

Essential Points of the Taliban Peace Agreement with the United States and Its Consequence for Iran (2020-2021)

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Abstract

On March 10, 2020, within an agreement between the USA and Taliban, a timetable to withdraw all foreign troops from Afghanistan, a practical mechanism to prevent the use of Afghan territory against the security of the United States and its allies, efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire in the inter-Afghan talks was announced. One of the critical points of the U.S. peace agreement with the Taliban is that it could have significant political economic security consequences for Iran; such as the limitation of the possibility of Iranian companies operating in Afghanistan, the duality of the positive security outcome due to the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the negative consequence of the increased instability in Afghanistan, the limitation of Iran's security and economic presence due to the increased presence of Russia and China in Afghanistan, and could pave the way for the expansion of the influence of regional actors in conflict with Iran's interests in Afghanistan. Strategies include in the peace Agreements were:

- Developing multilateral mechanisms for cooperation with Russia and China,
- expanding direct economic and security interaction with the Taliban, and
- establishing a joint economic commission consisting of economic representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan government to strengthen economic security and take advantage of the economic and political consequences of the peace agreement.

This article examines the peace agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban, Iran's position against the Taliban, and the economic consequences for Iran now that the Taliban took power. Iran is deeply concerned about the Taliban's implications for its internal security, economic interests, and regional position. Although Iran is pleased that American troops are no longer in Afghanistan and considers this a great victory, it has been more cautious with its neighbor than ever before.

To attain the goals of this qualitative research, a descriptive-analytical method is used. The advantages presented by this method include: enabling the collection of a significant amount of data from different sources presented by different countries, China, Russia, USA, Iran, and Afghanistan, which makes the present research more reliable. The view is critical regarding existing circumstances on the impact of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan on Iran political and economic situation. This article examines the possible consequences of this agreement by pointing out the possible geopolitical changes in the region.

Keywords: Doha Peace Agreement, US, Afghanistan, Taliban, Foreign policy, Iran's economy, Russia, China, Muslim Brotherhood

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Introduction

The United States and its allies, such as Britain and France, entered Afghanistan about two decades ago with relatively specific goals: to oust the Taliban. The only result of the various strategies of the foreign troops in recent years has been to make them more realistic and accept the facts in the face of the insurgency in Afghanistan. Recognition of the reality of the Taliban was born out of this situation. The current disappointing political-security outlook in Afghanistan is the consequence of NATO and U.S. casualties in 2011, the Taliban's ingenuity and speed in imposing deadly military blows on the foreign troops. The opposition of a robust public opinion force to the continuing erosive war in Afghanistan to strengthen peaceful ideas and solutions has led to the opening of the current impasse and enhanced the role and importance of the Taliban in future trends (Malkasian, 2021).

2020, US-Taliban peace agreement was signed in Doha, Qatar, under the Trump administration and under which the United States would withdraw all military forces, allies, and coalition partners, including all civilian and non-diplomatic staff, private security contractors, trainers, advisers, and staff, within 14 months from Afghanistan (Rafiei, 2014). The United States had guaranteed a complete withdrawal of foreign troops and a timetable in the presence of international witnesses, and in exchange, the Taliban stated that Afghan territory would not be used against the security of the United States and its allies. However, the United States specified that they would not recognize the Islamic Emirate of Taliban as a state, and the entity must as well negotiate with the inter-Afghan government. Nevertheless, within the agreement, the U.S committed to releasing five thousand Taliban fighters and end of economic sanctions on the Taliban (Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, February 29, 2020)

The outcome of this peace agreement could have economic security consequences for Iran due to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the groundwork for Afghanistan's internal developments.

Therefore, examining the possible economic consequences to strengthen Iran's economic security is of great importance.

Important Parts of the Taliban Peace Agreement with the United States

The U.S. peace agreement with the Taliban had three essential parts; the first part emphasizes the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan within 14 months: The United States had

committed to withdrawing all its troops and coalition forces, including non-diplomatic civilian personnel, military contractors, instructors, advisers, and support forces, from Afghanistan within 14 months. To implement this plan, the following measures have been considered:

A: Within 135 days, the number of American troops would be reduced to 8600, and the coalition forces would be reduced to the same amount.

B. The United States and its allies would withdraw their forces from five bases in Afghanistan.

C. The United States and its allies would withdraw their troops from Afghanistan within the remaining nine months.

The United States was rapidly working with various parties to secure the release of Taliban prisoners. With Trump's administration pressuring the Afghan authorities, 5000 Taliban prisoners were released by August 2020 (Pompeo, 2021).

With the start of the inter-Afghan talks, the United States would begin reviewing sanctions against members of the Taliban group to lift the sanctions against the group by August 27, 2020. The United States had also urged permanent members of the Security Council to remove Taliban members from their respective blocklists. In addition, the United States and its allies renew their commitment not to threaten or use force against Afghanistan's territorial integrity or political independence or to interfere in its internal affairs.

The second part of the peace agreement emphasizes the Taliban's commitment to cut ties with terrorist groups. In this regard, the Taliban had to take the following steps to prevent the use of Afghan territory by various groups, including al-Qaeda, to counter the security threat to the United States and its allies:

A. The Taliban will not allow members, individuals, or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use Afghan territory to threaten the United States and its allies.

B. The Taliban had to send a clear message to those who want to threaten the security of the United States or its allies that they have no place in Afghanistan and instruct its members not to cooperate with such groups.

C. The Taliban had to stand up to a group that sought to use Afghan territory against the security of the United States and its allies and did not allow them to recruit, train, or host them.

D. The Taliban must be committed to dealing with groups seeking refuge in Afghanistan following international immigration law and the provisions of this agreement so that they cannot threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

E. The Taliban must not issue visas, passports, travel permits, or any legal documents to groups that threaten the security of the United States and its allies so that they can enter Afghanistan or leave the territory.

Examining these clauses shows that their collective actions made the Taliban the representative of the U.S. interests in Afghanistan.

The third part of the peace agreement emphasizes cooperation with the United Nations, which requires the agreement to be approved by the U.N. Security Council. Now that they took the total power in Afghanistan, the ratification of the agreement by the U.N. Security Council identifies the Taliban quasi-government, which will once again put them on the path to requesting recognition from the U.N. General Assembly Accreditation Committee for Governments. The agreement mentions the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 18 times, indicating that the Taliban have been very insistent on including the phrase "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" in the negotiations. It showed the strong will and lobby of this group in reviving the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This also shows the recognition of the Taliban government system by the U.S. Thus, the United States utters that it does not recognize the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and, on the other hand, has dealt with the Taliban as at least one quasi-state and the principal and only actor in the Peace Agreement. And this was before the collapse of the Afghan government.

The clauses that are emphasized in this section are:

A. The United States requests that the United Nations Security Council ratify this agreement.

B. The United States and the Taliban seek to establish positive relations with each other and expect the relations of the new Islamic State of Afghanistan, which will be established after the inter-Afghan negotiations.

C. The United States seeks to cooperate economically with the new Afghan government to rebuild Afghanistan and not interfere in its internal affairs.

The implementation of this agreement has had various political, security, and economic consequences for Iran, which are discussed below.

Important Implications of the Taliban-U.S. Peace Agreement for Iran

The binding peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States, which was signed in 2020, has essential axes that can affect the type and nature of Iran's relations with Afghanistan and, consequently, have significant consequences for the country's economic security. The most important of these axes are:

Restriction of the Possibility of Iranian Companies Operating in Afghanistan

Considering that one of the articles of the Taliban peace agreement guarantees practical mechanisms to prevent the use of Afghan territory against the security of the United States and its allies, which could harm Iran's economic activities in Afghanistan, especially the financial companies affiliated with the Iranian military in Afghanistan (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahim, 2020). In other words, under this clause, the United States can use the Taliban to put more pressure on the activities of Iranian companies in Afghanistan.

The Duality of the Positive Security Consequences of the Withdrawal of U.S. troops (as a source of threat) and the negative dichotomy of the increased likelihood of instability in Afghanistan are essential provisions of the peace agreement, guarantees and practical mechanisms, and a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Achieving this could create a positive and negative security dichotomy for Iran concerning Afghanistan. The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan means neutralizing the potential threat posed by U.S. troops near Iran's eastern borders, however, the neutralization of security threats, can increase the power of Iran's security maneuver in Afghanistan to fill the gap created by the absence of the United States (Barzegar, 2014).

Restricting Iran's Security and Economic Presence has Always been under Close Consideration from Russia

Russia had a strong presence in Afghanistan during the nineteenth century competing with Britain to influence the Afghan government and during the Soviet period with its direct military intervention (Sadjadpour, 2013).

Active foreign policy on Afghanistan helps Russia expand its influence in Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These countries are now concerned about the spread of insecurity in Afghanistan and, when threatened, seek Russian support.

In addition, Russia's increased role in Afghanistan will allow it to gain more influence in Beijing-Kabul relations, as Russia does not want to be sidelined by the China One-Way Road project.

In the current context of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan with the conclusion of the peace agreement, the realization of this issue provides an unprecedented opportunity for Russia to expand its influence in the security and economic spheres in Afghanistan, to fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan on the one hand, and to consolidate its influence in Eurasia and China on the other. This, in turn, could place restrictions on the expansion of Iran's economic activity in Afghanistan.

Restriction of Iran's Security and Economic Presence due to China's Presence in Afghanistan

China has been able to play its role in international politics for many years by maintaining economic cooperation. Bilateral relations between China and Afghanistan were established in 1955 and then, in 1964, led to an economic agreement and technical cooperation. Afghanistan has many rich natural resources such as iron, copper, marble, coal, precious metals, precious stones, and hydrocarbons, some of which have been discovered and others have not yet been discovered due to the war situation in this country. Undoubtedly China is looking for opportunities to make the most of these economic capacities. Furthermore, to increase its economic activity, China seeks to connect to other parts of the world by expanding its rail network and strengthening its road and port infrastructure to increase maritime trade. In addition to the economic view of Afghanistan, China also has a security view to take advantage of its economic potential (Pandey, 2019). The spread of instability in Afghanistan and its negative security implications for Central Asia raise China's security concerns. In this regard, after the withdrawal of NATO and the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan in 2014, China has strengthened its position in that state by playing an influential role in the stability and security of Afghanistan. Therefore, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan based on a peace agreement will expand China's economic and political influence in Afghanistan. This, in turn, could place restrictions on Iran's economic and political activities in Afghanistan (Tiezzi, 2015) due to Iran's support to Hezbollah, the sanctions imposed on the latter, and the restrictions of Iran's activity according to the recent Peace Agreement.

Laying the Groundwork for Expanding the Influence of Regional Actors in Conflict with Iran's Interests

The signing of a peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States is also influential at the regional level. Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood could increase their influence in the region by providing the ground for peace talks and financial support to this agreement (Fair, 2014). In addition, recent developments could pave the way for coordination between the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, it can lead to the start of talks between the Taliban and Islamabad.

Qatar's efforts to bring the Taliban back into Afghan politics and the group's presence in regional and international equations are mainly due to the joint lobbying of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood in Washington. In a way, the Trump administration was convinced that an agreement with the Taliban could pave the way for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and, as a result, benefit Donald Trump's re-

election campaign in November 2020 (Ozdemir, 2020). Thus, it can be said that the Taliban movement, without abandoning the Brotherhood and extremism, succeeded in pursuing a seemingly moderate policy for a while. However, they would follow the same long-term radical strategy of the Jihad movement now that they took control over the country. The newly established Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan could open the door to regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, who have conflicting interests with Iran (Hiro, 2018).

The "inherent conflict" of the Taliban with Iran

The Taliban rulers' thoughts are in complete conflict with the tremendous cultural sphere of Iran. That is why the Taliban are attacking forces that have a particular interest in the Persian language, culture, and literature and are in serious conflict with the spread of terrorism and Salafism in Afghanistan. The prominent regional supporters of the Taliban in Afghanistan are Qatar, Pakistan, Turkey directly, and the UAE and Saudi Arabia indirectly.

The meeting with the representative of the Taliban in Tehran before the complete capture of Kabul indicates that Iran agreed to recognize the Taliban as an independent government. According to Javad Zarif, Iran's former Foreign Minister, in a meeting between the Taliban and Tehran on January 2021, the Taliban pledged to change their behavior regarding Shiites.

They promised to prevent the mass exodus of Afghan refugees and their deportation to Iran. They would not execute members of the Iranian consulate in Afghanistan as it happened twenty years ago; the Shiites of Afghanistan would be safe and have no execution, especially regarding the Hazaras (Alizada, 2019). The Taliban will also prevent the presence of ISIS in Iran, and the borders of Iran should be entirely secure by the Taliban fighters.

At first glance, these points seem reasonable, but in the long run, Iran as a neighbor with vast borders and one-handed culture shows that it will face many dangers and problems. The Taliban have sympathizers in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan provinces with a large Sunni population, some of whom adhere to the same Saudi-inspired Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, just like the Taliban (Shams, 2019). A solid and unified Taliban government could ask its supporters to put pressure on Iran, and it could even incite extremist insurgents in Baluchistan, the same one who bombed mosques, attacked military posts and soldiers, and sought ransom in the 1999 and 2000s. They, therefore, have the support of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Pakistan.

Conclusions and Possible Solutions to the Peace Agreement

The Taliban peace agreement with the United States has essential points, the main one being the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Through independent humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the United States will be providing nearly \$64 million in new humanitarian assistance to Afghans, mainly refugees (Blinken, 2021). However, this agreement could have significant consequences for Iran and its future development.

Unlike in the 1990s, today's Iranian options for dealing with Talabani in Afghanistan are more limited. At the time, the western countries were a significant challenge to Taliban rule and had India and Russia's support. Iran was not alone in confronting the Taliban, but there is no credible coalition against the Taliban today.

The world's major powers, including Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States, want to engage with the Taliban to stabilize Afghanistan, although they formally declared they would not recognize it; however, Russia, China, Iran, and Pakistan have their embassies open and active in Kabul. They also hope to find common ground with the Taliban's behavior and protect their interests through dialogue within this process. Iran also wants a stable government in Kabul, provided the Taliban would have a friendly attitude towards Iran, but this is unlikely to happen.

If Iran seeks to support any anti-Taliban group, it will not have the support of other governments. More likely, regional governments and international actors will accuse Iran of destabilizing Afghanistan.

The more serious danger is that if Iran intervenes directly in Afghanistan's internal affairs, the Taliban could cause Tehran's trouble with their Sunnite supporters settled in Iran.

Unlike some Arab countries and Turkey, Iran lacks the economic tools and financial resources to soften the Taliban's approach. Iran's only asset is that it is a good trade route and a valuable source of energy. However, other countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar can replace Iran in at least in of those areas. Iran also needs to trade with Afghanistan due to its economic difficulties due to sanctions imposed by the United States, and therefore it cannot take full advantage of economic

trade with Afghanistan.

In order to strengthen Iran's economic security and take advantage of the new conditions, the following solutions are proposed:

- Developing multilateral cooperation mechanisms with Russia and China;

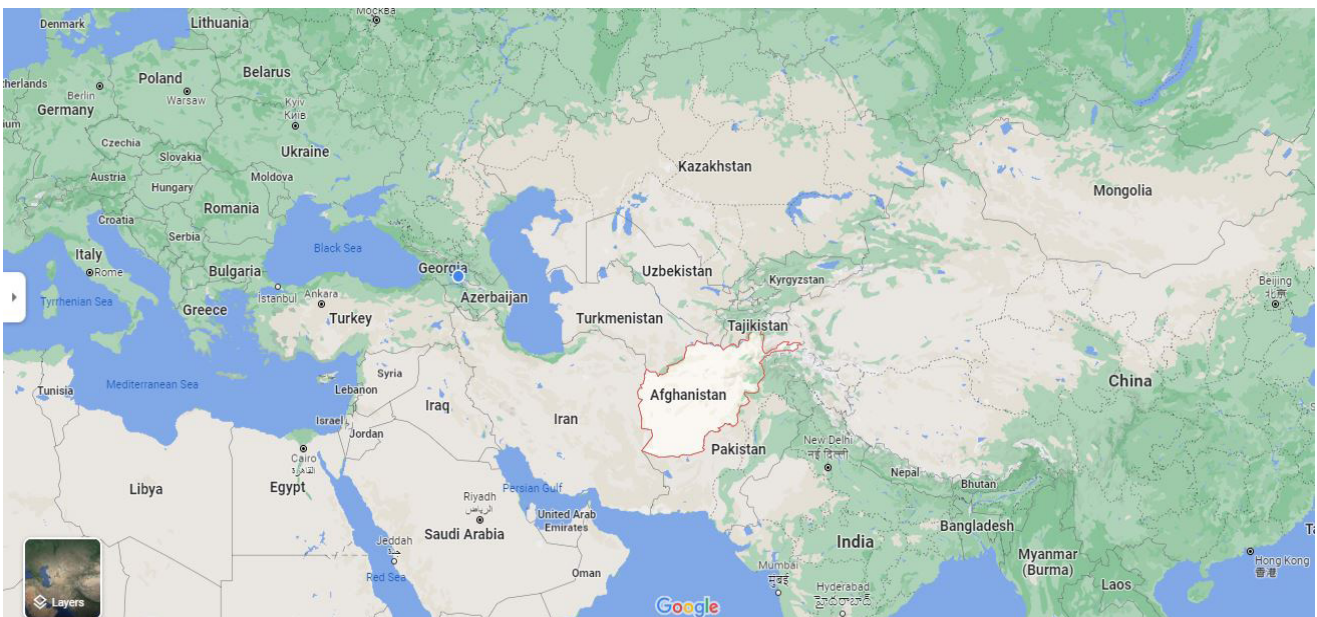
With the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the power vacuum in Afghanistan, China and Russia will undoubtedly expand their economic and security influence in Afghanistan. Iran, Russia, and China want to ensure stability and security in Afghanistan due to common security concerns. On the other hand, they have good capacities for cooperation in transit, exploitation of resources, mines, and infrastructure and can create multilateral mechanisms to regulate policies and advance common economic and security goals in Afghanistan. This is important because Iran's unilateral diplomacy is less productive due to its low competitiveness with China and Russia.

- Expanding direct economic and security engagement with the Taliban: Although the United States formally refuses to recognize the Taliban, the negotiation and conclusion of an agreement with this new government implicitly confirm the de facto and practical identification. Therefore, from now on, this authority will make more economic and security cooperation at the regional and international level, and on the other hand, other countries will try to establish relations with them. Therefore, it is suggested that Iran adopt active diplomacy to cooperate with this new state in economic fields.

Considering the Iranian support to Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, the political and military heir of Ahmad Shah Masood (the legendary Tajik commander of the Northern Alliance) and the former speaker of the lower house during the presence of Western countries in Afghanistan, and the refuge they provided to Osman bin Laden's families and senior Al-Qaeda leaders after the invasion of the United States to Afghanistan in 2001, and now not actively engaging in Panjshir and supporting Ahmad Masood, might benefit future relations between Tehran and Kabul.

Consequently, it is suggested that Iran adopt a balancing approach in the political and security spheres with the new government to prevent increasing instability between the two countries.

Annex I
Maps



Iran and Afghanistan share a 921 km (572 mi) border, which runs from the tripoint with Turkmenistan in the north to the tripoint with Pakistan in the south. Afghanistan has a special geographical position. It connects south Asia and West Asia with Central Asia that is an important thing to understand as South Asian nations are overpopulated and are energy hungry whereas Central Asia has energy resources



Annex II



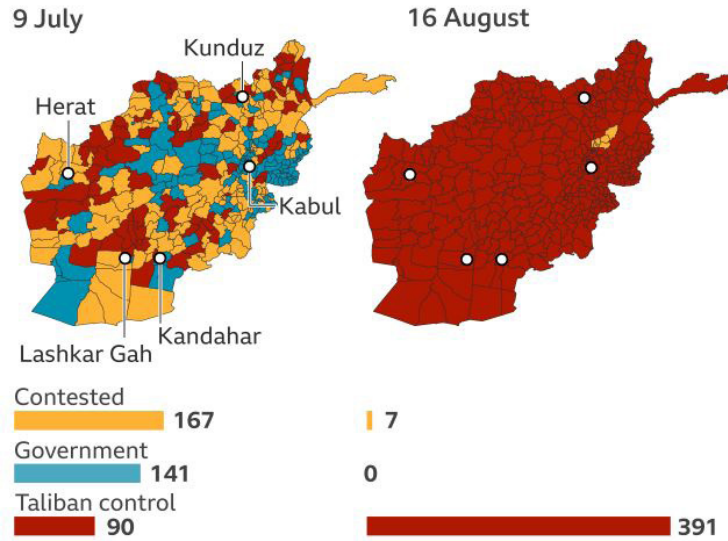
2013-2021



2021

Taliban now control nearly all of the country

Militants made huge gains in just over a month of fighting



Afghanistan flag 2013-2021

The three-color flag was designed by British soldier and diplomat Mark Sykes as a symbol of the 1916 Arab Revolt. This followed the European tri-color shape to distance itself from the Ottoman Empire against whom the revolt was directed at. The White flag embraced by the Taliban has been in use for two decades, since the Taliban's rise to power in the 1990s. When the militant Islamist group first took power in 1996, it is symbolizing "the purity of their faith and government".

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