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Delhi Policy Group

DPG Webinar Series

The Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan: Regional Dynamics and Implications for India

Date: September 10, 2021

Time: 1730-1900 hrs (IST), 0800-0930 hrs (EDT), 2000-2130 hrs (SGT), 1630-1800 hrs (AFT)

Location: Zoom

Event Profile

The speed of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has taken the world by surprise. Chaotic visuals of Kabul airport and the devastating suicide bombing by the Islamic State on August 26 only highlight the uncertainty that confronts Afghanistan. While the people of Afghanistan fear a return to the harsh conditions of the earlier period of Taliban rule, their predicament also has major implications beyond the borders of the country.

The U.S. has faced widespread criticism for an ill-planned withdrawal, that was in part responsible for the collapse of the Afghan National Security Force. Questions are also being raised about the credibility of U.S. commitments to partners and allies. China and Russia are projecting a geopolitical picture of an America in secular decline. While some of this criticism is justified, it also masks the unease among regional powers of the possible implications of Taliban rule.

Much about the future of Afghanistan is uncertain, but there is a real danger of terrorism and Islamist extremism once again spilling over across its borders into neighbouring countries and beyond. Many of Afghanistan's neighbours are happy to see the back of U.S. forces but would have preferred a power-sharing role for Taliban, rather than a completely Taliban-dominated regime which maintains links with terrorist groups and allows them to operate from Afghanistan. The Taliban's relations with neighbours will thus be guided by their respective security interests. A common regional approach towards the situation in Afghanistan would be preferable, but this appears unlikely as there is a wide disparity in the national interests of neighbouring countries.



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In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover, India's options appear to be limited. While some in India have called for an immediate engagement with the Taliban, others have suggested a more cautious wait-and-watch policy. Either way, India needs to adopt a coherent and consistent strategic approach that will guide its policies in the near and medium term. The geopolitical churn in the region could also impact India's bilateral ties with China, Pakistan, Iran and the U.S. These will need to be reassessed.

There are also concerns about the fallout of the situation in Afghanistan on the internal security situation in India. There is reason to worry that situation in Kashmir could worsen, with comparisons being drawn with the early 1990s following the Mujahideen victory over Soviet forces in Afghanistan. While this comparison may not be entirely appropriate, a close watch will have to be kept on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Against the backdrop of recent events and ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan, the Delhi Policy Group will host a webinar to examine the future trajectory of Afghanistan, the role and interests of regional players, and India's future policy options. Speakers at the event will address the following issues:

1. An overview of developments in Afghanistan:
 - Run up to the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and reasons behind the unexpected turn of events in Afghanistan.
 - Visualising the manifestation of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.
 - International fallout, particularly the impact on U.S. credibility and reliability as a partner.
2. The Regional Dynamics:
 - The role played by regional players towards (Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran, Turkey).
 - Implications of the Taliban takeover and the security interests of each of the key players.
3. Implications and Options for India:
 - Possible approaches towards Afghanistan in the near and medium term.
 - Likely impact of the Taliban takeover on India's national security (internal and external).
 - Impact on India's bilateral relations with the U.S., China, Russia and Pakistan.



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Participants

Chair: Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh, *Director General, Delhi Policy Group*

Moderator: Lt Gen D S Hooda (Retd.), *Senior Fellow for Military Strategy, Delhi Policy Group*

Panelists:

Ambassador Jayant Prasad, *Former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan.*

Dr. Omar Sadr, *Professor, American University of Afghanistan*

Dr. Christopher Clary, *Assistant Professor, University at Albany*

Dr. C. Christine Fair, *Professor, Georgetown University*