Pakistan caused by the Pakistani Taliban; and countering India's increasing influence in Afghanistan. From China's perspective, the Taliban can only be an acceptable partner if they can control groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), prevent India's influence in Afghanistan, and renounce global Islamic thinking and commit to the nation-state. In that case, China is prepared to connect a branch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan. The Taliban, who are pleased even with the smallest political and economic gain, apparently have agreed to these conditions and view it as an opportunity to solidify their international standing.

On the other side of this game stands India—a country that is becoming the main pillar of America's policy in South Asia. The United States seeks to turn India into the "Israel of South Asia," meaning a key power that plays an essential role in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific against China. That is why India is being strengthened by Washington, and it is trying to play a more active role in Afghanistan, closely monitor the Taliban, and through them, penetrate groups opposed to Pakistan and China. The recent visit of Anind Prakash, India's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Kabul and the phone call between Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Amir Khan Muttaqi can be interpreted in this context. New Delhi wants to resume its previous economic projects and at the same time establish meaningful political relations with the Taliban. India's main fear is the Taliban turning into a regional power and the growth of transnational political Islam; therefore, it seeks to align the Taliban with the nation-state order by offering them concessions.

Pakistan, in the midst of this, is in a fragile position—like a servant ignored by its master. Islamabad is deeply concerned about its security from Afghanistan, especially

due to the presence of the TTP. At the same time, it is worried about India's growing influence in Kabul and New Delhi's expanding ties with the Taliban. Currently, Modi's Hindutva government is Washington's favorite. Despite its resentment, Pakistan has submitted to this American policy but tries to use the Taliban as a tool to secure its own safety and to bind Afghanistan to the nation-state.

The United States, having withdrawn from Afghanistan, is now trying to contain China by strengthening India. Washington does not want Beijing to get close to the Taliban and gain control over Afghanistan's untapped mineral resources. Moreover, the United States seeks to keep Pakistan entangled on its border with Afghanistan so that its security focus is diverted from India, allowing India to breathe easier in its competition with China. From the time of the initial negotiations with the Taliban until today, the United States has tried to integrate the Afghan government into the international community, keep it committed to the nation-state, and have the Taliban themselves suppress and control the potential for global Islamism.

Meanwhile, the Taliban, with their pragmatic approach, welcome any political or economic relationship or concession—without understanding the Shari'ah standards or its consequences. This political instability and lack of strategic awareness has caused the Taliban to ignore China's crimes against Uyghur Muslims and India's oppressive policies in Kashmir. Even many Taliban members themselves do not realize that from a fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) perspective, these countries fall under the category of "dar al-harb" (territory of war); but based on nationalistic and economic policies, these countries are presented as strategic friends.

The Taliban are trying to maintain a balanced and economy-centered policy based on national interests to strike a balance between China, India, and the West; however, in practice, they lean more toward the West, especially the United States. This policy does not come from an Islamic perspective but rather from a lack of political awareness. Instead of taking a principled and Shari'ah-based stance toward the powers, they gravitate toward whichever side offers them the most concessions.

In the end, this situation reflects a deeper crisis in the politics of the Islamic world. Experience has shown that as long as the Taliban and similar groups seek political concessions from powers hostile to Islam, the condition of the Islamic world will not change. The way out of the battleground of East and West lies not in reliance on China or America but in the establishment of the second Khilafah Rashidah (Righteous Caliphate) —a Caliphate that, with a deep understanding of political and economic realities, would lift the Islamic Ummah out of being mere foot soldiers in colonial projects and restore them to their independent and powerful status. Without such an approach, Afghanistan and other Islamic lands will remain battlegrounds for the rivalries of the major powers.

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