

Afghanistan Stability: Taliban's Governance, Humanitarian Crisis, and Terrorism Concerns with Threats to Pakistan

Afghanistan's stability remains a critical issue in South Asia, especially after the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. The situation directly impacts regional security, humanitarian conditions, and Pakistan's national interests.

1. Taliban's Governance

a) Governance Challenges

- The Taliban faces significant difficulties in transitioning from an insurgency group to a governing body. Their governance model lacks inclusivity, with no representation for women or ethnic minorities like Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks.
- Administrative inefficiency persists due to a lack of qualified professionals and international recognition, leading to weakened state institutions.

b) Struggles for International Legitimacy

- The Taliban seeks global recognition and aid, but most countries have withheld recognition due to their regressive policies on human rights, particularly women's rights (e.g., bans on female education and employment).
- Their failure to meet international norms has resulted in diplomatic isolation, affecting economic and developmental prospects.

c) Economic Collapse

- Afghanistan's economy has drastically declined. International sanctions and the freezing of \$9 billion in Afghan central bank assets have exacerbated the crisis, with the GDP shrinking by over 20% since 2021.
- This economic breakdown fuels unemployment, poverty, and reliance on narcotics trade, further destabilizing the region.

2. Humanitarian Crisis

a) Widespread Poverty and Food Insecurity

- Over 28 million people, more than two-thirds of Afghanistan's population, require humanitarian assistance (2024 estimates). Acute malnutrition and hunger remain widespread.
- UNICEF reports that 3 million children are at risk of starvation, with minimal healthcare infrastructure to address emergencies.

b) Refugee Crisis

- Afghanistan has the second-largest refugee population in the world. More than 1.5 million Afghans reside in Pakistan, straining its resources. The recent wave of Taliban policies has driven new migrations.
- Unregistered refugees often live in dire conditions, further complicating Pakistan's socioeconomic challenges.

3. Terrorism Concerns

a) Resurgence of Terror Groups

- Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP): Operating with impunity from Afghan soil, the TTP has escalated attacks in Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas. They leverage Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a safe haven.
- Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP): ISKP continues to launch high-profile attacks in Afghanistan, targeting minorities, foreign missions, and the Taliban itself. Their activity threatens regional stability and risks spillover into Pakistan.

b) Cross-Border Threats to Pakistan

- Pakistan has experienced an alarming increase in militant attacks in 2023–2024, attributed to the Taliban’s inability or unwillingness to control terror networks like the TTP.
- Afghan border security remains weak, allowing for illicit trade, arms smuggling, and the movement of militants, directly threatening Pakistan’s internal security.

c) Taliban’s Limited Counterterrorism Cooperation

- The Taliban has made promises to prevent Afghan soil from being used against other countries. However, their actions indicate limited efforts, creating mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

4. Threats to Pakistan

a) Security Implications

- The rise in cross-border terrorism has led to significant casualties in Pakistan. The tribal areas and Baluchistan face frequent militant incursions.
- Pakistan’s military has had to increase its operational activities in these regions, diverting resources from development to security.

b) Refugee and Border Management

- The influx of Afghan refugees intensifies Pakistan’s socioeconomic burden, with limited international support for their integration or repatriation.
- The lack of a coordinated border management system results in illegal crossings, fostering smuggling and criminal activities.

c) Diplomatic Strains

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- Pakistan's relations with the Taliban regime remain complex. While Pakistan initially supported the Taliban's return to power, their lack of cooperation on counterterrorism and border issues has strained ties.
- Anti-Pakistan rhetoric from certain Afghan factions exacerbates tensions, undermining trust.

Conclusion:

Afghanistan's instability, underpinned by the Taliban's governance challenges, humanitarian crises, and growing terrorism, presents grave concerns for Pakistan. Cross-border militancy, economic burdens from the refugee crisis, and strained diplomatic relations further complicate the situation. To address these challenges, Pakistan must adopt a multi-pronged strategy involving enhanced border security, regional counterterrorism collaboration, and active engagement with global powers to address humanitarian and governance issues in Afghanistan. Without concerted efforts, the instability in Afghanistan will continue to pose a significant threat to Pakistan's security and development.

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