

Original Article

Afghanistan during Taliban 2.0: Heading Towards Devastation

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Abstract

Afghanistan is passing through a crucial stage of history since the Taliban 2.0 have assumed the reign of power in August 2021 through Doha accord with America and its allies by toppling a national government led by President Ashraf Ghani. The one-year and four months of the Conservative Taliban regime has played havoc with the economy, health, education, and human rights situation in the country. While at the same time, the country is facing horrific international isolation where no country in the world has formally recognized the government. After the 9/11 attack, the Taliban 1.0 government was toppled national governments were formulated two times each by Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. It has been almost 1 year and 4 months since the Taliban have retaken the country after two decades in August 2021. Since then the state has been witnessing gigantic changes in the economic, political, diplomatic, human rights, education, and health sectors. Although the situation concerning these spheres was not good prior to the Taliban's regime on the other side, it was far better than today's Afghanistan. Although much has been written on the conditions of social, economic, political, education, health, and basic human rights during the Taliban rule but the ongoing research will focus on a comparative analysis of indicators before the Taliban regime and the current Taliban regime itself and their incompetency and will prove that the country is witnessing a great leap backward during the current Taliban regime. In the end, the research will concentrate on the best possible policy options for the Taliban to be taken to steer the country out of these whirlpools.

Keywords: Human rights, International law, Political instability, Taliban, Women rights

1. INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is at a juncture where a myriad of challenges has been threatening the very existence of the state. From economic fragility to political instability, from human rights violations on the part of the Taliban to diplomatic isolation, and from the collapse of education to healthcare sectors- the state has plunged into unbearable conjunctures. Although these clutches have not occurred on the twinkling of eyes or have taken shape abruptly during the current Taliban regime, it must be in consideration that the situation of all these sectors was not that bad which the country is facing now. The country was on economic growth, and political stability was defending human rights, the state was recognized by the international community and there was no diplomatic isolation whilst the education and healthcare sectors were flourishing. The available data in the



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aforesaid research proves that the economy was at the mercy of loans and aid but was not on the ventilator as it today is. The political instability was not as bad as today is and human rights violations were not as worse as today are.

Notwithstanding that, the health and education sectors were flourishing and were not as pathetic as today. Whilst, the diplomatic isolation of the Taliban regime reflects that the previous government was far better at legitimating and recognizing its government internationally. It is high time the Taliban focus on economic revival, issues of governance and management, exterminating corruption, effacing mine and thine, overcoming power struggles and tug of war within their ranks and files, concentrating on infrastructure development, etc. And not waste their energies in the wrong direction. History has witnessed that rudderless, and shortsighted governments have never borne fruits. towards a lusterless path of devastation. The research calls upon the Taliban to peel into their collars by leaving stubbornness and provides policy recommendations for bringing back the country in socioeconomic, political, diplomatic, education, and health sectors on the track. The ongoing research will shed light as to how the incompetence of the Taliban has deteriorated the institutional growth. It will further elaborate as to how the Taliban did not abide by its promises of not banning females education and assurance of the protection of human rights? The current research will analyze as to how the US is responsible for the ongoing quagmire in Afghanistan by bypassing the Afghan government while finalizing the Doha accord? This research will prove the gap question as to how the socioeconomic, political, human rights, education, healthcare sectors have devastated and as to how Afghanistan is facing chronic international isolation after the Taliban and that how these sectors were improving before the Taliban takeover.

Sectors that have been deteriorated after the Taliban 2.0 are being summarized in the succeeding paragraphs.

Economy Meltdown

The economy is the backbone of any state upon which the very fundamentals of the country depend on. The more the economic situation of a state is cemented the more it will touch the zenith of glory, prosperity, happiness, and development. As far as the economic conditions of Afghanistan are concerned it is right to observe that the economy of Afghanistan was not in good condition prior to the Taliban taking over in August 2021 and was at the mercy of foreign aid and loans. But, it was overall in a better condition as compared to the present frangible economic situation. It was the 103rd number in terms of GDP based on purchasing power parity PPP which was 77 billion USD with an exchange rate of 20 billion USD in 2020. (World Bank, 2020). While, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Afghanistan was worth 20.12 billion US dollars in 2020 (trading economics, 2022). As far as foreign reserves are concerned, the total reserves (including gold, current US\$) in Afghanistan were reported at 9748946327 USD in 2020 (Trading economics, 2022). But once the Taliban 2.0 took over the reign of the country, the state was pitched into a political crisis that led to economic fragility. The FDI stopped, unemployment and poverty increased while per capita income and revenue generation dwindled. The political crisis that began in August 2021 increased food insecurity and widespread deprivation. The real GDP is projected to contract further in 2022, with an accumulated contraction of close to 30-35 percent between 2021 and 2022 (World Bank, 2022).

Poverty and unemployment go shoulder by shoulder. The more there is unemployment the more poverty will be. Unfortunately, both poverty and unemployment increased during the reign of Taliban 2.0. Unemployment has reached up to 25 percent which was 11.2 percent in 2020 (trading economics, 2022). Comparatively, poverty has increased at an accelerated speed during the rule of the Taliban as it has increased from 54 to 71 percent (Khan, 2021). The UNDP fears that 97 percent of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid-2022 (UNDP, 2021). Besides poverty, foreign direct investment is in shaky condition. The UNDP says that investment could drop from 3 billion USD to 1 billion USD in 2022 (UNDP, 2022). The country, economic fragility further deteriorated when the Biden administration froze 9 billion USD of Afghans central bank assets in America. When world bank suspended 470 million the IMF 370 million dollars, and when the EU suspended 1.4 billion USD in aid to Afghanistan (Khan, 2022).

A more worrying aspect is food insecurity which has increased with the economic meltdown of the country. These developments have made Afghanistan one of the most affected countries that are facing severe food hunger. Astonishingly, as per the global hunger index, Afghanistan ranks 109th among 121 countries. (GHI, 2022). These horrifying figures gesticulate that the economic situation of Afghanistan is in jeopardy while the Taliban regime has failed to handle the economic meltdown.

Abysmal Health Sector

History proves that in the midst of economic frail, political uncertainty, and incompetence; institutional decay has never been far. We have been observing the same in the case of Afghanistan where one of the most important social sectors - health is on the decline. Currently, Afghanistan is facing different outbreaks of diseases such as COVID-19, Measles, Diarrhea, Malaria, etc. At the same time, the infant mortality rate is 46.5 per 1,000 births, and the maternal mortality rate is projected 638 deaths per 100,000 births. Pregnant women are in dire need of pre and post-natal care (WHO, 2022). Owing to multiple causes such as insecurity, economic meltdown, and incompetency of the ruling government majority of healthcare institutions have been closed down. Revelo observes that only 17% of over 2,300 health facilities funded under the Sehatmandi project — which is described by WHO as the “backbone” of Afghanistan’s health system — is fully functioning (Ravelo, 2021).

These all centers were properly and efficiently providing services during Ashraf Ghani’s tenure. It was a program of 600 million dollars of the World bank where free medical treatment along with the provision of food supplements was being given to pregnant women and children who have been facing malnutrition and to those who had been stunted. The situation of malnutrition is at a dangerous level as the UN observes that 23 million people are at risk of malnutrition including 2.3 million children (Gul, 2021). The UNDP also observes that health services are under threat including those aiming to contain the pandemic, eradicate polio and care for maternal and child health (UNDP, 2022). This has resulted in a huge humanitarian health crisis where millions of people are in need of urgent health services. A report published in the health cluster Afghanistan in 2022 fears that in 2022 more than 24.4 million people would be in need of humanitarian health assistance (WHO, 2022).

When you stop women’s education how do female doctors and staff produce? When you stop competent brains from running matters? When your economy is not in a position to afford a good healthcare system? How could one expect improvement in the medical field? The Taliban must peel into their collars as to how are they running the state and how could they bring back the health sector on track in the midst of such lusterless indicators and their inability to overcome the crisis.

Lusterless Scenario of Education

Education is the pillar of pillar, the future of the future, and the backbone of social mobility and societal progress. Like the health sector, the education sector in Afghanistan is also on the verge of devastation during the Taliban 2.0. It must be in mind that we must give the devil its due that for the past two decades a mushroom improvement had been seen in the progress of the educational sector where not only institutions were being established but the world community had also been pouring millions of dollars in this sector which has come on a logjam position after the Taliban took over the reign. soon after the Taliban took over the country they announced that they will not ban women’s education. But, slowly and repeatedly they disowned their stances and banned girls’ education beyond the primary level.

When the Taliban took over Kabul they promised moderate provision of girls’ education. With the passage of time, the dreams of millions of Afghan girls were shattered when the Taliban turned to their old days and banned women’s education. On March 23, 2022, the Taliban ruled that only women could teach women classes. It announced that university courses would be coed, but until that there would need to be a physical partition between the female and male students (Jackson, 2022). On one side the Taliban have banned girl’s education beyond primary while, on the flip side restrictions on women in Afghanistan have resulted in the joblessness of female teachers, lecturers, and university faculty. When you stop girls from getting higher education than the primary level how could you expect to produce women faculty in the future? It does not look sane. The ban on women’s education has ultimately resulted in illiteracy, societal decay, and economic meltdown. The UNDP observes that restricting women from work will result in an economic loss of 600 million dollars to 1 billion USD to the economy (UNDP, 2022).

How an administrative system can be run without competent minds of the said administration? How is it possible to run a hospital by a teacher and an educational institution by a clerk or other incompetent individuals? Sheerana Qazi writes that about 70 staff members including professors resigned from Kabul university when a Ph.D. holder chancellor Muhammad Osman Baburi was replaced by Muhammad Ashraf Ghairath a journalist graduates from the same university (Qazi, 2021). After the mishap, Babur left for Germany and the loss was to Afghanistan. The same situation has been seen in other institutions too where according to the BBC a snipper of the Taliban has been appointed as director of land and urban development in Balkh (BBC, 2022).

While looking into women’s education prior to the Taliban regime reveals that the situation was improving.

During the Republic, there were female professors, journalists, judges, doctors, TV personalities, and executives (FARR, 2022).. Women's literacy, while still below 50 percent, increased dramatically. More than 3.6 million girls were enrolled by 2018 – more than 2.5 million in primary school and over 1 million in secondary (Batha, 2022). There are total of 17 public universities in Afghanistan and 2 private universities. Before the Taliban, the American University of Afghanistan, which was housed for security reasons in the American Embassy compound, had 763 students of which 44 percent were female, and 42 full-time faculties, of which 31 percent were female (Bickford, 2022).

The mentality of Taliban rulers with respect to women's education can be guessed from the controversial remarks of minister for education Nida Mohammad Nadim, who said that it would be "disrespectful" for members of the Taliban to take exams to determine their academic qualifications. He insisted that a Taliban fighter's credentials were based on the "number of bombs" he had detonated (Siquique, 2022). This is pathetic, disgusting, and unacceptable.

Gloomy Conditions of Human Rights

Like the Taliban 1, regrettably, the situation regarding human rights during the Taliban 2.0 is not impressive. From ethnic segregation to curbing freedom of speech and from restrictions on women's rights to creating hurdles in art and cultural promotions, human rights violation is at their peak. The Taliban have banned Music and closed down the Afghan national institute for arts. Artists have been banned from promoting their art. Calligraphy has been banned. Dozens of artists have fled from the country. Recently, the Taliban set fire to the musical instruments of Musicians in Paktika. Footage showed an Afghan musician made to watch as his musical instruments are set on fire, as the Taliban waged a long-term war against music in the Paktia province of Afghanistan (Hall, 2022)

As far as extra-judicial killings are concerned, the UNHR observes that the Taliban were responsible for 40 percent of civilian deaths in extra-judicial killings in the first 6 months (UNHR, 2022). As far as the situation of media freedom is concerned, reporters without borders articulate that since the Taliban takeover, 40% of Afghan media have closed, and 80% of women journalists have lost their jobs. A total of 231 media outlets have had to close down (RSF, 2022). The Taliban have started their old tactics of flogging and other punishments to create fear among the common Afghans. The government has started public punishment by flogging 27 people including one woman in the Charikar capital of Parwan province. Gul Ayaz, (2022). Apart from this, the regime has also initiated public execution on December 7 of a murder in the province of Farah.

Educational institutions have been shut down after the primary level for girls. A woman must be accompanied by a male Muhram while traveling more than 72 kilometers. The womenfolk have no political rights which they enjoyed before the Taliban government. Zahid Hussain writes in dawns and calls it the return of the dark ages and says that those who were hailing the Taliban takeover of Kabul last year should be over their euphoria by now (Hussain, 2022).

In addition to that, the Taliban leaders subsequently called for women to stay home temporarily, citing concerns over new Taliban forces who "have not yet been trained very well" and who may mistreat, harm, or harass women (Astor, Hassan, and Onishi, 2021). The Taliban have reinstated the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which enforced the Taliban's interpretation of Islam in the 1990s (Trofimov, 2021). It is like Iran's morality police. Furthermore, early marriages have increased in Afghanistan so the parents of the girl's halt forced marriages of their daughters. In the 15 months since the Taliban took power, there has been a dramatic increase in early marriages of Afghan girls - trend activities (Siddique, 2022).

The policy of the Taliban against the Hazara community has been harsh since the 1990s owing to which the Hazara community has been in fear. Although, the Taliban appointed a Hazara in the cabinet as health minister in their second rule it has also not created confidence in Hazaras in the Taliban. Amnesty International has also reported that Taliban fighters executed Hazara civilians (including former Afghan security forces) in July and August 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021). Despite Hazara ethnic group, the Taliban has been intolerant of other religious minority groups. A Sikh place of worship in Kabul was vandalized, reportedly by Taliban fighters (NDTV, 2021). Consequently, the world community has reservations to recognize the Taliban regime owing to large-scale human rights violations.

Diplomatic Isolation

Recognition is a process whereby certain facts are accepted and endowed with a certain legal status, such as statehood, sovereignty over a newly acquired territory, or the international effects of the grant of nationality (Britannica). It brings numerous benefits to a state. If an entity has effective control in a state, as

its government it is entitled to exercise the state's international rights and bears its international obligations (Saul, 2021).

Afghanistan which was recognized by almost every country of the world before the Taliban had established warm relations with the international community, where it had its representation in world organizations and where internal aid and commitments were coming through the nook and corner of the world has been struggling for its formal recognition. How pathetic it is as it has been almost a year and a half that no nation in the world has recognized the Taliban government formally. This isolation has led Afghanistan towards economic catastrophe where at one end the foreign reserves of the country have frozen while on the other hand, the international community is hesitating in providing aid, loans, and investment owing to the legitimacy of the Taliban rule. Currently, only seven states in the world have established diplomatic relations with the Taliban while diplomats of the Taliban are also present in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Najafizafa believes that the militant group has relations with only 7 countries including China, Russia, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Qatar, and Turkey but these states have not recognized the Taliban yet (Najafizada, 2022).

The countries that have established diplomatic relations with the Taliban are still worried about their interests. For instance, Russia is worried about the ISIS presence, Pakistan has reservations about the presence of the TTP which has increased attacks and China is anxious about Xinjiang militant presence known as the East Turkistan Islamic movement. While the US and the EU have concerns over the presence of ISIS and Al-Qaida.

It has been for the first time in almost 2 decades that Afghanistan lacks representation in international organizations such as the UNO etc. The UN has rejected the appointment of its ambassador Suhail Shaheen. Zahid Hussain writes that the international community may have engaged with the Taliban administration but there is no sign of their recognizing them formally (Hussain, 2022). Amid such a gloomy state of affairs of diplomatic engagements how can one expect economic recovery, progress, and prosperity without the help of the international community in a country like Afghanistan which has been short of almost every social, political, and economic indicator? How can investment be secured especially for the extraction of natural resources in a country that is around 1 trillion USD? The de facto authority of the Taliban has yet to be recognized it has led to a sudden stop in international aid and the freezing of Afghanistan reserves (UNDP, 2022). Sanity must prevail.

Although, the Taliban have stated "we do not want to have any problem with the international community (Aljazeera, 2021). But, have failed to convince the world community to recognize their government. How a government is recognized is that it should abide by Women's rights, Human rights, good governance, etc. Unfortunately, this lack in Taliban's Afghanistan. Pakistan's foreign minister said in late September 2021 that "I don't think anybody is in a rush to recognize" the Taliban, but also called for "innovative" engagement with the group (Dawn, 2021). It reflects the failure of the Taliban in diplomatic relations where no state has recognized the regime yet. The international community is not recognizing the retrogressive regime of the Taliban owing to their conservative policies. Ultimately, this non-recognition has been harming the country more and has been increasing the Taliban's predicaments with an accelerated speed.

Politics Instability

In the economic, health, education, human rights, and diplomatic sphere the situation of political stability in the country is unwelcome. A tug of war among the lines of the Taliban, Pashtun dominance in the government, lack of political maturity by the Taliban, absence of Loya Jirga that has been the representative of all ethnic groups of Afghanistan for centuries, dearth of women participation in the government, paucity of the national government that is the demand of the time for the current situation of Afghanistan, dearth of decentralization and absence of power-sharing in the government have brought Taliban's Afghanistan at the brink of decline.

At present, the Amir of Afghanistan is Pashtun followed by the Deputy Prime minister, Foreign Minister, and Defense and Interior ministers all are Pashtun. The representation of other communities is equal to none as Qari Deen Muhammad Hanafi was the acting economic minister who belonged to the Tajik community while one deputy prime minister Abdul Salam Hanafi is from Uzbek ethnicity. Of 33 members Afghan caretaker government only a handful of portfolios have been given to non-ethnic Pashtuns (Ahmad, 2021). The decentralization in the country has further dimmed the progress of the country at local levels. For example, Article 137 states that "the government shall transfer necessary powers to local administrations to accelerate and improve economic, social, as well as cultural matters (Thier and Worden, 2017).

President Karzai's tenure from 2001 to 2014 was marked by constant efforts to balance the distribution

of power keeping a wide tent while attempting to keep any faction from getting too powerful (Thier and Worden, 202). The same policy was adopted by Ashraf Ghani in a feasible power-sharing formula for a unity government based on national reconciliation for the sake of political stability. Regrettably, the Taliban have failed in bridging the national differences and have become the only party in the country to run the affairs at their own whims and wishes by banning and bypassing political parties as there are about 70 registered parties in Afghanistan (BTI, 2022).

Discussion

While analyzing the current quagmire that has pushed Afghanistan into one of the darkest ages of its time, one can observe that after taking the reign of government in Afghanistan, the country has plunged into myriad of crises such as economic, political, human rights, health, education, international isolation, etc. It must be in mind that before the Taliban regime the country was progressing in all the above spheres for which we must give the Devil his due. Undoubtedly, the Taliban are responsible for the current deteriorated miseries owing to their incompetence, bad governance, shortsightedness, lack of pragmatic policies and many more. But on the flip side, the factor of the US failure cannot be set aside. When the Doha accord was being signed the Afghan leadership was not taken into confidence and when the US pulled out its forces the country abruptly, the Afghanistan's government was left in the lurch and the country was left on the mercy of the Taliban who had failed to govern the country from 1994 to 2001. Had the US not left the state in an abrupt manner, had they succeeded in establishing a national government through the Doha accord, the situation in Afghanistan would not have been so drastic as today is.

Policy Recommendations

The current research recommends that the Taliban regime should learn from their previous mistakes and do their utmost struggle to meet the challenges for which the Taliban leadership needs to bring back the intelligentsia of the country into their respective fields as a matter of fact that Taliban might be good worriers but when it comes to administrative skills they lack this. There is a dire need to put the country's economic situation on track for which an advisory council of economic experts should be established as soon as possible. Moreover, there is a dire need for a national government, that assures human rights and allows women's education to end mistrust among the government and international community for recognition. Once the recognition process is completed, the flow of foreign aid, loans, and refreezing of the 9 billion USD of assets of the central bank of Afghanistan in America might start which will have positive consequences for the dwindling economy. The US that had committed a huge mistake by not taking the then Afghan government into confidence while handing over the power to the Taliban, has big responsibility to pressurize the Taliban more to end their policies and compel them to form a national government that is currently the only panacea of all ills. Last but not least is that the Taliban should allow all political parties and hold elections in a democratic way to bring political stability to the country which will further help in ending international isolation and economic meltdown.

2. CONCLUSION

The general discussion leads one to the conclusion that Afghanistan is in intense crisis since the Taliban assumed power in August 2021 which is responsible for the states miseries which are heading towards one of the darkest times of history. At present, the economy is in a shaky condition, political instability is at its peak, diplomatic isolation, educational decline, fragility of the healthcare sector, and human rights violations have been provided fuel to the already frail situation. Sanity demands that the Taliban must accept the reality they have failed to meet the current challenges through their ongoing policies. Introspection and revisiting the current foiled policies are the demand of time. Sanness must prevail on the part of the Taliban as in the twenty-first century such policies, the Taliban's hard lines, and their own intransigence which the Taliban have taken up do not fit in the scenario.

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