

# WEEKLY ANALYSIS

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## AN OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.

## In this issue:

- An overview of India's foreign policy towards the Islamic Emirate..... 3
- Introduction..... 3
- Background of Afghan-Indian Relations..... 3
- India's Policy about the Islamic Emirate (before 2021) ..... 4
- India's policy after the rise of the Islamic Emirate..... 5
- Conclusion ..... 6
- Suggestions..... 7
- references..... 8

Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



## AN OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

### INTRODUCTION

India does not have a shared border with Afghanistan, but the country is connected with Afghanistan in several ways, and it has always tried to be involved in the issues of Afghanistan. Therefore, India has had a special foreign policy towards Afghanistan in different periods.

If we look at the India-Afghanistan relations in general, since the invasion of the Soviet Union until the rule of the Republic (2001-2021), the relations between the two countries were not good. But in the 20-year period of the Republic, the relations between India and Afghanistan have become closer.

After the Doha agreement between the Taliban and the United States of America, when the Taliban did not dominate all of Afghanistan, but most of the regions of Afghanistan were under their control. Therefore, India was concerned about this rapid development of the Taliban and decided to talk and meet with the Taliban unofficially. India was thinking that if the Taliban rule the whole of Afghanistan, then there should be an alternative with India in Afghanistan to protect its national interests.

When the Taliban ruled over Afghanistan and the caretaker government of the Islamic Emirate came to power, India used a lot of caution at first and then proceeded with the diplomacy of humanitarian aid and thus started some interaction with the Islamic Emirate.

Looking at the historical path and the importance of India-Afghanistan relations, in this article, we look at, in addition to referring to the history of relations between Afghanistan and India, the past history of India's relations with the Islamic Emirate, existing mistrust and the current state of relations.

### BACKGROUND OF AFGHAN-INDIAN RELATIONS

Historically, India first gained independence from Britain in 1950. In order to strengthen political relations with Afghanistan, India signed a "friendship agreement" with this country. During the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, India supported the Soviet Union and took the Soviet side against the Afghan Mujahideen.

From 1996 to 2001, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, India cut off all diplomatic relations and support with Afghanistan because it considered the Taliban to be a group trained in Pakistan and they believed that Pakistan wanted to provide safe havens for the warring groups in Kashmir under the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan. That is why India cooperated with the Northern Alliance during this period.

When the Taliban regime was overthrown in 2001, India urgently established relations with Afghanistan. First, India opened its embassy in Kabul, and then opened consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar and established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan once again. Also, in 2011, the "Strategic Partnership Agreement" was signed between India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, through which both countries were to cooperate with each other in political, economic, cultural, educational and other fields.



## INDIA'S POLICY ABOUT THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE (BEFORE 2021)

Before the establishment of the Islamic Emirate government, India recognized the Taliban as a group funded by Pakistan. In this regard, Indian writer Sripati Narayanan says: "After the creation of Pakistan, from 1947 to 1992, India's influence in Afghanistan was greater than that of Pakistan. In order to eliminate this influence and to expand its role in Afghanistan, Pakistan was looking for a way, and finally it found this way in the form of the Taliban. The Mujahidin differences among themselves led to Pakistan creating the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It was the same that with the arrival of the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban, India also withdrew from Afghanistan and terminated all relations with Afghanistan and declared the Taliban as a terrorist group.

India's policy regarding the Taliban became more difficult when Indian Airlines flight 814 was hijacked and taken to Kandahar in 1999. In exchange for this hijacked plane and Indians, the government of India was requested to release some people, then India also released three people in exchange for these hostages. Among these three people, two of them were Pakistanis and those who fought for Pakistan and against India in Kashmir. One of them was Masood Azhar, who is the founder of Jaish-e-Mohammed group, and the other was Ahmad Umar Syed Sheikh, who later kidnapped an American journalist, Daniel Pearl, and then killed him.

India believed that the Taliban is a group that is carrying out Pakistan's proxy war in Afghanistan and targeting India's goals in this country, and also provides examples for this: On July 7, 2008, a car bomb exploded at the Indian embassy in Afghanistan. In this explosion, Brigadier Mehta, who had experience in operations against the insurgents in Kashmir and was assisting the Afghan government in training Afghan forces at that time, was killed who was the main target of this explosion. Also, on October 8, 2009, there was another attack on the Indian embassy in Afghanistan, as a result of which 17 people were killed and 63 others were injured. On February 26, 2010, a hotel (guesthouse) in Kabul where mostly Indian doctors and engineers were staying was attacked and as a result 36 people were injured, 18 of whom were Indians.

A discussion in the field of relations with the Islamic Emirate is (The Policy of Zero Tolerance Towards Terrorism), which has two parts:

**First: Diplomatic attacks (Diplomatic Offensive):** The first part of the terrorism policy is to attack terrorists diplomatically; That is, on the one hand, the names of the terrorists should be revealed, and on the other hand, the clients and countries that financed them should be revealed. In this regard, India has a famous saying: (name and shame) that is, it shames the terrorists by revealing their names, as well as diplomatic measures against the terrorists.

**Second: (Use of hard power):** If terrorism cannot be controlled through diplomatic means, then India's policy is to attack them, regardless of which country the terrorists are in; In other words, if the terrorists are in any country and have threatened India, India attacks them in that country. For example: On June 4, 2015, a terrorist group of Myanmar the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) attacked Indian soldiers and fled back to Myanmar; A few days later, India launched airstrikes on them inside Myanmar.

Also, On September 28 and 29, 2016, the surgical strike or attack against Pakistan, in which they carried out airstrikes on Pakistan-ruled Kashmir and entered the territory of Pakistan.



Also in 2019, the Indian air attack on Pakistan's Balakot region in February is worth mentioning. These are the examples that India considers as part of its policy and says that it will never leave the terrorists.

Although there is no accepted international definition of terrorism and each country uses the term terrorists to refer to its enemies and opponents. However, the purpose of the above discussion is that before the rule of the Islamic Emirate, India had a policy of not tolerating terrorism even against the Taliban, and this is the reason that compared to other countries in the region such as Russia, Pakistan, China, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran and other countries, India's relations with the Islamic Emirate are cold. Now that almost two years of the rule of the Islamic Emirate have been completed, India has come to some truths about the Taliban and is gradually changing its policy towards the Islamic Emirate and wants to gradually move towards interaction with the Islamic Emirate. But India is very cautious in this regard.

### **INDIA'S POLICY AFTER THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE**

In 2020 September, Indian Foreign Minister G. Shankar participated for the first time in the meeting held between the Afghan government's negotiating delegation and the Taliban in Doha through a video link. This step was a demonstration that dialogue and interaction with the Taliban is in India's national interest.

Although the Islamic Emirate has repeatedly assured the whole world, including India, in the last two years that the territory of Afghanistan will not be used against any country, nor does it have a policy of hostile behavior towards any country. And based on this assurance, many countries in the region and the world have entered into interaction with the Islamic Emirate; However, India has currently adopted a (watch and wait policy) against the Islamic Emirate. This policy of India is also called strategic patience, that is, India is studying the policy of the Islamic Emirate, and whenever it is sure about the policies of the Islamic Emirate, it will establish official relations with the Islamic Emirate.

India does not yet have official relations with the Islamic Emirate and at the same time feels the need to interact with the Islamic Emirate, so it is currently using two types of diplomacy against the Islamic Emirate, one of which is humanitarian aid diplomacy and the other is regional diplomacy.

India, in 2021, helped 50,000 metric tons of wheat with the Afghan people, 1.6 tons of medicine with Kabul's Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in December of the same year, 5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to prevent the corona virus, and they provided 27 tons of emergency aid to the victims of the Paktika earthquake, including tents and blankets. It can also be said that India's humanitarian aid diplomacy towards the Islamic Emirate has been effective and this has encouraged the Islamic Emirate to work on establishing bilateral relations with India.

In the middle of the year 2022, India sent a technical team to its embassy in Kabul in order to manage India's humanitarian aid to the Islamic Emirate. However, this technical team sometimes meets the leaders of the Islamic Emirate and this has had a positive effect on the relations between the two countries.

Another unannounced policy of India towards the Islamic Emirate is regional diplomacy, which means that India wants to interact with the Islamic Emirate not by itself, but in cooperation with



the countries of the region or to clarify their position about the Islamic Emirate together. In this regard, India has also participated in various regional meetings about the Islamic Emirate and clarified its common position. In 2021, during the Third Regional Security Dialogue was hosted for the first time on November 10th and 11th, in which, apart from Pakistan and China, the national security advisors of the neighboring countries of the region and Afghanistan such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Iran attended, India clarified its position by chairing this meeting and issued a joint statement with other regional countries. In this declaration, India and the countries of the region want an inclusive system in Afghanistan that represents all aspects of the Afghan society. The declaration insisted on respecting human rights in Afghanistan, preventing the threat of terrorism from Afghanistan and that the territory of Afghanistan will not be used against other countries. Also, India participated at the fifth multilateral security meeting on Afghanistan under the auspices of Russia in 2023, which took place in February in Moscow. In this meeting, the representative of India said: India wants a safe, stable and peaceful Afghanistan and the countries of the region should establish security and intelligence cooperation against the terrorist groups emerging from Afghanistan and the region such as Daesh, Al-Qaeda and others. At the same time, India has made statements about Afghanistan in the meetings of the Shanghai Organization and has tried to choose a common position on Afghanistan together with the countries of the region. From this, it is known that India is trying its best to prioritize the regional policy regarding the Islamic Emirate and use caution in directly establishing official relations or interacting with the Islamic Emirate.

## CONCLUSION

India always looks at Afghanistan from Pakistan's point of view; Whenever Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan has increased and its relations with Afghan governments have become closer, India has left the scene and its relations have deteriorated. For example, during the invasion of the Soviet Union, when Pakistan supported the Afghan Mujahideen, India sided with the Soviet Union. And when Pakistan officially recognized the Taliban in the first period of the Islamic Emirate, India cut ties completely at the same level. And then during the Republic, when India's relations with Afghanistan became closer, the relations of the Afghan government with Pakistan were not so good. In general, it can be said that Afghanistan has often become the proxy battlefield between India and Pakistan, and both sides have tried to increase their influence over the Afghan government and target each other's interests in this country. This is the result of the lack of balance in the relations between the two countries and is not in the interest of Afghanistan in any way.

In this way, it can be said that in the face of the interaction between India and the Islamic Emirate, friendly and trusting relations are not visible, but on the contrary, these relations were based on suspicion and the support of other parties against the Islamic Emirate by India. This mistrust led to the fact that India has not yet officially handed over the Afghan embassy in Delhi to the Islamic Emirate, and compared to other regional countries, its relations with the Islamic Emirate are weak and full of mistrust.



India is currently using caution in establishing relations with the Islamic Emirate. On the one hand, India needs to establish relations with the ruling system in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Americans from the region, but on the other hand, it has concerns about the Taliban because they believe that the Taliban are under the support of Pakistan. Therefore, India has adopted a) watch and wait policy (towards the Islamic Emirate and instead of direct interaction, it is conducting its diplomacy towards the Islamic Emirate through humanitarian aid and regional organizations.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

- 1- The Islamic Emirate should assure and convince India in every possible way that its foreign policy is completely independent and based on national and Islamic values and will never look at India through Pakistan's window.
- 2- The Islamic Emirate should try harder to assure India that the territory of Afghanistan will not be used against India.
- 3- The Islamic Emirate should maintain a balance between India and Pakistan in its foreign policy.
- 4- India should also enter into the official framework of maintaining relations with the Islamic Emirate and like other regional countries should hand over the Afghan embassy in Delhi to it so that doubts in the relations between the two countries can be removed.
- 5- Afghan students are facing a lot of problems due to non-issuance of visas by India. India should pay attention to this issue and provide visa facilities to Afghans.
- 6- In order for trade relations between the two countries to be strengthened as before, India should provide visa and travel facilities to Afghan businessmen on the one hand, and on the other hand, trade relations should be expanded at the state level.

**The End**



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