

AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER: THE ROLE OF PAKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN COOPERATION¹

Dr. Guli Yuldasheva,

Associate Professor, Senior Scientific Fellow,
Coordination- Methodological Center on Contemporary History of Uzbekistan,
Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan,

Dr. Asifa Jahangir,

Assistant Professor, Dept of Political Science,
Govt. graduate College for Women, Cooper Road Lahore

Abstract: *The goal of the paper is to describe the Pakistani-Uzbek cooperation within the changing context of Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover in 2021. The idea is forwarded that in the context of the prolonged clash of interests and growth of various threats, national interests of developing countries push them towards more regional integration and combining their efforts and resources vis a vis unpredictable outcomes of the regional geopolitical competition. This proves not only relevance and interaction of the realistic and liberal provisions in the current political processes, but shows visible growth of some neoliberal tendencies (collective security, trade, etc). The problem of Afghanistan is for the first time investigated through the prism of Pakistani-Uzbek cooperation. To describe this strategic and system analysis have been used as the main one.*

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Taliban Takeover, stability, cooperation*

Introduction

Historically, the strategically important area of Afghanistan remained a battlefield and “zone of conflict” due to geopolitical rivalry between great powers that created instability inside the country and throughout the South Asian region (Saikal 2014, 2-3). The consequences of the old 19th and ongoing New Great Game² around Afghanistan have still their negative repercussions for the country and its regional neighborhood (Jahangir & Javaid 2018, 420). The long-awaited withdrawal of the US-led NATO forces from Afghanistan following the rapid takeover of the Taliban in 2021 formed the complex situation favoring rise of new

¹ This article is published by permission of the Authors

² Which is far more extended today, includes many regional and global powers due to multifaceted concept of security and thus has been called as Grand Great Game in a doctorate dissertation of Dr. Asifa Jahangir. She has reconceptualized the concept of Great Game. Afghanistan-India Geopolitical Interests: Implications for Pakistan (2018).

http://pr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/12120/1/Asifa%20Jahangir_South%20Asian%20Studies_2019_UoPunjab_PRR.pdf

security challenges and threats influencing the vast area of the South and Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Despite official rhetoric on the necessity of the collective security actions, Afghanistan remains to be the sphere of open or clandestine activity for various competing powers that is aggravated by non-recognition of the new regime and the reciprocal Taliban's rapprochement with some radical movements inside Afghanistan. This is complicated also by the diversion of the world community's attention to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

It is known that the relations between the Pakistani government and Taliban are at the critical point now with uncertain perspectives. This arises many questions concerning the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan, influence of the current Afghan-Pak crisis on regional security and economic development of the neighboring countries, first of all, on such a strategically located Central Asian country as Uzbekistan. Pakistani-Uzbek partnership will logically affect the level of political and economic security in the Central and South Asian region.

Altogether this demand thorough investigation of the new trends developing in relationships between the new Taliban rulers in Afghanistan and Pakistan as the key regional actors, connected by proximity of territorial, historical-cultural, religious and ideological ties, and the impact of these relations on the Pakistani cooperation with Uzbekistan. This predetermines main goal of this paper aimed at revealing specifics of the Pakistani relations with the present Afghan Taliban government and its influence on the Pakistani-Uzbek cooperation in the new environment. These issues have not been investigated before in the context after the Taliban takeover, moreover based on the joint Pakistani and Uzbek approach to the regional process that determines topicality and importance of the research.

To efficiently oppose the above-mentioned situation, the authors forward the idea that in the context of the prolonged clash of interests and growth of various threats, national interests of developing countries push them towards more regional integration and combining their efforts and resources vis a vis unpredictable outcomes of the regional geopolitical competition. This proves not only relevance and interaction of the realistic and liberal provisions in the current political processes, but shows visible growth of some neoliberal tendencies, reflected, for instance, in activation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the role of the UN institutions, trade, etc. This is all the more important

because all regional countries are geographically connected nations with common history, close economic and security problems that excludes any possibility of isolating this or that country for “bad” behavior. Besides, the past decades have enough demonstrated that the use of military force only exacerbates explosiveness of any situation. And here complex set of coordinated efforts are more justifiable. This can include the instruments of “soft” diplomacy with regionally and globally coordinated strong pressure on the Taliban government to observe the international laws and demands, and accompanied, when necessary, by the use of limited military counterterrorism measures.

Interests of Pakistan and Uzbekistan in Afghanistan

Pakistan's Interests

Pakistan is a geographically, historically and culturally close kindred neighbor to both Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. These facts preconditioned Islamabad's interest in revival of the ancient ties with Central Asia and in strengthening Pakistani stand in Kabul. Moreover, Afghanistan has always been regarded as the best geo-economic point of access to Central Asia (Yuldasheva 2017 119-120). Consolidation of ties in these directions would help Islamabad to regulate its domestic social-economic crisis, and strengthen regional political status.

Considering this, Pakistan was working hard to regain its lost position in Afghanistan by becoming actively involved in its economic and political rehabilitation; it also worked on possible inclusion of the pro-Pakistani forces into the Afghan government. This predetermined Islamabad's support for Taliban brought up in the Pakistani *madrassahs*. Pakistan believes that the interests of the Taliban should be taken into account, and has been striving to create a balance between pro-Taliban and anti-Taliban forces. A secure environment in Afghanistan would allow to build trans-Afghan transportation links connecting Pakistan with Central Asian and the world markets. It was expected that the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) gas pipeline and the related transportation projects, designed to give the land-locked partners access to the Pakistani ports of Karachi and Gwadar, would play a great role in the process. This would contribute to achieving Pakistani long-term goals of turning the country into a regional transportation hub and a “gate” to the Indian Ocean and the world markets for Central Asian countries.

Toward these ends, since 2018 there has been a major shift in terms of changing perspectives of Pakistan's foreign policy from geopolitics to geoeconomics, from war and bloc politics to peace and peaceful coexistence, from security towards socio-economic and environmental issues. Within this trend, the former Prime-Minister Imran Khan clarified Pakistan's role as a facilitator/mediator in his address to the state-of-heads meeting of 20th SCO summit held on 17 September 2021 (Siddiqui, 2021).

The events of almost year-and-a-half negotiation process from 2018 to mid-2021 - which period, clearly demonstrate the role of Pakistan in the region. In particular, the peace process restarted following a visit by Ambassador Khalilzad and the Afghan Taliban to Pakistan after President Trump had broken off talks in September 2019. Pakistan invited an Afghan Taliban delegation to Islamabad to try to advance the peace process in 2020 (Afghan Taliban visit Pakistan 2020).

Uzbekistan's Interests

For neighboring Uzbekistan, isolated from the water transportation routes to the world markets Afghanistan presents a brilliant opportunity both with its inner immense market and as a transit route to the Southern seas and oceans. However, instability of the country and the international anti-terrorist campaign hampered realization of any economic projects. Yet, since the last years of I.Karimov's rule, Uzbekistan has been looking at Afghanistan as not only a source of regional threats and challenges but as a unique strategic opportunity to develop new economic ties in the region with the far-reaching positive outcomes for Central and South Asia.

President Sh. Mirziyoyev developed this stand further, his policy in this direction has given a new impetus to developing wider trans-regional links overall Eurasian space. As a whole, this means developing mutually advantageous trade with Afghanistan, trans-Afghan corridors with their stabilization potential and future benefits to the regional economies and construction of the regional economic network that altogether gradually pacify the vast region of South and Central Asia, as well as the Middle East. At the same time, Uzbekistan recognizes preservation of threats and potentials for the spillover of radical ideas and terrorism, illegal migration and drug trafficking from the territory of Afghanistan. Within this context, on May 2018, Tashkent hosted an international conference on the issues of regulating situation in Afghanistan, strengthening connectivity between the regions of Central and South Asia. Uzbek side declared about its

readiness to provide all conditions for the Afghan authorities and Taliban to conduct direct negotiations.

Thus, despite the political situation in and around Afghanistan there are long-term objective interests for cooperation between Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Realization of these interests depend on many internal and external factors, which we'll try to examine below.

Ashraf Ghani's policy in Afghanistan

Both Uzbekistan and Pakistan cooperated with the former Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani's government in Afghanistan, although at times their views diverged on the issues of terrorism. Tashkent was inclined to support more the Ghani's efforts of pacifying the country, and organized several meetings with Ashraf Ghani in Uzbekistan. This temporarily reduced Pakistan's involvement in the main Central Asian initiatives on Afghanistan, although Islamabad was also a part of the peacebuilding process participating in the SCO activities and in discussions at various regional conferences held in Tashkent. However, Islamabad had tense relations with A.Ghani's cabinet due to the Taliban issue.

The Afghan government under Ashraf Ghani did not want to see the Taliban or any other extremist group in the governing institutions of the country; it was seeking closer relations with the Central Asian countries within the Heart of Asia project, which would trim the role Pakistan was playing in the region. Kabul has always been interested in constructing transportation and transit routes through its territory since that would accelerate resolution of the socioeconomic problems and stabilize the country. Besides, economic cooperation with the nearest Central Asian neighbors, especially with Uzbekistan, can provide Afghanistan with so needed energy, technique and goods of primary importance for its suffering population.

Not surprisingly, President Ghani's government adopted a robust roadmap for Afghanistan's future and sought economic integration of Afghanistan by offering to use the country as land corridor connecting South, Central, and West Asia (Botezai 2015). Moreover, despite some tension over some pro-Pakistani radical groups, Kabul has long been developing an economic relationship with neighboring Pakistan. The Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA), signed in 2010, allowed Afghanistan to import goods duty free through the Pakistani port of Karachi on the Arabian Sea. Pakistan is the largest exporter to Afghanistan, with around US\$ 1.7 billion in exports annually, which accounts for 36.8 percent

of Afghan imports. It also represents a major export market for Afghan products, with roughly about US\$ 71 million exported to Pakistan every year – equal to 21.8 percent of all Afghan exports (Pakistan and Afghanistan 2022).

At the same time, shoving away unnecessary irritants from a peaceful settlement with the Afghan Taliban remained a priority over which, most of the Ghani's foreign policy capital was invested. President Ghani's tried to engage key regional countries including China and Saudi Arabia to pressurize Islamabad to use its influence over the Taliban and bring them to the table for a meaningful dialogue. Overall, he tried to engage regional countries including Pakistan, China, Turkey, Russia, and the United States to end the regional conflict and to ensure stability in Kabul.

Realizing the fact that road to peace in Afghanistan passes through Islamabad, President Ghani visited Pakistan in June 2019 and tried to ensure Pakistan's support in bringing the Taliban to the table (Hashim 2019). Ghani even distanced himself from an ally and the largest donor India to appease Pakistan. While Ghani visited China and Pakistan immediately after assuming office, it took him seven months to pay a single visit to India. It was clear that President Ghani did not want Indian role in the security sector but remained open to welcoming investments and training the Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF).

However, Taliban's onslaught against the Afghan security forces continued and Ghani's government became frustrated with the peace talks. All these efforts though enabled Pakistan to accelerate its pursuance of the Taliban for peace talks but failed to make any difference because of which, President Ghani went more critical towards Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's repeated assurances, especially under the Prime Minister Khan's government, President Ghani and his officials continued blaming Pakistan for encouraging and supporting Taliban against the Afghan government. This jointly with obvious links of the Taliban and other radical forces with Islamabad could not but stimulate cautious and restrained policy of Uzbekistan with regard to Pakistan.

On the other hand, Ghani's approach was confusing even to the political actors within the country. He rarely consulted the political leadership including Abdullah Abdullah on foreign policy matters, which gave an impression of a 'Solo Fly' in Kabul's foreign policy (Ebrahimi 2014). Most important, while looking for stability through peace talks, in fact President Ghani opposed inclusion of Taliban into the government that caused Taliban's discontent and, eventually,

their military attacks. In response, Ghani intensified military operations against the Taliban, he encouraged the unrestrained use of force by the US and allied forces including drone strikes and targeted missions (Faizi 2016).

A.Ghani's subsequent joining the Doha Peace talks with the Taliban, initiated by the US President Trump to clear the way out for an intra-Afghan peace dialogue for a prospect inclusive Afghan government, did not bring any positive result in this sense. The violations of the Doha Accord by the newly elected Joe Biden administration allowed the Taliban to adopt a more militaristic approach. The later withdrawal of the US forces created a political vacuum and left Ghani's ANDSF to collapse with no funds and close-air-support. Thus, Ghani's foreign policy approach failed to reach a lasting solution with the Taliban.

By early August, the Taliban's rapid seizure of various areas of Afghanistan took place without opposition from Afghan forces, indicating two things: (1) Afghan forces had mentally accepted defeat. (2) Finally, on August 15, 2021, Kabul fell to the Taliban and Ghani escaped to Dubai. Former Afghan President Security Advisor Khamdulla Mokhib considers Pakistan as the main culprit of the Taliban's advent to power on August 2021 (Former Adviser 2022).

Role of regional players in the afghan peace process

Besides, the above-said, Uzbek-Pakistani relations evolve in the context of some regional and global powers strategies in Afghanistan. All involved states have their own stakes in the region; still they are all interested in its peace and stability that in some sense unite them.

The United States of America

Having been actively involved in the Afghan conflict for the last two decades, the US remained the principal party and negotiator to secure a peaceful exit from Afghanistan. After lengthy negotiations with the Taliban in Qatar's capital Doha, the U.S. reached an agreement with the Taliban to end the conflict in February 2020. To ensure a peaceful transition of power to an inclusive government and avoid instability, the US also signed an agreement with the then Afghan government to push for the intra-Afghan peace dialogue. However, the road to these successful negotiations was full of crests and rouges given the changing political and security dynamics in the region as well as the change of command in the US from Donald Trump to the incumbent President Joe Biden. What remained consistent was the American efforts to influence regional countries principal Pakistan to bring the Taliban to the table.

The US, under President Donald Trump, blamed Islamabad for supporting the Afghan Taliban and punished in terms of stopping the arms sales, withholding International Monetary Fund loans, as well as threatened to blacklist the country in the Financial Action Task Force. Yet, the US State and Defense Departments understand that without Islamabad's support, any negotiated settlement with the Taliban is practically inconceivable. This resulted in multiple visits of the US special representative Zalmay Khalilzad to Pakistan. Pakistan yielded and not only hosted its own rounds of talks but also facilitated other regional countries like China and Russia to bring the warring parties together and seek a negotiated settlement. After an on-and-off negotiations process spanning some nine rounds of discussions, the two parties signed a final agreement in February 2020. The agreement allowed the U.S. to withdraw all its forces from Afghanistan over a period of fourteen months while sanctions the Taliban not to allow the Afghan to be used by any actor for terrorism. Yet, the ill-managed withdrawal and disastrous defeat of a U.S. backed government in August 2021 left Washington with no strings to influence the conditions in a Taliban-controlled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

At present, the Afghan Taliban's backing of the Pakistani offshoot of the Taliban-Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and close cooperation with S.Haqqani in Afghanistan have caused doubts in the United States regarding the counterterrorism commitments of the Afghan Taliban (Mir 2022). In this connection, American experts point at the non-fulfillment of the Taliban obligations, provided at the talks with the Afghan government in March 2020: reducing violence, withdrawing foreign troops, starting intra-Afghan negotiations, and guaranteeing Afghanistan won't again become a refuge for terrorists. The bigger challenge, they state fairly, is achieving a peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Continued Taliban violence, a weak Afghan government, and objections by outside countries could spoil negotiations (Maizland 2021). In this context, the future of the U.S-Pakistan relations are uncertain. It is clear though, to prevent global security outcomes of the Afghan situation, the US will be in any case involved in the region. Especially as Washington is not interested in the extreme growth of Chinese stand in the region by realization of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, including China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that may significantly counteract the US regional interests.

China

Being the largest investor in Afghanistan, China actively supported and promoted the Afghan peace process at bilateral and multilateral forums. For a comprehensive approach, China was not only engaged in the then Ashraf Ghani government but also talked to the Taliban (Maizland 2020) and even hosted talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban (Khan 2015). Thus, in May 2021, Beijing hosted the Taliban leaders two weeks before the Kabul fell to the Afghan Taliban (Myers 2021). China was the only major power, which announced 'friendly' ties with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan or the new Taliban government in Kabul (Kumar 2021).

However, Dr. Davood Moradian, Director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, rightly pays attention that the Taliban-China-Pakistan triangle lacks the necessary means to address Afghanistan's mounting challenges (Moradian 2022). More importantly, there are serious and irreconcilable differences between China and the Taliban and by extension Pakistan, he says. Realizing China's geo-economic ambitions and projects require a region free from terrorism and proxy warfare. But Pakistan's reliance on Islamist proxies is China's Achilles' heel. And Western intelligences' decades of fraternity with Islamist militants and Turkey's neo-Ottoman ambition would provide additional bonus, concludes Dr. Moradian.

However, these considerations, in our view, cannot remove China from the region, the sides will most probably look for more checks and balances in building their regional relationships. In its turn, Beijing is obviously not inclined to have serious problems with potential BRI project participants, including with global powers – partners in the global economy system.

Russia

Russia is another major regional player who has advocated the US withdrawal and facilitated the peace process. In November 2018, Russia hosted the Taliban delegates and members of Afghanistan's High Peace Council as demonstration of its desired role as peace broker in the region (Roth 2018). Moscow tried to regionalize its Afghan policy and engage players including China, Pakistan, Iran, and India to seek a credible solution to the Afghan conflict. In this regard, Russia relied on its inter-governmental regional peace consultation, which began as three-party talks in December and by April 2017, it expanded to eleven-party consultation which involved Russia, Afghanistan, its 'Big Four'

neighbors, and the Central Asia countries (Stepanova 2019). Now both China and Russia have announced working constructively with the Taliban-led government.

India and Iran

India is facing a dilemma to either recognize the Taliban or continue holding the same line of resisting it as an illegitimate force at the detriment of its future influence in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, in the interests of security and future economic benefits Delhi tries to constructively cooperate with all regional actors, including its archrival – Pakistan.

The same can be said about **Iran**. In comparison to Pakistani continued support of the Taliban, Tehran would particularly like to see the Shia community of Afghanistan being afforded wider rights, it cannot accept the philosophy and current policy of the Taliban. All the more that the instability of the last years has significantly increased the scope of the Afghan problem affecting Iran: an estimated 5,000 Afghans traverse the common 960-kilometer (572-mile) long border each day and “the neighbors – erstwhile enemies that trade fuel, share water, and have a tortured history — navigate an increasingly charged relationship” (Fattahi & DeBre, 2022). On the other hand, Pakistani radicals continue to attack *Shia* minority that has recently been condemned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran (Iran Condemns 2022). Most importantly, Pakistan and Iran are potential competitors of the two projected geoeconomics corridors through Afghanistan – the Chinese-Pakistani sponsored corridor to the Gwadar port and Indian-Iranian corridor to the Chabahar port. In the interests of stability therefore, Tehran tries to moderate its stance towards the Taliban government and rely more on the world community and the UN decisions on Afghanistan.

As a whole, strategic considerations, of all regional actors, including Uzbekistan and Pakistan, are expected to allow them to engage the Taliban and make sure the Afghan territory is not to be used for terrorism in the region. In this context, Tashkent and Islamabad rely more on the world community and the UN decisions on Afghanistan with the emphasis on inclusivity of the Afghan government. Meanwhile, any state that recognizes the Taliban regime must establish a permanent and inclusive political set-up, should take a calculated step and avoid haste as the Taliban's future lineups are still unclear.

Interim government of Taliban: New challenges and threats

Afghanistan is currently facing three major interconnected challenges: political instability; economic and humanitarian crisis due to the security uncertainty.

Political Challenges

Most important since Taliban announced their interim government on September 7, 2021, is the ongoing *Taliban policy of excluding* all representatives of the former Afghan government *from power* as “traitors” of the Afghan people; those who sympathize with the Western powers, and who has worked in their agencies; representatives of other religious or ethnic organizations. There is no Afghan politician and ethnic leader other than Taliban members, including two Tajiks and one Uzbek, the cabinet does not represent diversity or inclusivity as the world expected. Although, on the other hand, they announced a general amnesty to all opponents and former government officials, pledged to respect women’s rights and ensure freedom of the press (Taliban offers amnesty, 2021).

There is also *increasing militancy and terrorism* that proceed from the territory of Afghanistan. This means such factors as (1) activation of Islamic State [ISIS] or Daesh; (2) close ties of the Afghan Taliban and the TTP; (3) polarization within Taliban’s chain of Command and foot soldier, and (4) disagreement of Afghan Taliban’s government over Pakistan’s fencing on Pak-Afghan International border (also called as Durand Line). All these factors can have a spillover impact on Pakistan’s and Uzbekistan’s both peace, security, and stability at large.

As Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai³, an Afghan expert and senior analyst of an Islamabad-based think tank, stressed, ISIS’ footing has become very strong within Afghanistan and nearby Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Its presence is also rooted within the areas of Waziristan (i.e., Bajaur, Mohmand agency) of Pakistan. Family links of many former Afghan armed forces and spies who have joined ISIS are present in Pakistan. The Daish or Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) is another emerging security challenge and a sole anti-Taliban militant group. Its presence in Afghanistan came into limelight when a mosque was bombed in

³ He is a Senior Research Associate for South Asian and Central Asia at the Islamabad-based think tank Strategic Vision Institute (SVI), Pakistan. He is also an author of a book entitled *The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban’s Shadow*

Kandahar, Afghanistan in October 2021 and the ISIS has admitted responsibility for this attack.

It is not excluded that some former Afghan spies and soldiers of armed forces are recruited in ISIS-K due to lacking income. These new recruits can bring critical intelligence and warfare expertise to ISIS and potentially improve the ability of extremist organizations to challenge the Taliban's power and position. As Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai further notes, hundreds of thousands of former intelligence officers, armed soldiers and officers, and police officers have not been able to flee their homes after Taliban advent to power. In addition to protection from the Taliban, the Islamic State offers significant amounts of money to its new members in Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's promise of amnesty, the latter therefore have joined ISIS owing to their unemployment and fear for their lives. Only a fraction of them, mostly in the National Security Directorate, has returned to work under Taliban supervision. Like almost all other Afghan civil servants, they have not been paid for months.

With regard to **TTP**, Pakistani experts consider (Shahid 2021) that today, "as much as Pakistan used Taliban for its gains, so too did the Taliban use Pakistan for its gains". The Afghan Taliban have released around 2,300 leaders of the Pakistani offshoot of the TTP, long persecuted in Pakistan for its radical activities. According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, the TTP claimed 282 attacks in 2021 in Pakistan, and had killed more than 500 law enforcement personnel; it claimed an additional 42 attacks in January 2022 (Afzal 2022). Despite that, Pakistan is not willing to get tougher with the Taliban government on counterterrorism, including on issues that affect its own security.

In its turn, the Afghan Taliban is worried that pressing the TTP too hard could push it towards its enemy, the Islamic State-Khorasan Province, and the TTP itself is apprehensive about desertions within its ranks if it does not continue with its hardline approach to the Pakistan government, which it wants to overthrow, state some experts (Khan 2022). The more the Afghan radicals escalate their attacks on security forces and civilians, the greater the public pressure in Pakistan will be to take decisive action, including against the TTP's main backer – the Afghan Taliban. Domestic pressures in Pakistan – as well as a push from China – could result in Islamabad's halting its international campaign in support of the Afghan Taliban, or starting to back Afghan anti-Taliban groups

that could destabilize Taliban rule. The process can lead to further radicalization of the Afghan Taliban, predict experts.

Like previous Afghan governments, Taliban too do not accept the Durand Line. With the arrival of Taliban in that area, Pakistan army soldiers on duty at border run away by leaving the stuff of fencing. Pakistan reacted very sensibly and Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi responded that Pakistan is engaging diplomatically with the sitting government of Taliban within Afghanistan to resolve “some confusions” (Gul 2022).

As a whole, the conflict around the Pak-Afghan border demonstrate polarization prevailing within Taliban’s chain of Command and foot soldiers. The top leadership of the Taliban are divided and don’t have the same thinking on the border situation because they know very well their dependency on Pakistan. On the other hand, there is a sign of relief for Pakistan on the western border by the Taliban’s coming to power, it is also a firm reality that Islamabad doesn’t have strong influence over the existing leadership of the Taliban as it was earlier in Pakistan. So, it is expected that such kind of events will occur from time to time and Pakistan will need to act and react very sensibly.

The ISIS and TTP issues are closely related to the quest for international political recognition and legitimacy of the Taliban interim government, which could finally help this de facto political set-up free up much-needed funds for Afghanistan’s ailing economy. The Taliban have made numerous promises regarding inclusive governmental set-up under their leadership, non-violation of human rights, liberalization of women and women’s participation in government, and continued education of girls to make clear to the world community that the current Taliban generation differs greatly from the Taliban of the 1990s. But the response from the international communities has been muted since September 2021. In particular, Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi wrote a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and asked about his address to the world community at the annual high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on 27 September 2021 (Taliban name Sohail Shaheen 2021). This address would be on behalf of Afghanistan’s seat at the United Nations. Therefore, the Taliban appointed their Doha-based spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, as Afghan ambassador to the United Nations. However, there was no response at all.

In its turn, Pakistan has tried its best to break the ice regarding the Afghan Taliban government's political isolation by opening various windows of opportunities. In line with it, on 19 December 2021, Pakistan hosted the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad, which aimed to bring the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan into focus (Shah 2021). It was expected that the Islamic world would collectively recognize the Taliban government, but no consolidated response came. In Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai's opinion, no state, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, does not want to repeat the mistake of the past and to be held responsible for the Taliban's recognition, if any unpleasant incident or terrorist activity happens anywhere in the world. Moreover, a clear expression about inclusive governmental structure was given to the Taliban regime in the Dushanbe Declaration, adopted at the SCO summit held on 17 September 2021. The member states endorsed their support for "the emergence of Afghanistan as an independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful State, free of terrorism, war and drugs... (and) that it is critical to have an inclusive Government in Afghanistan, with representatives from all ethnic, religious and political groups of Afghan society" (Experts react: 2021 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2021).

Economic crisis

Political crisis logically leads to the economic meltdown of the country. The lack of Taliban government's political legitimacy is the Achilles' heel that will remain the problem, both for maintaining the internal order as well as for the country's leadership, as the Biden government has frozen \$9.5 billion of Afghan government assets in US banks (Iqbal 2021). The trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has reduced to more than 50% (Trade Turnover 2022) – from \$2,5 billion till annual \$1 billion, supposedly due to such reasons as the absence of friendly trade policy and clear trade mechanism, absence of banking system. Construction of the long-awaited TAPI has been stopped as the Asian Development Bank refused to finance it due to non-recognition of the Taliban government (Afghanistan: The Implementation 2022). Afghanistan is turning into a poverty-stricken country after the ban on key foreign aid.

Humanitarian crisis

As a result, millions of people are at risk of starvation due to drought, the health system is collapsing due to the unavailability of medicines, the flight of doctors and other paramedical personnel, and furthermore due to plummeting of

wages. According to the United Nations World Food Program, it helped a total of 15 million people so far in 2021. Only 2% of Afghans, according to their assessments, had enough to eat, and more than three million children were malnourished (15 millions Afghans 2021). On January 2022, 23 million people, that was 55% of the Afghan population, were in crisis due to the food shortage, and about 9 million were in the extreme state that was the biggest indicator in the world.

However, former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, P. Michael McKinley said that any expanded aid to Afghanistan, whether to deal with the humanitarian crisis, might risk being used indirectly to entrench the Taliban's footings and to and consolidate their military power (McKinley 2021).

Refugee crisis: Most of Afghan people are forced to fleeing home due to financial constraints, impoverished situation, and fear of Taliban. According to the estimates of the Council on Foreign Relations on the Afghan refugee settlement in Pakistan, Iran, European Union, and United States, half a million people could flee the country by the end of the years, fearing reprisals and heightened insecurity. Even before this crisis, almost 80% of the world's Afghan refugees were settled in two neighboring countries – Iran and Pakistan, which in 2020, for instance, hosted 2.8 million of Afghan refugees. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans are likely to continue to be drawn there due to the proximity and family members already in these countries (Maizland 2021). It is also expected that Pakistan should be ready to host a massive refugee flow in 2022 if the insecure and challenging situation in Afghanistan continues. According to refugee advocates, the US and EU will not allow any more Afghans to be resettled as the refugees will urgently need shelter, food and health services at a time when the world's humanitarian resources are already exhausted. The EU has already decided to give shelter to 400,000 Afghans in 2020. It is expected that up to 95,000 more Afghans could be relocated to the US in 2022 (Maizland 2021).

The neighboring Uzbekistan could not accept too many Afghan refugees in the interests of security – the country is over-peopled with more than 35 million of its own population, persistent social-economic problems of transitional character and presence of dormant cells of radical religious groups that altogether can create an explosive situation. Besides, according to the UN Refugee Agency, it hosts over 38,000 known stateless persons – the largest number in the sub-region – mostly ex-citizens of the former Soviet Union. In November 2021,

13,020 Afghan citizens arrived in the country in 2021 on short-term visas (Uzbekistan, The UN Refugee Agency 2022). In July 2021, the community of around 10,000 Afghans already lived in Uzbekistan. The country is open to Afghan investors and businessmen and none of them want to return to their home country (Uzbekistan bracing 2021). It is worth also to add here the increasing numbers of Uzbek labor migrants returning today from the unstable Russia – 133 thousand have returned since the beginning of 2022 and 60% of them don't want to return (Since the Beginning of the Year 2022).

The above-said will certainly increase the additional burden on the Pakistani and Uzbekistani economies, disrupt the country societal fabrication, and will cause many other challenges that will certainly have their indirect influence on other neighboring states.

Peculiarities of the present-day Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations and Afghanistan

Long-term terroristic activity and geopolitical struggle in the South and Central Asian regions could not but influence on development of Uzbekistan-Pakistan cooperation. Considering the origin of the Taliban in Pakistani madrassah, presence of other radical groups still operating in Pakistan, Tashkent has been very cautious in building its relations with Pakistan. Nevertheless, both countries cooperated in the anti-terroristic campaign after 2001, entered similar regional organizations like Organization for Economic Cooperation and SCO with ambitious regional economic goals. Still, the civil war in Afghanistan and concentration of Uzbekistan on its inner and other external problems under President Islam Karimov, have been the main barrier in fulfilling these objectives.

In 2016, Pakistan invited Uzbekistan to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and formulate a joint integrated strategy to exploit the potential of trade in the region, especially in view of CPEC. As former PM Nawaz Sharif pointed, “Pakistan is keen to further expand ties in all fields, particularly economic and energy cooperation, connectivity and human resource development” (Zaafir 2016). Uzbekistan's impressive annual economic growth and rich energy resources, and Pakistan's large industrial and agricultural base are considered to provide an ideal environment for expansion of trade and commercial cooperation between the two countries.

However, nothing can be done without stabilization of Afghanistan. Tashkent activated its diplomatic, security, humanitarian and economic contacts

with Kabul long before the Taliban current advent to power (Aripov 2018, 17-18). In particular, for more than 15 years, Uzbekistan has been a reliable partner of Kabul in the field of electricity supply. An agreement was signed on implementation of the project for the construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power line. Tashkent opened an educational Center in Uzbek Termez town to educate Afghani students. Despite the pandemic, the bilateral trade turnover increased till 25% and achieved \$777mln in 2020. By January 2022, Afghanistan occupies the sixth place (5%) in the common export volume of Uzbekistan (Afghanistan: Prospects for Economic Cooperation 2022).

Since September 2021, Uzbekistan tries to use all available means and potential of their negotiations with the new Taliban government. The Decree of the President Sh. Mirziyoyev underlines priority of establishing constructive cooperation in the field of security in relations with Afghanistan: “guaranteeing security of borders, struggle against terrorism, illegal drugs trafficking and the spread of the extremist ideology” (Authorities Determine 2022). Uzbekistan tries not to antagonize the Taliban forces and to achieve their maximum possible concessions in advancing the projected economic projects that can reconcile the sides and will supposedly gradually moderate the Taliban.

Uzbekistan’s efforts to build close regional connectivity through realization of trade, energy and transport-communication networks in South and Central Asia as prerequisites for achieving peace, stability and progress in these regions have found full understanding and support in Pakistan. Thus, owing to the initiatives of President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev the bilateral ties have started to consolidate. In 2021, the first Uzbek-Pakistani business-forum was held in Tashkent that opened new window of opportunities for private companies from both countries. Bilateral trade turnover this year increased 1,5 times. And what is most important is signing of the trilateral agreement “Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan” aimed on realization of the Trans-Afghan transport corridor, connecting Pakistan and Central Asia with European and Asian countries by the shortest land route (Uzbekistan-Pakistan: Cooperation 2022). Tashkent has already started construction of Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshavar railroad, \$5 billion worth project (Media: Uzbekistan has Begun Construction 2022). Specialists from Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan discuss now the problems arising during the cargo transportations on their territories, and the ways to remove them.

Both countries organize different forums and participate at all international workshops and summits on Afghanistan. For instance, Pakistan held the first meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan in September 2021, both countries participated at the second round of the meetings hosted by Tehran in October the same year. On March 30 and 31 2022, their representatives participated at the third meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbors in Tunxi, China.

In March 2022, Islamabad hosted the seventh round of political consultations between the Foreign Ministries of Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Besides, the leaders of two countries signed a series of bilateral documents, a joint Declaration on further steps to develop strategic partnership between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, agreements on preferential trade, cooperation in the ecological sphere, tourism, railroads, etc. The agreements on joint trade and investment projects worth \$800 mln have been achieved (Uzbekistan and Pakistan Signed 2022).

Still, the worsening relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have stalled many projects, including the ATTA agreement. Moreover, the efforts of the Pakistani government on advancing talks with the Taliban, and its constructive role in organizing the work of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group comprised of representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, failed.

Much depend today on Islamabad's given commitments to fight against radicalism and terrorism, its pressure, flexibility and talent of persuading the Afghan Taliban to fulfill the UN and world community demands to stabilize the country. That is here that Uzbekistan also can assist due to its proximity and potential to contribute to Afghani development. This means using all diplomatic and economic means, persuasion and rigid pressure on human rights and violations.

Conclusion

Thus, whatever interests and goals the involved actors can pursue first, none of them can provide their security alone or within the opposing state blocks in conditions of the comprehensive global challenges and threats, greatly connected with Afghanistan. Secondly, they cannot realize the projected economic goals without combining their efforts with other states due to both shortage of necessary resources and the security challenges that cannot be solved fully considering the complex multilayer crisis in Afghanistan with too many geopolitical interests involved.

Hence, the situation reflects the intermix of the central provisions of neorealism with their ideas of “force”, “national interest” and “balance of power”, and ever-growing, in contrast to some critiques, neoliberal tendencies with ideas of multiple actors and necessity of building a capable collective security system under the SCO and UN guidance and observance of international norms and universal principles of foreign policy. To be efficient the regional policy should be based on the concept of “«soft power»”. In practical terms, this means a need to untie the Gordian knot of the Afghanistan issue by the new rulers of Afghanistan, all regional countries along with the US and the West. Only concerted and balanced policy of all involved regional and global powers can bring some peace and stability into Afghanistan.

However, the most disturbing point is the ongoing Afghan-Pakistani dispute. Without its resolution, one cannot speak of any transit projects in Afghanistan. In this sense we fully support the Crisis Group experts’ view that Islamabad is better placed than any other regional or extra-regional actor to persuade its Afghan ally to accept changed international realities, and correspondingly transform its domestic and foreign policy (Pakistan’s Hard Policy Choices 2022).

At the same time, Uzbekistan as the closest neighbor of Afghanistan and vitally interested in its peace and stability, as well as in realization of all Trans-Afghan corridors, has also its own levers and resources (cultural, diplomatic, economic, military, etc.) to influence the situation. The synergy of Uzbekistan and Pakistan efforts in this direction could speed up solution of many problems and contribute favorably the regional crisis.

Available options and recommendations

- The Taliban government should move towards inclusive formation of the political system as soon as possible so that it can be able to sign agreements to deal with the humanitarian crisis, economic adversity, and to manage crisis of mistrustful relationship with major powers, regional countries, and the rest of the world.
- Pakistan and Uzbekistan should try to persuade the Taliban government for inclusive composition of governmental set-up to use diplomatic channels and multi-track diplomatic measures, i.e., a systems approach at different levels to peace (McDonald 2003). Any delay in this aspect would exacerbate Afghanistan’s

economic vulnerability and security situation. Incorporation of different segments of society into the Afghan government structure will likely be a drowning catcher at straw and may pave the way for the Taliban regime's legitimacy; at the same time, it will certify the world community's confidence in the Afghan Taliban government.

- As a facilitator, Pakistan needs to categorically clear its role and policy with regard to Afghanistan and the World community. Its Afghan policy should be based on non-interference because bad memories of the past about Pakistan's interference in Afghan state affairs are still in the minds of Afghan people. Within this line, Pakistan needs to treat Afghanistan as an "economic depth" (Jahangir 2019) in view of the future expansion of CPEC considerably connected with Afghanistan.
- Pakistan must work on soft image building narrative within Afghanistan and worldwide to remove the dominating anti-Pakistan narrative in Afghanistan. This needs much time to wash out this perception. In this sense, main Pakistani ongoing "soft power" work and proposals consist of the following:

Ongoing Work		Proposals
	<i>How does Pakistan assist Afghans?</i>	<i>What are Pakistan's near-term options?</i>
1.	Develops mutually beneficial economic relationship with neighboring Afghanistan.	Need to formulate an Afghan Trade policy, and measures should be taken for documentation of the ongoing Pak-Afghan trade.
2.	Conducts Pakistan-Afghanistan Cooperation Forum	The forum's objectives can relate to multi-track diplomacy measures to expand Pakistan's role as a facilitator.
3.	Tries to put the current Afghan issue into spotlight by its full capacity.	Mobilize China and other SCO countries, and international organizations like the United Nations and its agencies, and the world community in its efforts to peacefully transform Afghanistan.
4.	Hosts and manages the massive influx of Afghans.	Need to expand its cooperation with the EU countries, which can't accommodate refugees but want to help Iran and Pakistan in their assistance strategy in Afghanistan.
4.	Provides scholarship to young Afghans	Need to increase number of scholarships.
5.	Organizes exchange of students.	Exchange program of school-teachers and university professors to Afghan universities should be made under Pakistan's Higher Education Commission.

“It is now in the international community’s collective interest to ensure that there is no renewed conflict in Afghanistan and the security situation is stabilized” (Siddiqui 2021).

References

1. 2016. "Is Daesh really in Afghanistan?" *TRT World* . November 10. <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/is-daesh-really-in-afghanistan-225665>.
2. 2017. "13 Indian ISIS terrorists reportedly killed in US' MOAB attack in Afghanistan ." *DNA India* . April 18. 13 Indian ISIS terrorists reportedly killed in US' MOAB attack in Afghanistan. (2017, April 18). DNA India. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-13-indian-isis-miltants-killed-in-moab-attack-2407007> .
3. 2017. "13 suspected Indian IS fighters killed as MOAB hit Afghanistan: Reports." *Hindustan Times*. April 18. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/13-suspected-indian-is-fighters-killed-as-mother-of-all-bombs-hit-afghanistan-reports/story-q0klSwa0SH2CocXky> .
4. 15 millions Afghans. 2021. "15 millions Afghans receive WFP food assistance so far in 2021; massive uplift needed as economy disintegrates." *World Food Programme (WFP)*. December 14. <https://www.wfp.org/news/15-millions-afghans-receive-wfp-food-assistance-so-far-2021-massive-uplift-needed-economy>.
5. 2020. "Afghan Taliban visit Pakistan to discuss peace process." *The Nation*. August 24. <https://nation.com.pk/24-Aug-2020/afghan-taliban-visit-pakistan-to-discuss-peace-process>.
6. 2021. "97 percent of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid 2022, says UNDP." *2021 United Nations Development Programme*. September 9. <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/97-percent-afghans-could-plunge-poverty-mid-2022-says-undp>.
7. 2021. "Experts react: 2021 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tajikistan." *Atlantic Council-South Asia Center*. September 22. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/experts-react-2021-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-sco-summi> (accessed March 21, 2021).
8. 2022. "Afghanistan: Prospects for Economic Cooperation in New Realities (Афганистан: перспективы экономического сотрудничества в новых реалиях/ (transl. from Russian)." *XS.UZ (Uzbekistan News Media)*. January 14. <https://xs.uz/ru/post/uzbekistan-afganistan-perspektivy-ekonomicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-v-novykh-realiyakh> (accessed April 15, 2022).
9. 2022. "Afghanistan: The Implementation of the TAPI Gas Pipeline Project has Stalled (Афганистан: реализация проекта газопровода ТАПИ застопорилась (transl. from Russian)." *Regnum*. March 10. <https://regnum.ru/news/economy/3528382.html> (accessed March 12, 2022).
10. 2022. "Authorities Determine the Fate of Afghanistan in 2022 (Власти определили судьбу Афганистана в 2022 году (transl. from Russian)." *Sputnik*. January 04. <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20220104/chto-uzbekistan-budet-delat-s-afganistanom-v-2022-godu-22071321.html> (accessed April 17 2022).
11. 2022. "Like previous Afghan governments, Taliban too do not accept the Durand Line." *Like previous Afghan governments, Taliban too do not accept the Durand Line*,

- HinduYouTube Audio Library. January 1.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErmDrHAHM_0.
12. Afzal, Madiha. 2022. "Pakistan's ambivalent approach toward a resurgent Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan." *Brookings.edu*. February 11.
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/11/pakistans-ambivalent-approach-toward-a-resurgent-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan/> (accessed January 24, 2022).
 13. Ahmed, Munir. 2020. "US Envoy Lauds Pakistan's Role in Afghan Peace Talks Process." *The Diplomat*. September 15. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/us-envoy-lauds-pakistans-role-in-afghan-peace-talks-process/>.
 14. Alexandris, Ioannis. 2021. *An Outdated Debate? Neorealism's Limitations and the Wisdom of Classical Realism*. London: King's College London, Department of War Studies.
 15. Aripov, Eldor. 2018. "Uzbek-Afghan relations: a new stage in dynamic development." *International Relations: Politics, Economics, Law* 2018 (1): 17-23.
<https://uzjournals.edu.uz/intrel/vol2018/iss1/3> (accessed April 12, 2022).
 16. Botezai, Muhammad Akbar. 2015. "Interview: Afghanistan's Foreign Policy." *The Diplomat*. May 21. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/interview-afghanistans-foreign-policy/> (accessed October 4, 2021).
 17. Diamond, Louise & McDonald, John. 1996. *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace*. Third. Connecticut, United States: West Hartford, .
 18. Ebrahimi, Florance. 2014. "Ghani's Confused Foreign Policy." *Khaama Press (The Khaama Press News Agency)*. December 2. <https://www.khaama.com/ghanis-confused-foreign-policy-9078/> (accessed December 6, 2021).
 19. Faizi, Aimal. 2016. "Ashraf Ghani's war strategy will fail." *Aljazeera*. May 10.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/5/10/ashraf-ghanis-war-strategy-will-fail> (accessed December 10 2021).
 20. Fattahi, Mehdi and DeBre, Isabel. 2022. "As Iran-Taliban Tensions Rise, Afghan Migrants in Tinderbox." *The Diplomat*. May 2. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/as-iran-taliban-tensions-rise-afghan-migrants-in-tinderbox> (accessed May 5, 2022).
 21. Former Adviser to Afghan President. 2022. "Former Adviser to Afghan President Names Pakistan as Main Culprit in Taliban Victory, БЫВШИЙ советник афганского президента назвал Пакистан главным виновником (transl. from Russian)." *MediaZone News*. January 24. <https://mediazona.ca/news/2022/01/24/pakistan>.
 22. Freire, Lucas G. 2019. "Is Neorealism a Deterministic Theory of International Relations?." *International Studies* 56 (1): 58-67. doi:10.1177/0020881718824760.
 23. Gul, Ayaz. 2022. "Pakistan Vows to Continue Fencing Afghan Border, Downplays Taliban Disruptive Acts, ." *Voice of America*. January 03.
<https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-vows-to-continue-fencing-afghan-border-downplays-taliban-disruptive-acts-/6379947.html> (accessed February 11, 2022).
 24. Haass, Richard. 2020. *The World. A Brief Introduction*. New York: Penguin Press.
 25. Hashim, Asad. 2019. "Afghan President Ashraf Ghani arrives in Pakistan for key talks." *Aljazeera*. June 27. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/27/afghan-president-ashraf-ghani-arrives-in-pakistan-for-key-talks>.
 26. Held, David & McGrew, Anthony (eds.). 2000. *The global transformations reader: An Introduction to Globalization Debate*. Vol. 13. Cambridge: Polity Press.
 27. Iqbal, Anwar. 2021. "US freezes nearly \$9.5bn of Afghan reserves to block Taliban access to funds." *Dawn*. August 18. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1641367>.

28. Iran Condemns Powerful Pakistan . 2022. "Iran Condemns Powerful Pakistan Mosque Bombing (Иран осудил мощный взрыв в пакистанской мечети (transl. from Russian)." *Regnum (Russian News)*. March 05. <https://regnum.ru/news/3524800.html> (accessed March 10, 2022).
29. Jahangir, Asifa & Javaid, Umbreen. 2018. "Afghanistan Imbroglio: The Unintended Consequences of Foreign Interventions." *South Asian Studies* 33 (2): 411 – 433. http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/csas/PDF/7_v33_2_18.pdf.
30. Jahangir, Asifa, interview by Dr. Chad Haines. 2017. *Afghanistan and Great Game Geopolitics* (July 24).
31. Jahangir, Asifa. 2019. "Afghanistan-India Geopolitical Interests: Implications for Pakistan (2002-2014), PhD dissertation." *Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan*. http://pr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/12120/1/Asifa%20Jahangir_South%20Asian%20Studies_2019_UoPunjab_PRR.pdf (accessed April 23, 2022).
32. Kakar, J. H. 2017. "13 IS commanders killed in MOAB strike identified." *Pajhwok Afghan New*. . April 18. Kakar, J. H. (2017, April 18). 13 IS commanders killed in MOAB strike identified. *Pajhwok Afghan New*. https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2017/04/18/13-commanders-killed-moab-strike-identified?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter .
33. Keohane, Robert. O. 1986. "Theory of world politics: Structural realism and beyond." In *Neorealism and its Critics*, by Robert. O., (ed). (1986). "Theory of world politics: Structural realism and beyond" In *Neorealism and its Critics*, Washington: Columbia University Press, 158-203 Keohane, edited by Robert O. Keohane, 158-203. Washington: Columbia University Press.
34. Khan, Raza. 2022. "Is a rift between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban imminent?" *Al Jazeera*. February 6. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/2/6/a-rift-between-pakistan-and-the-afghan-taliban-may-be-imminent> (accessed February 10, 2022).
35. Khan, Tahir. 2015. "China offers to 'host' Afghan peace talks." *The Express Tribune*. November 9. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/987737/pitching-in-china-offers-to-host-afghan-peace-talks> (accessed January 17, 2022).
36. Kumar, Shivani. 2021. "Willing to develop friendly relations with the Taliban in Afghnaistan', says China." *Hindustan Times*. August 16. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/willing-to-develop-friendly-relations-with-taliban-in-afghanistan-says-china-101629106878591.html> (accessed January 20, 2022).
37. Maizland, Lindsay. 2020. " U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal: What to Know." *Council on Foreign Relations*. March 2. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-taliban-peace-deal-agreement-afghanistan-war> (accessed January 25, 2022).
38. —. 2021. "Where Have Afghan Refugees Gone?" *Council on Foreign Relations*. October 11. <https://www.cfr.org/video/where-have-afghan-refugees-gone>.
39. McDonald, John W. September 2003. "Multi-Track Diplomacy." In *Beyond Intractability*, edited by Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. , Boulder.: University of Colorado,. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/multi-track-diplomacy>.
40. McDonald, John W.,. 2003. "Multi-Track Diplomacy." In *Beyond Intractability*, edited by Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Boulde: Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/multi-track-diplomacy>.

41. McKinley, P. Michael. 2021. "Afghanistan's Looming Catastrophe: Why the United States and Its Allies Must Act Now to Prevent a Humanitarian Disaster." *Foreign Affairs*. December 3. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2021-12-03/afghanistans-looming-catastrophe>.
42. 2022. "Media: Uzbekistan has Begun Construction of the Trans-Afghan Railway (СМИ: Узбекистан приступил к строительству Трансафганской железной дороги (transl. from Russian)." *Afghanistan.ru*. March 30. <https://afghanistan.ru/doc/148661.html> (accessed April 2, 2022).
43. Mir, Dr. Asfandiyar. 2022. "After the Taliban's Takeover: Pakistan's TTP problem." *United States Institute of Peace*. January 19. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/01/after-talibans-takeover-pakistans-ttp-problem> (accessed January 21, 2022).
44. Moore, M. 2000. "Unintended consequences." *Bulletin Of The Atomic Scientists* 56 (1): 58-64.
45. Moradian, Dr. Davood. 2022. "Beijing's Afghanistan gamble: Can emerging China-Taliban-Pakistan triangle deliver peace? ." *The Print*. 30 March 2022. March 30. <https://theprint.in/opinion/afghans-future-now-rests-on-taliban-china-pakistan-triangle-and-beijings-role-is-key/894215/> (accessed January 20, 2022).
46. Myers, Steven Lee. 2021. "China Offers the Taliban a Warm Welcome While Urging Peace Talks." *The New York Times*,. July 28. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/world/asia/china-taliban-afghanistan.html> (accessed January 20, 2022).
47. Nye, Joseph. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs Group.
48. 2022. "Pakistan and Afghanistan." *Institute for the study of war, Washington D.C., US*. <https://www.understandingwar.org/pakistan-and-afghanistan> (accessed December 1, 2022).
49. 2022. "Pakistan's Hard Policy Choices in Afghanistan." *International Crisis Group*. February 04. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/320-pakistans-hard-policy-choices-afghanistan> (accessed April 21, 2022).
50. Roth, Andrew. 2018. "Russia hosts talks between Taliban and the Afghan peace council." *The Guardian*. November 9. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/09/russia-hosts-talks-between-taliban-and-afghan-peace-council> (accessed January 21, 2022).
51. Saiikal, Amin. 2014. *Zone of crisis: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
52. Shah, Syed Akhar Ali. 2021. "OIC conference: sobering effect." *The Express Tribune*. December 22. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2334985/oic-conference-sobering-effect> .
53. Shahid, Kunwar Khuldune. 2021. ". How the Taliban Used Pakistan." *The Diplomat*. August 19. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-the-taliban-used-pakistan/> (accessed January 23, 2022).
54. Siddiqui, N. 2021. "Taliban must fulfil promises made in Afghanistan, says PM at SCO summit." *Dawn*. September 17. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1646871> (Accessed October 10, 2021).
55. Siddiqui, Naveed. 2021. "Taliban must fulfil promises made in Afghanistan, says PM at SCO summit." *Dawn*. September 17. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1646871> (accessed April 25, 2022).

56. 2022. "Since the Beginning of the Year, 133 Thousand Labor Migrants Have Returned to Uzbekistan from Russia (В Узбекистан из России с начала года вернулись 133 тысячи трудовых мигрантов (transl. from Russian)." *gazeta.uz*. April 06. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/04/06/migrants-from-russia/> (accessed April 10, 2022).
57. Stepanova, Ekaterina. 2019. "Russia and the Afghan Peace Process." *PONARS Eurasia*. October 17. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/russia-and-the-afghan-peace-process/> (accessed January 21, 2022).
58. 2021. "Taliban name Sohail Shaheen as envoy to UN." *The News*. September 22. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/894425-taliban-name-sohail-shaheen-as-envoy-to-un>.
59. 2021. "Taliban offers amnesty, promises women's rights and media freedom." *Al Jazeera*. August 17. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/17/evacuation-flights-resume-as-biden-defends-afghanistan-pullout> (accessed January 22, 2022).
60. 2021. "Taliban vows to provide safe passage to Kabul airport, Biden adviser says." *Reuters*. August 17. <https://www.reuters.com/world/taliban-told-us-it-will-provide-safe-passage-airport-us-national-security-2021-08-17/>.
61. 2021. "The Taliban's Aug. 31 'Red Line'." *Wall Street Journal*. August 23. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-taliban-aug-31-red-line-joe-biden-afghanistan-troop-withdrawal-deadline-11629756664>.
62. 2022. "Trade Turnover Between Afghanistan and Pakistan Fell by More than 50%, Товарооборот между Афганистаном и Пакистаном упал более чем на 50% (transl. from Russian)." *Regnum (Russian News)*. March 1. <https://regnum.ru/news/3520407.html> (accessed March 7, 2022).
63. 2022. "Uzbekistan and Pakistan Signed a Number of Bilateral Documents, Узбекистан и Пакистан подписали ряд двусторонних документов/ (transl. from Russian)." *Regnum*. March 04. <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3524800.html> (accessed April 20, 2022).
64. 2021. "Uzbekistan bracing for possible Afghan refugee crisis." *eurasianet*. July 3. <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-bracing-for-possible-afghan-refugee-crisis> (accessed March 2, 2022).
65. 2022. "Uzbekistan, The UN Refugee Agency." *The UNHCR Regional Representation in Central Asia*. <https://www.unhcr.org/uzbekistan.html> (accessed March 1, 2022).
66. Waltz, Kenneth N., 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
67. Yuldasheva, G. 2017. *The Role of Iran and the United States of America in Geopolitics of Central Asia*. Riga, Latvia: LIIA, Latvian Institute of International Affairs.
68. Zaafir, Muhammad Saleh. 2016. "Muhammad Saleh Zaafir Pakistan invites Uzbekistan to join CPEC." *The News*. December 24. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/174153-Pakistan-invites-Uzbekistan-to-join-CPEC> (accessed April 13, 2022).
69. 2022. "Узбекистан – Пакистан: Сотрудничество в выстраивании межрегиональной взаимосвязанности/ (trans. Uzbekistan-Pakistan: Cooperation in Building Interregional Interconnectedness." *Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan*. February 20. <http://isrs.uz/ru/yangiliklar/934>. (accessed April 17, 2022).