

Iran's Perspective on the Evolving Situation in Afghanistan

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The common cultural and civilizational roots between Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan have a long history. Both societies share deep intellectual, cultural, civilizational and historical bonds. These bonds are the cause of Afghanistan's distinct place among Iran's fifteen neighbours. The two country's shared destiny has led to the decision that the Islamic Republic of Iran, irrespective of Afghanistan's political system, maintains the highest priority when it comes to assisting the Afghan people.

Against this backdrop, this study introduces the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy in Afghanistan and its strategic considerations in the context of the present evolution in Afghanistan. The authors trace Afghanistan's importance for Iran and argue that instability, conflict, human trafficking, and drug trafficking are the main concerns of Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan and these concerns have led to the policy of protecting the process of political stability and reconstruction.

Why is Afghanistan important to Tehran?

Afghanistan is one of Iran's fifteen neighbouring countries, but after the Islamic Revolution the relations between the two countries have always been important with regards to Iran's foreign policy. This is due to various aspects of Afghanistan's importance to Tehran.

The first reason of this importance is the historical-cultural commonality between two countries. The existing connections

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between people, culture, history and geography of these two countries, are unique. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is one of the outstanding mythical pieces in Persian literature which shows this connection very well.¹ Speaking of connections between two countries could be misleading; while there used to be no duality in their history and civilization if we go backward a little in time. This situation requires a specific perspective towards the two countries' relations, at least on behalf of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Second, Afghanistan has a significant Shia population who are spread in different parts of the country and in spite of the racist policies taken by the different governments; they have a relative focus in the central parts of Afghanistan, a region called Hazarajat. The Shia population in various evaluations is estimated to be between 9 to 20 per cent of the whole population of 40.6 million of Afghanistan.² A considerable part of Afghanistan's Shias facing the security and social-political hardships, recognize Iran with majority of Shia as a home and supportive neighbouring country. The Islamic Republic of Iran, besides helping all the people of Afghanistan, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation, pays special attention to the Shiites of Afghanistan.

Thirdly, Afghanistan is geopolitically important to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Afghanistan has a complex geopolitical reality and history has shown that the country is prone to extremism.

In Afghanistan, there is an array of ethnic groups consisting nine main ethnic groups and more than ten smaller ones³ on one hand, and the lack of a strong and centralized government on the

¹ Maghsoudi, Mojtaba and Monireh Arab. 2010. *Shahnameh; field of cultural-identity interaction between Iran and Persian-speaking countries*. Quarterly Journal of Political Studies, Volume 4, Issue 14: 79-92.

² World population review, "Afghanistan Population 2022," 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/afghanistan-population>

³ Larger ethnic groups including Pashtuns, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen, Balouch, Nouristani and Sadat and smaller ones including Pashayi, Pamiri, Kurds, Kyrgyz, Arabs, Gujjar, Moghol, Ormur, Wakhi, Dards, Sindhi, Sikhs and Hindus.

other. Due to the lack of nationalization and the precedence of ethnic loyalties over national loyalties, Afghanistan is still recognized as a weak nation-state. The findings suggest that countries with fragile and weak governments and societies suffering from ethnic mosaics are moving towards armed ethnic conflicts.⁴ It is noteworthy that Iran shares more than 950 km of its frontier with such neighbours.

In addition, Afghanistan's geopolitical capabilities are of particular importance from a connectivity perspective, and if secured, could help diversify the connecting routes between Iran and Central Asia. This will be especially important for Central Asian countries.

Lastly, in addition to its geopolitical importance, Afghanistan is also of geostrategic importance. The long-term presence of the United States, NATO, and other rival actors has made the relationship with Afghanistan more and more sensitive and serious. However, contrary to existing analysis, Tehran has tried not to pursue its rivalry with the United States in Afghanistan.

Islamic Republic of Iran's National Interests in Afghanistan

For the reasons mentioned above, Tehran has a special perspective on Afghanistan and has to pursue its national interests through the conflict of heterogeneous factors in the political and social arena of that country. It is noteworthy that Iran's national interests in Afghanistan do not necessarily have an affirmative aspect, and it can be said that negative aspects have a more prominent place in the system of security and national interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The most important interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan are mentioned below.

The development of economic and trade relations between the two countries is one of the most important positive aspects of Iran's national interests in Afghanistan. At first glance, trade

⁴ Hadian, Hamid. 2009. Structural Weakness of Nation-State Building in Afghanistan. *The Scientific Journal of Strategy* Volume 17, Issue 2 - Serial Number 51: 133-152.

between two countries is the highest level of economic relations. In this context, Iran has been at the forefront of economic partnership with Afghanistan for the past four years (2017 to 2021).⁵ Although the US sanctions and the obstacles posed by anti-Iranian currents in this area cannot be ignored, given the complex links between businessmen and the private sector of the two countries, the process of economic exchanges has been relatively stable.

Afghanistan's reconstruction also provided a fertile ground for the development of Iranian companies and contractors in Afghanistan. Although under the new round of US intensified sanctions against Iran, various obstacles prevented this cooperation and the extensive activity of Iranian companies in Afghanistan became limited to a few small projects, however, the usefulness of the activity of Iranian companies in Afghanistan infrastructure projects for the two countries cannot be denied.

Strengthening the ties of civilization, especially the Persian language in Afghanistan, is another interest for Iran. Persian is one of the two main languages and the official and administrative language in Afghanistan. In addition to the institutionalization of the Persian language in Afghanistan, it should be noted that scientific and academic texts are in Persian which are produced or translated mainly by Iranian and Afghan writers and translators. Many books, especially university books, are transferred from Iran to Afghanistan.⁶ The strong presence of the Afghan cultural in Iran and the reception of Iranians to the cultural and literary productions of Afghans show the lively cultural ties between the two countries. In addition, Iranian

⁵ Rouhifefat, Mohsen, "Prospects of economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan," SCFR, September 14, 2021, <https://www.scfr.ir/en/economy/136151/prospects-of-economic-relations-between-iran-and-afghanistan/>.

⁶ Damirchi, Saeed. 2018. "رشد چشمگیر صادرات کتاب به بازار نشر افغانستان". IBNA. Accessed May 12 2022, <https://www.ibna.ir/vdcfeed0tw6dvya.igiw.html>.

traditions such as Nowruz and other traditions are of interest to a wide range of Afghans.⁷

Maintaining security of the shared frontiers of the two countries is another interest of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan. The Islamic Republic of Iran has maintained stability and security of these borders at a high cost, despite various waves of insecurity originating in that country; generally these borders have acceptable stability and security.⁸

However, some concerns exist. The first concern is insecurity and instability in Afghanistan. Since 1979, six different and conflicting political systems have emerged in Afghanistan. Officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran consider the presence, intervention and unilateralism of foreign powers in Afghanistan as one of the most important roots of this situation in Afghanistan, especially during the last two decades. There is no doubt that this factor is not the only cause of the long-standing crisis in Afghanistan, but it is surely one of the chief causes of instability in Afghanistan in the last two decades.

Another concern for Tehran, which is rooted in insecurity and instability, and of course the geopolitics of Afghanistan, is the presence and activity of numerous terrorist groups, especially ISIL Khorasan, in the geography of Afghanistan.⁹ In the months since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, we have seen a dramatic increase in suicide attacks in Afghanistan's major cities. The focus of these actions has also been targeting the Shiites. Considering the experiences of Iraq and Syria shows that the spread of this threat in Afghanistan can have unpredictable consequences for the entire region and the world.

7 Sazmand, Bahareh. 2021. "اشتراکات فرهنگی ایران و افغانستان؛ برگزاری آیین نوروز", *Irdiplomacy*. Accessed May 5 2022, <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/2003774/>

8 Sahibzada, Muhammad Usman. 2020. "Iran's objectives and approach towards Afghanistan". *International Journal of Social Science Archives*, Dec, 2020, 3(2), 11-21.

9 Clayton, Thomas, "Terrorist Groups in Afghanistan," 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10604.pdf>.

Another consequence of political and security instability in Afghanistan is the development of cultivation, processing and trafficking of drugs in Afghanistan. Over the past decades, the lucrative revenues from drug trafficking have provided the energy needed to move the war machine and bloodshed in Afghanistan. According to international reports (2018), more than 86 per cent of the world's opium is grown in Afghanistan. The report also confirms the link between drug trafficking and terrorism. Afghanistan's narcotics production, processing and trafficking revenues are estimated to be between \$ 1.8 billion to \$ 2.7 billion a year.¹⁰ Therefore, the issue of drugs in Afghanistan is a serious security problem.¹¹ The fight against narcotics requires regional cooperation and it is in fact an area in which Iran, its neighbours, the United States and its European allies have common interests.¹² This is because as mentioned above, high turnover in the production, processing and trafficking of narcotics provides good income for criminal and terrorist groups and strengthens the roots of terror and crime in self-reinforcing cycles.

As Afghanistan's immediate neighbour, Iran is one of the most important drug trafficking routes to West Asia and Europe, and every year, staggering economic, social and human costs are imposed on Tehran to fight drug trafficking. Countering this phenomenon and reducing its threats is one of the serious security interests for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

¹⁰ UNODC, "Terrorism and drug trafficking," 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/organized-crime/module-16/key-issues/terrorism-and-drug-trafficking.html>.

¹¹ Felbab-Brown, Vanda, "Drugs, security, and counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan," Brookings , October 29, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/drugs-security-and-counternarcotics-policies-in-afghanistan/>.

¹² Aman, Fatemeh and Barbara Slavin, "Resolving regional sources of instability: Iran, Afghanistan, and South Asia," Atlantic Council, November 8 2013. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/iran-afghanistan-and-south-asia-resolving-regional-sources-of-instability>

The latest and perhaps most important phenomenon, which is again due to instability and insecurity in Afghanistan, is the displacement of millions of Afghan people, most of whom come to and live in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Currently, Iranian officials estimate the presence of more than six million Afghans in various cities of Iran. Needless to say that managing the affairs of this huge population, which alone is larger than the population of many European countries, is a difficult, tedious and costly task for Iran.

In addition to addressing these concerns, Tehran had other major concerns with Afghanistan, the most important of which was the continued presence of the United States and NATO countries in Afghanistan. In other words, the US presence in Afghanistan for two decades and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Islamic Republic of Iran was never something to easily accept and get along with.

Iran's Policy: Protecting Stability and Political Continuity in Afghanistan

A number of scholars have already assessed the commonalities of Iran and Afghanistan. The commonalities have made Afghanistan one of the most significant issues for Iran's foreign policy since 1979. Contrary to some given analysis, the lack of security and stability and political continuity is not favourable for the Islamic Republic of Iran. None of Afghanistan's neighbours have such immunity.

"Strong Region" as a pillar of Islamic republic of Iran's foreign policy is highly emphasized by Iranian leaders.¹³ It confirms Iran's approach towards peace and stability in Afghanistan. According to neighbourhood theory, development, security and other fundamental values are regional concepts, not national ones. Through praising plurality, this theory claims that the more independent regional actors, the more prosperous the societies will

¹³ Ashna, Hesamoddin, "Stronger, more efficient governments in the region," *Journal of Strategic Studies of Public Policy*, 2016, http://sspp.iranjournals.ir/article_23309_fe320f52e776e02c259b0379af687444.pdf?lang=en

be. In other words, the biggest diplomacy for a regional power is to satisfy smaller states and societies.¹⁴

In this regard Tehran had tried for a multidimensional reconstruction in Afghanistan during two last decades using all its potential and facilities. Its potential has been very limited due to the oppressive US sanctions, but this trend has always been a priority in the agenda of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy.

Economic Reconstruction

One of the fundamental challenges emanating from Afghanistan are that its consequences spill over into various fields, is the weakness of the wealth-producing economic infrastructure, which is the result of insecurity, war and long-term instability. Regardless of the roots of this issue, the result is low per capita rates, the dependence of the economy on the outside, a generally weak economy, livelihood of the Afghan government and people and consequently attraction of militant groups for Afghan youth.

The international community in general and the Islamic Republic of Iran in particular, realizing this necessity, made extensive plans to provide the necessary financial resources for the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. One of the most important steps taken was holding an international conference to rebuild Afghanistan in Tokyo. The Ministerial Summit was held in January 2002 and was co-chaired by Japan, the United States, the European Union and Saudi Arabia, with representatives from 61 countries and 21 international organizations.¹⁵

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which before and after the Islamic Revolution was one of the most important countries providing funds for the country's development programs,

¹⁴ Tahaei, SeyedJavad and Seyed Reza Mousavinia, "The Neighborhood (A Theory for the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran),"2014. *Islamic Politics Quarterly*, 2014, 1 (4), 165-192.

¹⁵ Abbasi, Ebrahim and Majid Ranjbardar, "Iran's Financial Assistance to Afghanistan: Its Economic Objectives and Impacts,"2011, *Foreign Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (11), 195-229.

attended the conference and pledged more than \$560 million in aid to Afghanistan. Out of this \$ 250 million were in grants and \$250 million in export credit and \$60 million were to be paid in the form of grants to public institutions within 5 years.¹⁶ Among the participating countries, the largest contributors and organizations included the United States with 5 billion dollars, the European Commission with 1.2 billion dollars, the United Kingdom with 850.9 million dollars, Germany with 729.5 million dollars, Iran with 560 million dollars, the World Bank with 553.3 million dollars, Canada with 457.2 million dollars, the Netherlands with 285.8 million dollars and Italy with 263.8 million dollars.¹⁷ The Islamic Republic of Iran, by fulfilling its commitments within five years, played an important role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.¹⁸ In addition to the aforementioned assistance, according to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report the Islamic Republic of Iran pledged \$100 million in aid to Afghanistan at the 2006 London Conference.¹⁹

In 2001 the Islamic Republic of Iran, established the Headquarter of Participation for Reconstructing Afghanistan, for coordination and policy efforts under the management of the Vice President. In this framework, important measures were taken with the participation of Iranian private and public sectors and from the committed budget in various fields such as road construction, electricity supply, establishment of health and hospital centers and sending humanitarian aid. Iran also played an effective role in the construction projects such as Dogharun Road to Herat, Mahirud - Farah Road, Khaf-Herat Railway, electricity transmission to Herat, as well as construction and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Shafiei, Nozar, "A Strategic Assessment of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy toward Afghanistan," 2014. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 6, Issue 22, 827-851.

¹⁸ Balkhi, Mirwais, "Iran's Afghanistan Policy: Post-Taliban Evaluation," *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, 2011, Vol. 15, No. 1, 140-151.

¹⁹ Agarwal, Rajeev, "Post Afghanistan 2014 Options for India and Iran," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, March 1, 2014. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09145>

provision of necessary infrastructures for Afghan traders to export and import goods through Chabahar port.

Meanwhile, Chabahar port is one of the most important projects designed and implemented by the Islamic Republic of Iran in cooperation with India to help Afghanistan and is one of the most important advantages offered to Afghanistan. Iran's Chabahar port and inland routes take Afghanistan out of its landlocked situation and connect the country to world markets.²⁰

Social Reconstruction

Afghanistan is the mosaic of distinctive cultures. Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the idea of an inclusive government in Afghanistan with the active presence of all ethnicities including the Taliban. During the Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan, where every religion and ethnicity had a representative, even those who supported monarchy but the Taliban were excluded. This strategic miscalculation led to many mistakes. It could have been easily predicted that supporters of this group will engage in long conflicts to secure their interests that eventually forces American forces out of Afghanistan. In the Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran had a significant role. The outcome of Iran's Diplomatic efforts was the recognition of Shia people's safety and presence of Iran Allies in Afghanistan's government structure which was a breakthrough in establishment of Hazaras rights in Afghanistan Society.

Contrary to the principled and consistent policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Shias of Afghanistan, some experts believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran should reconsider its policy of protecting the Shia in Afghanistan because it exposes them to internal and security threats and dangers .

²⁰ Nader, Alireza, Ali G. Scotten, Ahmad Idrees Rahmani, Robert Stewart and Leila Mahnad, "Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the U.S. Drawdown" RAND Corporation, 2014. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/R600/RR616/RAND_RR616.pdf

In addition, the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted Afghan refugees for four decades, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliations, and has not based its interaction on any of their identity affiliations. That is why ethnic affiliations among Afghan refugees living in Iran are not very visible. However, some Afghan ethnic groups have ethnic rallies in other countries, and this gap is active even among refugee communities.

Political Reconstruction

For the past four decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to organize the multilateral measures needed to assist the people and government of Afghanistan within the framework of UN arrangements. This idea has always appealed to Tehran to curb the unilateralism of the great powers, especially the United States, and to provide a better environment to help the people and government of Afghanistan.

Recently Tehran also tried to strengthen its relations with the government and transfer the center of relations from various groups to the central government of Afghanistan. This was also to help strengthen the position and importance of the Afghan government by encouraging jihadist forces to cooperate with the government. In fact, while maintaining its traditional and exceptional relations with some influential Afghan currents and personalities in Herat or the Northern Alliance leaders, Iran did not see maintaining these relations as contradicting the expansion of relations with the Afghan central government.²¹ Iran's president visited Kabul in August 2003 as the first foreign leader and expressed Iran's satisfaction with the formation of a government in Afghanistan.

21 Tolouei, Hadi and Mohammad Shafieefar. 2019. "Iran's Smart Power Analysis in Afghanistan after the US-led Invasion in 2001" Central Eurasia Studies April 1 20219.
https://jcep.ut.ac.ir/article_72556_b2d4a325447d68b1f9fd998092d5eba.pdf?lang=en

Tehran has expressed intentions to establish stability in Afghanistan and form a government in which all ethnic groups and groups can work together. Claiming Iran's efforts to destabilize Afghanistan is an exaggerated claim because Tehran knows that Afghanistan's instability will inevitably spill over into Iran due to geographical proximity. The experience of years of war in Afghanistan has shown that instability in Afghanistan can lead to problems such as drug trafficking, terrorism and extremism, the Afghan refugee crisis and its consequences in Iran. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always declared the solution to the Afghan crisis through inter-Afghan negotiations.²²

Cultural Reconstruction

The fourth pillar of the Islamic Republic of Iran's assistance to the new government of Afghanistan is its active participation in the provision of services, reconstruction and development of its scientific, educational and cultural infrastructures. As mentioned earlier, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown great incentive to eradicate the roots of extremism in its eastern neighbor and has considered one of the most important platforms in this field to provide educational services to Afghans in various areas. It has also worked on educational and cultural issues of both countries. In order to develop educational services and infrastructure in Afghanistan, in the spring of 2002, the first days of the formation of a new government in Afghanistan, the Minister of Higher Education left for Tehran and a scientific-educational memorandum was signed between the two countries. Subsequently, in September of the same year, a delegation consisting of representatives of Iran's universities and higher education centers headed by the then Deputy Minister of Student Affairs of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology travelled to Afghanistan to implement this memorandum and visit scientific and academic centers.²³

²² Pahlavani, Mehrdad, "The approach of effective actors in Afghanistan; A challenge to peace talks with the Taliban," *Foreign Policy Quarterly*, 2012. Vol. 26, Issue 3, 711-742.

²³ Dehghani Firooz Abadi, Seyed Jalal, "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan crisis," *The Quarterly Journal of Public Law Research*, 2006, *The Quarterly Journal of Public Law Research*, 8 (20), 7-23.

Furthermore the Islamic Republic of Iran contributed 30 million dollars to Afghanistan's education in 2010 assisted in providing in support to five university libraries, equipping and setting up the Herat Cultural Center.²⁴

Regarding the development of primary education, the Ministry of Education, on the orders of Ayatollah Khamenei, enrolled all Afghan children in public schools. According to reports, in 2017, similar educational services for Iranian students in public schools were provided to more than half a million Afghan students at a cost of 150 million dollars.²⁵

Furthermore, the Ministry of Science annually offers 500 scholarships to eligible Afghan citizens. In addition to this effort, for the first time, Islamic Azad University and Payam - e - Noor University have established master's degree programs in several fields in Kabul and are known as the first universities to offer postgraduate studies. The Al-Mustafa International University also has a branch in Afghanistan and provides educational services.²⁶

Moreover, due to language similarity and affordable cost, Afghan students prefer to study at Iranian universities, and the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, need to work together to create a framework for further cooperation in scientific and educational exchanges .

In recent years, graduating from Iranian universities has become an academic advantage for employment in Afghan universities.

²⁴ Koohkan, Alireza, Mohammad Ali Rahiminejad and SaeedGholami, "Cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan," 2018, *Pazhuheshhaye Rahbord Eslami Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (2), 39-69.

²⁵ News Desk, "Afghanistan new transit route for Iranian goods to Central Asia," IRNA, May 2, 2020. <https://en.irna.ir/news/83773113/Afghanistan-new-transit-route-for-Iranian-goods-to-Central-Asia>.

²⁶ Davoodi, Ali Asghar, "The Iranian Science and Technology Diplomacy in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities," 2014. *Quarterly of Political Strategic Studies*, 3(11), 103-127.

Outlook

The US's irresponsible and hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan has confronted Afghanistan with a new round of insecurity and instability. The re-emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan through war, and making a monopolist state has created several challenges. At the same time the emergence of people's resistance as well as the development of terrorist activities such as Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) has blurred the prospective outlook to an unstable and worrying one.

During all crisis years in Afghanistan even before the Taliban came back to power, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always emphasized on political solutions such as intra- Afghan negotiations and all-inclusive government. It seems that this led to an intra-Afghan dialogue conference in Tehran before and after Taliban's return to power. Although this policy still has not reached a tangible result, it seems that there is not a more reliable idea in Tehran for stability provision in Afghanistan.

The longstanding crisis in Afghanistan is deeply rooted in internally cultural, economic, social and political disputes, as well as a lack of regional consensus and geostrategic and geopolitical considerations.

It can be claimed that in the current situation, no effective measure is taken to eliminate the fundamentals of the Afghan crisis. Tehran has always been the first victim of the Afghan crisis during the last four decades and obviously cannot optimistically look to the future. Therefore there is no chance of a substantial change in the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The worrying presence and activities of ISIS-K are a new matter of concern for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan's other neighbours. Regarding Iran's membership in SCO, it seems that this organization could be a good platform for regional security cooperation.

Afghanistan in Turkey's Foreign Policy

Murat Aslan*

Turkey views Afghanistan and Pakistan as friendly countries. Relations between these countries go back several centuries and they share cultural, religious and historic bonds. Turkey has had a presence in Afghanistan since the last century though, Turkish - Afghan relations go further back. Both communities share a common culture symbolised by, for instance, Mawlana Jalaluddin of Turkey who had immigrated to Anatolia from the Balkh city of Afghanistan in the 1200s due to Mongol oppression.¹ The support of Indian Muslims in the 1920s for the cause of the Turkish Independence War is still a fresh memory being circulated by Turkish intellectuals.² Hence, Turkey has always perceived South Asian Muslims, mainly Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, as distinct countries with unrequited commitments. Whenever a crisis occurs challenging these countries, Turkey pledges great support to them.

If Turkish - Pakistan relations are put aside, Turkish foreign policy is deeply involved in engaging Afghanistan. The Turkish Republic's early contact with Afghans in 1921 is a clear presentation of common concerns, shared values and commitments with no return.³ The recognition quest of the Afghan delegation in Moscow coincided with the Turkish goal in a phase to repel the colonial powers from the then Ottoman and new Turkey's sovereign land. The intense Turkish support to build a modern Afghanistan had

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¹ Konya Governorate, "Mevlâna Celeleddin-i Rumi", <http://www.konya.gov.tr/mevlina-celeleddin-i-rumi>, accessed on 5 May 2022.

² Ali Asghar Khan, "Hint Müslümanlarının Türk Kurtuluş Hareketine Mali Yardımı", (1993), *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1993, pp. 203 - 217.

³ Mehmet Köçer, *Emanullah Dönemi Afganistan (1919-1929)*, (Elazığ: Manas Yayıncılık, April 2009), pp. 183-188.

started while the Anatolian Government under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk was struggling in the battles against the occupying forces.⁴ In this sense, Turkey contributed to the development and modernisation of Afghanistan by building state institutions mainly defence and education ministries like Law Faculty, Medical Faculty etc.

On the other hand, Turkey's commitments were vulnerable in the sense that Turkey's capacity and Afghan internal political turmoil remained a hurdle. The political occurrences in Afghanistan complemented Turkey's attitude since the ideologically competing Afghan political factions and the Soviet invasion was not permissive to Turkish inclusion in the Afghan theatre for the purpose to assist the Afghan community.

9/11 and the subsequent US invasion did not change the general course of Turkish foreign policy, which was already aligned with the global structure. Turkey had provided support to the Mudjahiddin's struggle against the Soviets and impartially observed their internal conflict. On the other hand, Turkey did not become a direct combatant to the American-led intervention to counter the Taliban and al Qaeda.⁵ It was a carefully designed strategy that balanced the attitude of the global structure and Turkish perception toward Afghans. In this sense, Turkey pursued a well-designed policy on Afghanistan after NATO specifically formed the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to assume responsibility for providing security.

Given the long historical background of Turkish – Afghan relations which have had ambiguities and vulnerabilities due to a variety of factors, Turkey's role needs to be scrutinized in order to understand if Ankara can provide unrequited humanitarian, political and diplomatic assistance to the devastated country

ibid., pp. 149-175.

⁵ Merve Aydoğan, "Turkey's long involvement in NATO Mission in Afghanistan", 19 June 2021, Anatolia Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-s-long-involvement-in-nato-mission-in-afghanistan/2279062>, accessed on 5 May 2022.

although presently it is a regional power, irrelevant to the crisis-laden country, has no or limited gain from this. For this purpose, this research will investigate the developments after the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces, Turkish foreign policy in general and specifically towards Afghanistan, and finally the nature design of this engagement.

A Brief Overview of Incidents in Afghanistan

The foreign policy of any country is not only a variable of interests or emotional commitments but rather there might be historical process, discourses, internal and external actors and dynamics, or independent variables that influence foreign policy. Then, the question is how Turkish policymakers viewed the developments in Afghanistan. In this sense, a general assessment of the dynamics would clarify the preferred course.

One can understand what exactly has happened in Afghanistan and conclude an assessment through the lenses imposed by the historical process and the shift in power dynamics locally, regionally or globally. Another parameter to understand the change in Afghanistan is the societal structure other than their interactive dynamics and ideological tendencies, which can be correlated to the neighbouring states. Contrary to the generalised sentiments of most scholars, Afghanistan harboured varying brands of ideology, politics, or world views other than radical thoughts. Afghanistan is a place struggling against outsiders.

The Mujaheddin Wars and the first Taliban term, until the intervention of the American-led coalition, were clear examples of the Afghan inclination that reveals the identity proclamations of the local actors. All strata of Afghan armed groups collectively fought against the Soviets leaving aside their competition. But once the Soviets were defeated, the Mujaheddin War devastated the country in the form of a civil war that facilitated the social and political diffusion of the Taliban movement. The complicated social structure makes Afghanistan vulnerable to persistent and continuous struggle. In this sense, the Taliban were in strategic defence until 2005-2006 and balanced the

foreign forces and Afghan security forces until 2012. The US President Obama's famous speech in West Point encouraged the Taliban to commence strategic offence.

Focused on the latest two decades under American control, living conditions and public expectation is a point of interest for foreign policy discussion.⁶ Case in point; when American soldiers burnt the Quran in Bagram in 2012 and the resulting in public protests in the streets against US and NATO.⁷ These protests indicated that the Afghan people, who were already critical of the American presence due to night raids and mistreatment of the Afghans, were inclined toward the radical organisations. As the foreign forces were wrongly reading the Afghan theatre with irreversible faults, opposing forces accumulated strength. Meanwhile, the Afghan government could not hope for a prosperous future that the Afghan public was expecting. The struggles like corruption and ethnic nepotism, and highly escalated internal politics discredited the Afghan government in the eyes of the rural Afghan community.⁸ Poverty and lacking state services exhausted the Afghan public in parallel to the mismanagement of the state institutions. Meanwhile, poppy cultivation and drug trafficking was the essential mechanism running the state institutions, increasing inflation deprived the farmers of this sector of basic needs while drug processing trading made the landlords, organised criminal networks and corrupt people richer than ever.⁹ This overall

⁶ OCHA, "Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan", January 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022.pdf>, accessed on 5 May 2022.

⁷ Emma Graham-Harrison, "Qur'an burning protests: two US soldiers shot dead by Afghan colleague", *The Guardian*, 23 February 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/23/quran-burning-afghanistan-us-soldiers-dead>, accessed on 5 May 2022.

⁸ UNODC, "Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Patterns and Trends", December 2012, https://www.unodc.org/documents/lpo-brazil//Topics_corruption/Publicacoes/Corruption_in_Afghanistan_FINAL.pdf, accessed on 5 May 2022.

⁹ World Bank Group, "Afghanistan Development Update: Setting Course to Recovery", April 2021, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e406b6f24c2b7fdeb93b56c3116>

picture eased the Taliban's advance as the foreign forces withdrew.

As a result, unstable Afghanistan leans on four dynamics. The first one is the foreign military presence with its deficits in addressing the expectations of the Afghan public. The second dynamic is about the lacking capacity of the Afghan government and malfunctioning state structure. The poppy-based black market and inadequate distribution of wealth, as the third dynamic, deepened the negative effect of the first two deficits. Finally, the Taliban were skilful to exploit these shortcomings either to charm or compel the public. Furthermore, the early announcement of the American withdrawal in 2012 and the Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2014 was an outcome of decreasing interest in the Afghan cause in the minds of the western politicians. As a result, the Taliban felt stronger and were committed to challenging the foreign presence. This overall picture of Afghanistan, for sure, shaped the Turkish foreign policy on Afghanistan in ways so that it was impartial in balancing the actors while being very vigilant. In this sense, the post-invasion term, NATO missions and the second Taliban era may be referent time frames to understand the Turkish foreign policy.

Taliban 2.0

According to the memorandum signed between the US and Taliban, dated 29 February 2020, the US Army and NATO troops started the withdrawal process from Afghanistan with a delay due to the Presidential Elections in the US.¹⁰ The signed memorandum required a withdrawal of the foreign troops, which was the essential demand of Taliban.¹¹ The Biden

ed8f1-0310012021/original/Afghanistan-Development-Update-FINAL.pdf, accessed on 5 May 2022.

¹⁰ BBC, "US and NATO start to formally withdraw troops from Afghanistan", 1 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56955702>, accessed on 13 November 2021.

¹¹ BBC, "Afghanistan: US-Taliban deal hastened Afghan collapse, defence officials say", 29 September 2021,

administration had pointed out the end of August for the complete withdrawal as far as the process was initiated. However, quick planning and fast implementation generated frustration and devastated the Afghan public. Not-well informed GIRoA¹² and Afghan security forces were being circulated by the USA as the capable Afghan state that could balance Taliban and, to the least extent, could resist their rapid expansion to the urban areas but it did not happen as expected.

Afghan security forces – composed of the Afghan National Army (ANA), varying sorts of Police (ANP) and the National Directorate of Security (responsible for intelligence – NDS) initially collapsed in rural Afghanistan.¹³ The basic reasons and factors behind the quick debacle were two-fold. The first one was the positioning of the security forces. The three brands of Afghan security forces were deployed to a single fortified base across the districts that were as if imprisoned in their bases. Hence, Taliban were free to move and show the flag with no or limited resistance from the security forces. The second factor was the strategy of the Taliban that security forces were forced to leave their weapons at the expense of their free travel to their hometown with a small amount of payment.¹⁴ The inadequate ‘order of battle’ posture and ‘smart’ strategy of the Taliban opened the route towards the border passes with the neighbouring countries and the populated urban areas, mainly Kabul.

The Taliban leadership was attentive to the signed memorandum with the US since the already implemented

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58738953>, accessed on 13 November 2021.

¹² Rant Farr, “The Afghan Peace Agreement and Its Problems”, 6 April 2020, E-International Relations, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/04/06/the-afghan-peace-agreement-and-its-problems/>, accessed on 13 November 2021.

¹³ Jonathan Schrodin, “Lessons from the Collapse of Afghanistan’s Security Forces”, *Combating Terrorism Center*, October 2021, Volume 14, Issue 8, <https://ctc.usma.edu/lessons-from-the-collapse-of-afghanistans-security-forces/>, accessed on 14 November 2021.

¹⁴ Interview with a former Afghan officer, 12 September 2021.

withdrawal plan was promising victory after 20 years of continuous escalation. In this sense, the Taliban mobilised its units away from the potential conflicts and mission creeks that could provoke the US forces; since the smooth practice of the agreement was a pledge to the overall Taliban cause to assume the authority. Taliban took its armed units away from the foreign military presence with a sharp demand on the deadline of the withdrawal on 31 August 2021. But the American withdrawal plan was designed to manage the communal reaction of Afghans and the mass movement to leave the country. Hence the withdrawal of the foreign forces, except Turkey, was directed to a safe exit for their military forces rather than an integrated approach to managing the civilian demands due to the unexpected collapse of the Afghan government.

Taliban, which is a generalised term since it equates different sorts of opposing factions under one umbrella, quickly transformed itself into a regular force with uniformed soldiers marching before the public. Besides the US Army had destroyed most weapons, equipment, and ammunition, though the Taliban inherited billions of US dollars-worth equipment including aerial assets that they could even manage to fly a UH-60 in Kandahar.¹⁵ The armoured personnel carriers and weapons of all sorts were displayed by the Taliban along the streets and they were being operated by Taliban members. The question, after all, has been if the Taliban would repair the damage and build up human capital to achieve a strong army at least capable of challenging the regional dynamics. In this context, the Taliban's call to the pilots of the Afghan National Army (ANA) indicate its will to activate the remaining weapons, equipment, and vehicles of the US forces.¹⁶

¹⁵ Independent, "Taliban has access to \$85 billion US weapons, Republican congressman warns", <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/news/taliban-has-access-to-85-billion-us-weapons-v93e11819>, accessed on 14 November 2021.

¹⁶ Rahim Faiez, "Taliban urge ex-Afghan military pilots to stay, serve nation", 10 November 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-islamic-state-group-zabihullah-mujahid-tajikistan-7706909db19c59f15a845a8282ff2a4c>, accessed on 14 November 2021.

Despite the strengthening of the Taliban, in terms of capacity, the group has faced challenges inside Afghanistan as far as it assumes the responsibility of security. The initial threat was the suicide attack at the gate of the Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport by DAESH, which had become an imminent threat to the Taliban.¹⁷ Once an insurgent Taliban became a target for the opposing organisations, the bulk of the attacks, afterwards, were mostly taking the Shia Hazaras and their shrines for the radical organizations while the Taliban kept claiming responsibility to protect them despite having implemented harsh policies against the Shia community during their reign before Operation Enduring Freedom.

The second threat for the Taliban has been the National Resistance Front, organised by the son of Ahmad Masood in Panjshir Valley where Tajiks are heavily populated.¹⁸ Taliban claimed victory in this area though, the potential reminds a probable resistance in this neighbourhood. On the other hand, the other Mujaheddins were not well-organised thanks to the policies of Hamid Karzai and who mostly had to leave the country.

The final threat to the Taliban is the civil turbulence, mainly among women.¹⁹ Afghans can traditionally easily come together and protest the governments across the streets. Taliban's transition process and actual practices may ignite the Afghan public to protest the worsening living conditions and downgrading security. Taliban

¹⁷ Sayed Ziarmal Hashemi, Rahim Faiez, Lolita C. Baldor, Joseph Krauss, "Kabul airport attack kills 60 Afghans, 13 US troops", 27 August 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-france-evacuations-kabul-9e457201e5bbe75a4eb1901fedeee7a1>, accessed on 15 November 2021.

¹⁸ Ali Latifi, "Growing concerns for Panjshir residents as Taliban claims victory", 6 September 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/6/dire-situation-for-130000-residents-trapped-in-panjshir>, accessed on 15 November 2021.

¹⁹ Zeba Siddiqui and Parniyan Zemaryalai, "Protests get harder for Afghan women amid risks and red tape", *Reuters*, 4 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/protests-get-harder-afghan-women-amid-risks-red-tape-2021-10-04/>, accessed on 15 November 2021.

are not used to counter such protests and basic street protests may transform into wide scale social unrest. On the other hand, social cohesion in Afghanistan is usually a questioned phenomenon due to multi-ethnic and multi sectarian social structure. Taliban has been labelled as a Pashtun dominated movement though, this argument does not reflect the facts because Taliban include different ethnicities in its cadre and the continuity of this pattern should be expected.

Internal politics, as the first segment of the politics, was based on the good words of the Taliban to build a positive atmosphere inside the country. In this sense the Taliban delineated the 'change' in their thinking. Smart 'propaganda-words' during the press conferences and social media coverage of the Taliban leadership promised an inclusive administration based on Sharia Law, rather than the 'human-made' Constitution of 2004.²⁰ But the consultations were not more than pictures for positive messaging since the new interim government reflected internal power dynamics of the Taliban.

Taliban's main effort during September and October of 2021 was to prove its eligibility in leading the state and recognition of the new regime both in the eyes of the Afghan public and the international community.²¹ In this sense, the devastated Afghan economy has been the priority for the Taliban interim government with quick regulations to organise markets. The ruined banking system due to high-level cash demand was difficult to manage though, the main theme was to circulate the word 'trust'. The health sector, which was dependent on foreign support, has become dysfunctional. More important than all the

²⁰ Emerson T. Brooking, "Before the Taliban took Afghanistan, it took the internet", *Atlantic Council*, 26 August 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/before-the-taliban-took-afghanistan-it-took-the-internet/>, accessed on 15 November 2021.

²¹ Hasib Danisk Kozai, "Exclusive Interview: Karzai Says Taliban's International Recognition Requires Internal Legitimacy", 17 October 2021, *VOA*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-interview-karzai-says-taliban-s-international-recognition-requires-internal-legitimacy/6274709.html>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

other issue fields in question was the lack of human capital since once GIRoA technical experts in all sectors were either hiding themselves to ensure their lives or attempting to leave the country. As a result, the Taliban called clerks to return their duties promising continuity as if they work for the GIRoA.

The other concern for the Taliban has been its eligibility in the eyes of the international community, which has been put forward by legitimacy and recognition. The memorandum with the USA frequented the phrase in its task that the US Government does not recognize the Taliban as a government while pledging promises indicated an indirect recognition. On the other hand, China invited a Taliban delegation to Beijing and a photo of acceptance had circulated in the media as hope for the Taliban.²² In parallel to the Chinese efforts, Pakistan has become a mediating actor augmenting the recognition quest of the Taliban. On the other hand, the rest of the international community, except for Russia, conditioned their support to the Taliban by respect to human – mainly women’s rights, and the practice of the Taliban rather than promises. The Taliban’s other option to build a bridge with the international community was to approach Turkey as a catalyst for its internal and external recognition. However, the attitude of Turkey was somewhat reluctant and inspired by the general Turkish foreign policy principles, global patterns toward the Taliban and the ambiguity in the Taliban’s preferences.

Taliban takeover of the government and policy options for the international community has resonated pending the ambiguity of if the Taliban would act accordingly to the international norms. In this sense, the Taliban’s reading of universal norms and practices in Afghanistan, mainly to the marginal segments of the society, were the parameters to assess how it could be treated. Per the general perception of the international community, Turkish foreign policy had exceptional features.

²² John Calabrese, “China’s Taliban Conundrum”, East Institute, 21 September 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/chinas-taliban-conundrum>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

Turkey could be the engaging actor to the Taliban-led Afghanistan to sustain the diplomatic representation, humanitarian assistance and the linkage of the Afghan community to the globe. For this reason, the management of Hamid Karzai Airport had become the essential issue in question that Turkey could have been involved. Nevertheless, Turkey's foreign policy principles and conditions to engage Taliban-led Afghanistan ran a bargaining and investigation process.

Afghanistan and Afghans, after all these conceptual discussions, are not exceptional for Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey is devoted to engaging with Afghan actors in accordance with the global patterns. In this sense, Turkey has preferred to align its strategy with the UN and NATO, as an influential member of these organisations. Hence Turkey was (and is) well aware of the constraints that it cannot shape the Afghan conflict by its assets or undertakings. In this context, the country cooperated with the allied countries to observe and shape the overall undertaking at the political level but pursued the least available and capable options to directly reach the Afghan public in the area of operations.

Turkish main motivation in the Afghanistan commitment was not to realise any national interest but responsibility for a relative nation. In this sense, Turkey did not hesitate to contribute to NATO in Afghanistan while directly providing support to Afghan institutions. On the other hand, Turkey was very careful not to offend the Taliban or other opposing forces since they were also perceived as Afghans, and not as an enemy.²³ Turkey preferred to play a balancing role during NATO missions, taking the Afghan public to the epicentre of the activities. Turkish priority was the responsible military tasks to support civilian Afghan institutions and assume the complementary roles in military tasks such as training,

²³ I personally did not hear any word like 'enemy', adversary or threat used by Turkish forces during my two different tours in Afghanistan. The common depiction was the 'opposing military forces' for them, abbreviated as OMF.

education or improving technical skills. However, the main effort remained the civil-military cooperation that provided service to Afghan civilians through health institutions, the Provincial Reconstruction Team under the direct control of the Turkish Embassy or the Turkish Development Agency under the authority of the Turkish Presidential Office.²⁴ A very significant example of this strategy was the Turkish hospital dedicated to the Afghan civilians in Camp Dogan of Kabul that civilians could freely have access to in comparison to the other nation's compound due to high-security alerts. Meanwhile, Turkey commanded the ISAF in 2002 and 2005 with equal weight to the development and restructuring projects, with over 1,000 commitments.²⁵ As a result, Turkey was prone to civil-military affairs that can be framed by health, agricultural, educational, and support-to-security missions.

The withdrawal decision of the US troops and NATO's 'Resolute Support Mission' in 2021 increased the expectation of both the US and NATO on Turkish presence in Afghanistan.²⁶ In this frame, Kabul International Airport has become an essential concern since it is the only gate of Afghanistan's capital to the globe that embassies, international organisations, civil society organisations, foreign companies and nationals would have been connected in continuing their activities. After a long process of coordination, Turkey was ready to continue operating the

²⁴ Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "No: 85, 19 April 2010, Press Release Regarding the Efforts to establish a Civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Shibirgan in North Afghanistan", 19 April 2010, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-85_-19-april-2010_-no_-76_-6-april-2010_-press-release-regarding-the-efforts-to-establish-a-civilian-led-provincial-reconstruction-team-_prt_-in-shibirgan-in-north-afghanistan-in-north-afghanistan.en.mfa, accessed on 6 May 2022.

²⁵ Merve Aydoğan, "Turkey's long involvement in NATO mission in Afghanistan", *AA*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-s-long-involvement-in-nato-mission-in-afghanistan/2279062#>, accessed on 15 November 2021.

²⁶ Ragıp Soylu, Levent Kemal, "EXCLUSIVE: Turkey and Taliban close to deal on Kabul airport", *Middle East Eye*, 28 August 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/afghanistan-turkey-taliban-close-deal-kabul-airport>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

airport though the collapse of the GIRoA challenged the overall commitments. Taliban was insistent on the withdrawal of foreign forces including the Turkish military despite its flexibility for the civilian experts. Nevertheless, Turkey Turkey was not interested in keeping a civilian body of experts due to security concerns because there was an ambiguity of what type of (de)securitization would have been observed. Then, it was an indicator for the Turkish foreign policy that there could be no tolerance for security risks.

Turkish foreign policy perceived the Afghan folder as the priority in 2021 through a gradual and calculated engagement. In this context, it hosted a Taliban delegation in Ankara headed by the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaki.²⁷ Muttaki's statement was oriented toward the technical support of Turkey to the development of Afghanistan and humanitarian assistance before the winter season. Turkey, on the other hand, was positive in providing humanitarian help that managed to inaugurate schools for Afghan girls.²⁸ Consequently, Turkey pursued a balanced policy on Afghanistan in accordance with the ambiguity, while encouraging the Taliban to comply with the demands of Afghans and the international community. Turkey preferred to include the Qatari Government to bargain with the Taliban, mainly to operate the Kabul Airport. This option was to have the Taliban accept the goodwill and pledge of multiple actors not to annoy the Taliban. By that approach, Turkey would share the burden of the engagement and prove that Turkey does not have the intention to exploit the vulnerability of Afghanistan. On the other hand, Turkey has been more prone to an agreed and compromised course for assisting the Afghans, while taking the adequate level of security measures for the

²⁷ NTV, "Ankara ziyareti sonrası Taliban'dan açıklama", 16 October 2021, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/Turkey/ankara-ziyareti-sonrasi-talibandan-aciklama,fv4hbCHY40WstfJISbx9Dw>, accessed on 15 August 2021.

²⁸ Selma Kasap, "Turkey Maarif Vakfının Afganistan'daki okullarında kız öğrenciler eğitime başladı", 9 November 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/egitim/Turkey-maarif-vakfinin-afganistandaki-okullarinda-kiz-ogrenciler-kabil-ve-kandahar-disinda-egitime-devam-ediyor/2416012>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

sustainable and enduring pledges. The essential policy was to implement a gradual engagement approach in correlation with the practice of the Taliban and developments in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Given the developments of 2021, Afghanistan was a point of concern for Turkey, not in the realm of realising a national interest but assuming a responsibility due to historical and cultural reasons. The dynamics that shape the Turkish foreign policy to realise the prerequisites of being a 'responsible state' are the security situation in Afghanistan, the economy of Turkey, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in the frame of needed services and hope for the rights of the citizens. The security situation is fragile and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. The ISIS threat and once reigning and currently opposing factions may display a low-profile risk though, the passive defence will be the main effort until power accumulation is strong enough to challenge the Taliban. Turkey can play a mediating role between the opposing factions and the Taliban while providing support to the administration, which could be an agreed one by all Afghans. Otherwise, the country will not assume a risk by its presence in Afghanistan.

It is a clear fact that Afghanistan needs foreign economic and humanitarian support and the international community is hesitant due to the Taliban's practices. Hence Turkey can build a mechanism to coordinate the humanitarian aid of the international society and distribute it in Afghanistan. But a comprehensive economic restructuring is a politically conditioned effort that Turkey cannot sustain unless the Taliban complies with the demands of the international community. Meanwhile, the Taliban's decision to ban poppy cultivation and drug trafficking is a challenge to the internal stability and local economy that there prevails paradox between economic recovery and promoting a clean economy.

Linked to the security and economic situation, Taliban is short of providing services to the Afghan public due to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of human capital and financial resources. Hence state-led services will be very limited

and the Afghan public would be mobilised for the inadequacy of the Taliban. Turkey, together with the other contributing states, may start a state-support program to institutionalise the services and assist Afghans not depriving them of basic services. On the other hand, the Taliban will accumulate legitimacy as it improves the state services. But complementary problems, like political representation, will endanger the validity of the Taliban-led system. Political factors can be assessed by the two-fold approach which is internal and external politics. Internal politics may be tied to the Shura system of the Taliban while the public will not be reflected in the preferences of Taliban leadership. External politics may be in the form of regional competition, the Afghan public will not be the priority but the interests of the external actors.

The rights of citizens will be vulnerable to the interpretations of differing Taliban groups since it is not a solid body but composed of moderate and radical groups. Such a fact will push inconsistent practices across the country in terms of respect or violation of the rights of citizens. In this sense, the basic rights of citizens will be a point of concern in the frame of insurance of life, equal and just treatment before the judicial institutions, economic opportunities, or reaching the required services. Turkey's foreign policy may push the Taliban comply with human rights which is already consistent with Islam.

The coming term will be a correction period in correlation with the consistency of the Taliban Administration. In this sense, the words and deeds of the Taliban are parameters for more courageous steps. On the other hand, Turkey will be committed to the humanitarian prerequisites of the country that humanitarian and technical assistance will be on the agenda of the Turkish Government in coordination with the international community and at the request of the Taliban Administration. Turkey should be expected to engage Afghanistan with cautiousness.