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ANALYZING THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION LED BY TRUMP TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



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Introduction

Without a doubt, Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, after enduring a grueling election campaign against Democrat Kamala Harris, emerged victorious in the 2024 U.S. elections with 312 votes against Harris's 226. This was despite several polls, including those by CNN and PBS, predicting his defeat and Harris's lead.

Now, as Trump is set to return to power as the 47th President of the United States in two months, opponents of the Islamic Emirate are hopeful that his administration will bring about policy changes toward Afghanistan. The question arises: how will Trump interact with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan?

The answer to this question is somewhat clear, as Trump was the one who initiated the first direct negotiations between the U.S. and the Islamic Emirate during his first term. The Doha Agreement was also signed between representatives of the Islamic Emirate and American diplomats during his presidency.

Despite these predictions, what creates ambiguity is the presence of figures in Trump's cabinet who are skeptical of the Islamic Emirate. For instance, Michael Waltz, a U.S. House of Representatives member, is appointed as the National Security Advisor. Waltz, a retired officer of the U.S. National Guard, served in Afghanistan against the Islamic Emirate and has been a critic of Joe Biden's administration regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pete Hegseth, the Secretary of Defense, also fought against the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan and is a critic of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Additionally, Marco Rubio, a U.S. Senate member, is appointed Secretary of State in Trump's administration. Rubio is a staunch critic of the Islamic Emirate and advocates for its inclusion in the terrorism list, considering any expectation of change from the Islamic Emirate as foolish.

Thus, it is evident that Trump has chosen figures skeptical of the Islamic Emirate for his security team and foreign affairs apparatus. Therefore, another question arises: to what extent can Trump's security team influence his previous views towards the Islamic Emirate, and if they succeed, what consequences will it have for the Islamic Emirate and Afghanistan?



FACTORS INFLUENCING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

It's important to note that U.S. foreign policy isn't solely shaped by the President, his security team, or his Secretary of State. Instead, numerous systems and institutions influence these decisions. Here are some key factors:

- i. **The President and His Advisors:** The President can steer political directions using his executive power, playing a crucial role in setting foreign policies and major governmental decisions based on information provided by his security team and advisors.
- ii. **The U.S. Congress:** Comprised of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Congress has responsibilities beyond legislation, including approving budgets, ratifying foreign treaties, confirming appointed ministers, and even the power to override vetoes and impeach the President. These layers and structural diversity ensure that policies are based on thorough research and national interests, rather than individual or party views.
- iii. **Political and Security Structures:** Various entities like the Department of State, and Department of Defense, and intelligence agencies such as the NSA and CIA also play roles in formulating and executing foreign policies.
- iv. **National Interests:** The national interests of the U.S., encompassing national security, economic benefits, and maintaining global influence, significantly impact foreign policy decisions. Every decision is expected to align with and strengthen these interests.

Overall, in the U.S. and other democratic countries, major political decisions aren't solely enacted based on the views and opinions of those in power. Instead, decisions and actions towards a region or country are mostly driven by thorough research and collected information from various departments. Thus, it doesn't matter much what the President or a minister thinks; officials will present their reports based on their findings. Hence, U.S. foreign policy is a complex mix of various factors and entities, not just limited to presidential and security team decisions. Other bodies like Congress and various political and security structures play key roles in shaping the country's foreign policy direction, creating multi-dimensional and nationally interest-driven policies.



U.S. INTERESTS AND GOALS IN THE REGION

One of the key objectives of the U.S. in the region, particularly in Afghanistan, is to curb the economic and political growth of competitors like China. To keep China's economic and political advancements in check, the U.S. needs to maintain strategic control in the region and implement policies according to its interests.

According to repeated statements by American officials and diplomats, a major goal of the U.S. is to prevent anti-U.S. groups from establishing a presence in Afghanistan. Previously, the NATO-led presence in Afghanistan was also justified by the need to counter anti-U.S. groups in the country. The U.S. benefits from preventing the formation of an anti-American regime in Afghanistan. During Trump's first term, his administration facilitated direct negotiations between American representatives and the Islamic Emirate's delegation, aiming to bring the Taliban to power on the condition that Afghanistan posed no threat to the U.S. The officials of the Islamic Emirate have consistently stated that Afghan soil will not be used against any country.

As American troops withdrew from Kabul Airport and the Islamic Emirate forces took control, Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Emirate, addressed the media at the airport, saying that although the U.S. had been defeated militarily in Afghanistan, the Islamic Emirate sought to establish good diplomatic relations with the U.S. and the world. Hence, it appears that the U.S. does not need to disrupt the current situation in Afghanistan from this perspective.

Other objectives, such as countering drug trafficking, arms smuggling, terrorism, and human rights issues, are also cited by Americans in the region. However, these matters seem to be of lesser importance in comparison.

THE POTENTIAL POLICY OF DONALD TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION TOWARD AFGHANISTAN

It is unlikely that Donald Trump's administration would pursue a policy directly aimed at undermining the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the extent of causing significant changes to the current situation in the country. However, how his administration's overall approach toward the Islamic Emirate might influence Afghanistan's political, security, and economic dimensions warrants careful examination.



Political Dimension: The United States' expectations from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan can be broadly categorized into primary and secondary concerns. As previously mentioned, the foremost U.S. concern in the political realm is preventing its rivals, such as China and Russia, from gaining political and economic influence in Afghanistan. This concern might shape a shift in U.S. foreign policy toward Afghanistan. Therefore, the Islamic Emirate must maintain its balanced, economy-focused policies to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a battleground for regional powers and the U.S.

The second major U.S. expectation, as repeatedly expressed by American officials, is ensuring that Afghanistan does not serve as a haven for groups opposed to the United States. The Islamic Emirate has consistently assured that Afghan soil poses no threat to the U.S., alleviating any immediate concerns in this regard.

Other demands, often raised by critics of the Islamic Emirate, include the establishment of an inclusive government representing all Afghans, ensuring women's right to education and employment, and other human rights issues. For example, groups like the "Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan" have expressed hope that a Trump administration would reform U.S. policies toward Afghanistan and prioritize democracy and the rule of law. On November 23, a group of protesting women and civil society activists wrote a heartfelt letter to the U.S. President-elect. They urged him to cancel the Doha Agreement between the U.S. and the Islamic Emirate, believing it has been disastrous for the people of Afghanistan. They hope he will take this action in his first days in office.

Although these demands have been repeatedly rejected by the Islamic Emirate, if such expectations are formally raised by the U.S., they could potentially be used as pressure points against the Emirate, causing some unease. However, it is unlikely that these demands would hold enough significance for the U.S. to dramatically alter the current state of affairs in Afghanistan.

Security Dimension: Donald Trump's potential victory in the 2024 U.S. elections has created a sense of optimism among opponents of the Islamic Emirate. For instance, General Sami Sadat, a former military official of the previous Afghan government and leader of an opposition group against the Islamic Emirate, has reportedly sought cooperation with Trump's campaign team, advocating for support against the Islamic Emirate if Trump wins.



Given these dynamics and considering the presence of individuals critical of the Islamic Emirate within Trump's defense and security circles, the U.S. might use Afghan opposition groups as leverage to pressure the Islamic Emirate into meeting its demands. However, direct military intervention in Afghanistan seems unlikely.

At the same time, if Afghanistan becomes a stage for competition between the U.S. and its economic and military rivals, such as China and Russia, the possibility of external support for the Islamic Emirate's opponents to destabilize the country cannot be ruled out. In such a scenario, a Trump administration could indirectly contribute to insecurity in Afghanistan.

Economic Dimension: Donald Trump's economic policies toward Afghanistan would likely reflect his broader, unique worldview and approach. Trump has frequently emphasized that the United States should not provide unlimited financial aid to other countries, instead focusing on domestic priorities. This could mean a reduction in U.S. economic assistance to Afghanistan.

For instance, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reported that Washington provided approximately \$21 billion in aid to Afghanistan over the past three years. This financial support has played a significant role in stabilizing the country under the Islamic Emirate.

However, alongside Afghanistan's strategic geopolitical importance, the country's rich natural resources could incentivize continued U.S. diplomatic and economic engagement. Afghanistan is home to vast reserves of copper, lithium, and other valuable minerals, which could attract private investment during Trump's second term.

A Trump administration might encourage American companies to invest in Afghanistan's natural resource sectors by offering financial incentives and facilities. Such a strategy could benefit both sides: the U.S. could exploit Afghanistan's natural wealth, while the Islamic Emirate could secure an additional revenue stream to support the country's development.

CONCLUSION

With Donald Trump's potential return to power in the coming months and the formation of a new U.S. administration, his interactions with the Islamic Emirate and policies toward Afghanistan could have far-reaching implications for the country's



political, security, and economic dimensions. During his first term, Trump initiated the first direct negotiations with the Islamic Emirate, which led to the signing of the Doha Agreement. However, the presence of figures within Trump's circle who hold skeptical views of the Islamic Emirate—such as Michael Waltz, Pete Hegseth, and Marco Rubio—could influence Trump's stance and result in increased political pressure on the Emirate. That said, it is unlikely that there will be any revolutionary shifts in the U.S.'s overall policy toward Afghanistan.

From a security perspective, the possibility of direct U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan is virtually nonexistent. However, the Trump administration might use opponents of the Islamic Emirate as a tool to exert pressure. Furthermore, if Afghanistan becomes a battleground for competition between the U.S. and its economic and military rivals, such as China and Russia, there is a likelihood that the Emirate's opponents could receive external support, potentially destabilizing the country—a scenario that has already caused significant harm to Afghanistan in the past.

Trump's economic policy toward Afghanistan will likely emphasize reduced aid and a shift toward private investment. Trump has consistently advocated for cutting financial assistance to other countries, and his administration might scale back U.S. economic aid to Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan's rich natural resources could still attract private investments. The Trump administration may encourage American companies to invest in Afghanistan's economic sectors—particularly its mining industry—by offering financial incentives and other facilities. Such an approach could enable the U.S. to exploit Afghanistan's natural wealth while also providing the Islamic Emirate with a source of revenue.

In summary, Trump's second-term policies toward Afghanistan are likely to reflect a combination of U.S. economic and security interests. These policies might lead to shifts in the Islamic Emirate's approach to international relations while also creating opportunities for economic development through private investments. Although revolutionary changes in Afghanistan appear unlikely given the broader structures shaping U.S. foreign policy, the new administration could bring challenges and pressures to bear on the Islamic Emirate in line with American interests.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The United States should adopt a policy toward Afghanistan that respects the sovereignty and interests of the Afghan people, rather than focusing solely on advancing American interests.
2. The Islamic Emirate should work proactively to create favorable conditions for attracting foreign investments, including those from American investors, to mitigate potential future challenges and promote economic growth in Afghanistan.
3. The Islamic Emirate should maintain a balanced foreign policy with neighboring and regional countries while preserving active and constructive diplomatic relations. This approach will help ensure that Afghanistan does not become a battleground for geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China.

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