



## **Challenges and Opportunities in Iran's Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan (Case Study: Taliban Regime)**

**Shaban Mahgul**

Ph.D., Student, Department of Political Science, Lamard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lamard, Iran

**Ghafar Zarei<sup>1</sup>**

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Lamard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lamard, Iran

**Amin Ravanbod**

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Lamard Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lamard, Iran

### **Abstract**

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its relations with Afghanistan, Iran's neighbor, are important both geopolitically and in terms of politics, also economics, and culture. Based on this, Afghanistan is a country that should be considered in Iran's foreign policy. Therefore, this study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities in Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan, especially considering the recent occurrences in this country. This article is a descriptive-analytical study. The research method and materials are qualitative, and also note-taking was used to gather information. The results show that among the challenges of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan, we can mention insecurity and instability resulting from the Taliban's dominance, which causes events such as the increasing wave of Afghan migration, the presence of terrorist groups like ISIS, the need to manage relations with other regional leaders, and ethnic and religious issues. At the same time, there are opportunities such as the possibility of economic and commercial cooperation, playing a positive role in reducing tensions and peace processes, border management, expanding political influence, and strengthening regional cooperation. Therefore, to take advantage of these opportunities and address the challenges, Iran needs a comprehensive and balanced strategy in its foreign policy. In this regard, emphasis should be placed on important challenges such as the uncertain future of how the Taliban will deal with Afghan Shias and the tension over the Hari Rud River, as well as opportunities such as the Islamic Republic's cooperation with China and Russia in Afghanistan and economic relations with this country. Overall, it can be said that the history of relations between the Islamic Republic and Afghanistan can influence the foreign policies of both countries, considering the Taliban's regime in this country.

**Key words:** Challenges, opportunities, Taliban rule, Iran's foreign policy.

---

1. Corresponding Author: [abooeiyeh1402@proton.me](mailto:abooeiyeh1402@proton.me)



Received: 06/09/2024

Accepted: 05/11/2024

## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Following the rise of the Taliban, Tehran has redefined its relations with them as the new governing authority of Afghanistan. This is notable considering that in 1998, after the murder of several Iranian diplomats by the Taliban, Iran and Afghanistan were on the brink of war. However, after September 11 and the Taliban's insurgency against NATO/US forces, tensions between Iran and Afghanistan began to decrease with the occupation of Afghanistan, as Tehran welcomed the challenges posed by the Taliban to the US military presence there. It was not until 2015 that the relationship between Tehran and the Taliban garnered international attention. Since then, Iran has gradually established contacts with the Taliban, justifying it as an effort to reconcile competing interests in a neighboring country. The return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan in 2021, following the US withdrawal, will have significant implications for the region and international politics more broadly. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the failure of Washington in Afghanistan represents more than just a victory for the Taliban. Tehran has sought to reinforce the idea in its messages to partners and allies that it is the only reliable actor in the Middle East in opposition to Washington.

### Data and Methodology

This article employs a descriptive-analytical approach. The materials and data are qualitative, utilizing note-taking for the collection of information and data.

### Results and Discussion

From a geographical perspective, Afghanistan holds a central position in Asia, acting as a crossroads among the continent's major regions. Throughout its long history, it has frequently been invaded, provoking the greed of conquerors. Afghanistan is situated among four of the world's most populous regions and is rich in mineral resources, lying at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, Northern Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East. While Afghanistan respects the smaller sections of each of these regions and shares common cultural, ethnic, and trade interests with them, it is not specifically related to any of them. However, it cannot separate itself from any of them either, resulting in Afghanistan being positioned as a connecting bridge among these vast areas. As a country located at a critical geographical junction connecting Central Asia to South Asia, Afghanistan has always attracted the attention of global powers seeking to achieve their objectives in this part of the world. Historically, Afghanistan has held significant geopolitical and geostrategic importance in the region, with many historical events occurring within its borders. From ancient times until 1800, it was frequently invaded from the north and west as it was considered the most suitable route to reach India. Many rulers invaded Afghanistan to access India, with the last empire attempting to invade India through this route being that of Napoleon Bonaparte, whose plans were thwarted by Shah Zaman, the king of Afghanistan at the time. Afghanistan's strategic position as a link between Central Asia and South Asia has provided a foundation for the country to play an extraordinarily important role in the success of major regional economic projects.



Received: 06/09/2024

Accepted: 05/11/2024

## Conclusion

The findings indicate that the people of Afghanistan are more satisfied with the new situation compared to the previous government. Currently, the biggest issue facing the people is the economy and their livelihoods. This research also examined the current political situation in Afghanistan from various perspectives, including internal conflicts within the Islamic Emirate, the behavior and stance of other ethnic groups and the Taliban, and elections. Ultimately, the study explored the potential for engagement with the Taliban and how such interactions could occur. Recommendations were then made for fostering interaction between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. From the overall analysis, it can be assessed that Iran and Afghanistan possess relative territorial and human advantages for each other; however, the mismanagement of these advantages and the presence of regional and extra-regional powers in Afghanistan due to the country's geopolitical significance have led to threats such as terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, and national security threats for Iran from within Afghanistan. Additionally, issues related to water and escalating hydro-political disputes, as well as the problem of Afghan refugees and the mismanagement of these issues by both countries, have hindered the establishment of a stable relationship based on good neighborliness, grounded in geopolitical realities. This situation has exacerbated poverty and underdevelopment in Afghanistan, leading to increased extremism, foreign intervention, rising trafficking, and a consequent escalation of problems between the two countries. This has perpetuated underdevelopment, instability, and insecurity in Afghanistan, as well as underdevelopment in eastern and southeastern Iran, posing national security threats to Iran. Therefore, despite Iran's advantageous position for Afghanistan, the presence of rival or hostile regional and extra-regional powers with significant economic, political, cultural, security, and military influence in Afghanistan has severely undermined Iran's territorial capacities and strengths in this regard.

## References

1. Aghajari., M.J. & Karimi., M. (2015). The Role of Regional Actors in the State-Building Process of Afghanistan during the Taliban Era and Post-Taliban. *International Relations Studies Quarterly*, 8(30), 57-104.
2. Akbarzadeh, S. (2014). Iran's Policy towards Afghanistan: In the Shadow of the United States. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 1(1), 63-78. ( in Persian)
3. Al Jazeera. (2021, July 9). Taliban captures key Afghan border crossing with Iran: Officials. Taliban News | Al Jazeera. Retrieved May 2022.
4. Aman, F. (2021). The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran? Middle East Institute. Retrieved May 2022.
5. Ameri, N. S. (2020). The "Afghan Drugs' Problem – A Challenge to Iran and International Security. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 1(2).
6. Amul, G. G., Ang, M., Kraybill, D., Ong, S., Yoong, J. (2021). Responses to COVID-19 in Southeast Asia: Diverse Paths and Ongoing Challenges. *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 17, 90 - 110 .
7. Antonio, Giustozzi., Adam, Baczko. (2014). *The Politics of the Taliban's Shadow Judiciary*, 2003–2013.
8. Azimi., M.A. (2012). An Introduction to the Political Geography of Afghanistan, Kabul: Saeed Publications. ( in Persian)
9. Baczko, A. (2023). A revolution in the juridical field', The Taliban Courts in Afghanistan: Waging War by Law (Oxford, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 14 Dec. 2023).



Received: 06/09/2024

Accepted: 05/11/2024

10. Bina (2008). Regional Cooperation Strategy - 1999-2013, Kabul: National Development Strategy Secretariat of Afghanistan. ( in Persian)
11. Boukas, N., Ziakas, V. (2013). Impacts of the global economic crisis on Cyprus tourism and policy responses. *International Journal of Tourism Research* , 15 , 329-345 .
12. Brenner, Claire & Matthew Wallin (2021) Preparing for the Consequences of Withdrawal from Afghanistan, American Security Project.
13. Choksy, J. K., & Choksy, C. E. B. (2021, September). No friend of Iran: Tehran's responses to the Taliban's return to ... Retrieved April 4, 2022.
14. Darley, W. K. (2012). Increasing Sub-Saharan Africa's Share of Foreign Direct Investment: Public Policy Challenges, Strategies, and Implications. *Journal of African Business* , 13 , 62 - 69 .
15. Davoodi., A.A. (2014). Iran's Science and Technology Diplomacy in Afghanistan, Strategic Policy Research Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 11. ( in Persian)
16. Davoodi., M. Kiani., D. & Barzgar., K. (2023). The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Developments in Afghanistan; A Case Study: The Resurgence of the Taliban. *Political Studies of the Islamic World*, 12(1), 129-153. ( in Persian)
17. Durrani, A. (2022). Iran's Afghan policy after the U.S. withdrawal: Implications for Pakistan and the region. *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies*. Retrieved 2022.
18. Faiz, M, Z. (2023). 2. The Conflicting Synthesis of the Taliban's Religious and Cultural Identity. *Review of Faith & International Affairs*.
19. Farzanepour., H. & Yousefzahi., N. (2017). A Critical Reflection on the Security Challenges of Economic Relations between Iran and Afghanistan. *Biannual Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(2). ( in Persian)
20. Fatemi Nejad., S.A. & Mohammadzadeh., A.R. (2018). Examining the Position of New Afghanistan in Regional Security Frameworks from Central Asia to South Asia. *Central Eurasian Studies*, 11(2), 399-416. ( in Persian)
21. Feizi, H.(2018). Discourse, Affinity and Attraction: A Case Study of Iran's Soft Power Strategy in Afghanistan, *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
22. Ghiathi., E.T. (2004). Us and Civil Society, Mashhad: Homeland Cultural Center. ( in Persian)
23. Ghobar., M.Gh.M. (2020). Afghanistan in the Course of History, Peshawar: Dar al-Salam Bookstore. ( in Persian)
24. Hassan Zaidi, S.M., Manzoor, A. , Alamgir A. (2022). IRAN'S PRAGMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TALIBAN AFTER THE U.S EXIT CHALLENGES AND DETERMINANTS, *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*.
25. Herranz-Surrallés, A. (2014). The EU's Multilevel Parliamentary (Battle)Field: Inter-parliamentary Cooperation and Conflict in Foreign and Security Policy. *West European Politics* , 37 , 957 - 975 .
26. Hussain, M. (2023). Challenges and Opportunities to the Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Contemporary Era. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*.
27. Ignatiev, P. (2015). Afghanistan: Balancing between Pakistan and Iran . *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 27-28(1-2), 43-62.
28. IntelBrief. (2022, May 4). Intelbrief: Border clashes mar the Taliban's regional relationships. The Soufan Center. Retrieved June 2022.
29. Ishchenko. N. S. (2022). 1. Ethno-Political Structure of Taliban-led Afghanistan. *Aziâ i Afrika segodnâ*.
30. JAMES DOBBINS, JASON H. CAMPBELL, SEAN MANN and LAUREL E. MILLER , (2019) Consequences of a Precipitous U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan, RAND Corporation.
31. Karimi Fard., H. (2021). Explaining Iran's Foreign Policy towards the Taliban (1996-2021). *Middle Eastern Studies*, 28(3), 41-60. ( in Persian)



Received: 06/09/2024

Accepted: 05/11/2024

32. Khajehpour, B. (2021). Iran-afghan trade has murky future under Taliban. Al-Monitor. Retrieved 2022.
33. Kuhrt, N. (2012). The Russian Far East in Russia's Asia Policy: Dual Integration or Double Periphery?. *Europe-Asia Studies* , 64 , 471 - 493 .
34. Laletin. Yu. P., (2024). Formation of the Political System of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Challenges and Limitations. *Aziâ i Afrika segodnâ*.
35. Lewis, D. (2018). Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia'. *Europe-Asia Studies* , 70 , 1612 - 1637 .
36. Mace, M., Fyson, C., Schaeffer, M., Hare, W. (2021). Large-Scale Carbon Dioxide Removal to Meet the 1.5°C Limit: Key Governance Gaps, Challenges and Priority Responses. *Global Policy* .
37. Marjani, N. (2020). The US-taliban deal and its impact on Iran-Pakistan relations. The US-Taliban Deal and its Impact on Iran-Pakistan Relations. Retrieved August 29, 2022.
38. Michaud, J., Kates, J. (2013). Global health diplomacy: advancing foreign policy and global health interests. *Global Health, Science and Practice* , 1 , 24 - 28 .
39. Mickler, D., Pijović, N. (2015). Engaging an Elephant in the Room? Locating Africa in Australian Foreign Policy. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* , 61 , 100-120 .
40. Mortazavi Emami Zavar., S.A. (2019). Analyzing Iran's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan. *International Cultural Relations Studies*, 5(12), 81-106. ( in Persian)
41. Motamedi, M. (2021). Iran and Taliban forces clash in Border Area. Taliban News |Al Jazeera. Retrieved May 2022.
42. Nourian., S.M.A. (2015). The Roots and Consequences of Neighboring Failed States: Afghanistan and the Failure of State-Nation Building and Peace. *Specialized Quarterly of Political Science*, 11(31), 115-136.. ( in Persian)
43. Rahimi., H. (2014). Afghanistan and Regional Cooperation Organizations, Afghanistan's Foreign Policy in the Sphere of Regional Cooperation, Supervised by: Dr. Faramarz Tamana, Kabul: Strategic Studies Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ( in Persian)
44. Rahimi., S.M. (2012). The Geopolitics of Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century, Kabul: Saeed Publications. ( in Persian)
45. Rasanah Editorial Team. (2020). Trade between Iran and Afghanistan remains steady, despite US sanctions. International Institute for Iranian Studies. Retrieved May 2022.
46. Sawhney, A. (2019). Chabahar Port: Unlocking Afghanistan's Potential. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Retrieved 2022.
47. Tariq, Mumamad at al,(2020) US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Latest Development and Security Situation (2020),SJESR JURNAL, Vol 3 No 2: April - June (Spring)