

Headlines:

- **U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan Uzbekistan Create Platform for Regional Cooperation**
- **India is Scrambling to Get on the Taliban's Good Side**
- **China Weighs Risk and Reward in a Taliban-Led Afghanistan**

Details:

U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan Uzbekistan Create Platform for Regional Cooperation

The United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan formed a new diplomatic platform to support peace and stability in Afghanistan and foster regional trade and business ties, the State Department said Friday as U.S. troops continue their planned withdrawal from the country. "The parties consider long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan critical to regional connectivity and agree that peace and regional connectivity are mutually reinforcing," it said in a statement. The parties agreed to meet in coming months. [Source: Reuters]

It is interesting to see both US and China jostling with the Central Asian states to stabilize Afghanistan once the US forces withdraw. However, what is puzzling is Pakistan's role. Pakistan claims to be China's friend but in reality is working with the US to address Afghanistan's security concerns to Central Asian states. China must be anxious about this new diplomatic platform, as it can easily be exploited to export Taliban's style of militancy into Xinjiang thereby potentially disrupting China's One Belt One Road project.

India Is Scrambling to Get on the Taliban's Good Side

India is worried. As the last U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan, there is palpable fear in New Delhi that the return of the Taliban to power might mean the return of Pakistan-funded jihadi groups that have a history of attacking India. The growing possibility that Indian troops might be called on to enter Afghanistan sparks the greatest fear of all. The Indian government is not alone. Russia, Iran, and China are also worried about spillover from an extended Afghan civil war, including a large-scale refugee crisis. India, however, is in the most disadvantageous position. While Russia, China, and Iran started talking to the Taliban years ago, to be better able to address their concerns directly with the group if it returned to power, India stuck to its principled opposition to the group and stood by its allies in the Afghan government. Now, as a civil war in Afghanistan seems imminent and even Indian experts agree that the Afghan government's writ will be limited to urban centers, New Delhi has reportedly been scrambling to send reconciliatory messages to the Taliban—messages that have thus far gone unanswered. The Afghan government, meanwhile,

is none too pleased with the reports and is appealing for India to provide more support at its hour of need. [Source: Foreign Policy]

There are two major reasons India fears a Taliban takeover of Kabul. First, historically Afghanistan has served as a conduit for Afghan dynasties to launch Jihad into India and capture significant territory. Ghazni, Ghauri and Durrani sultanates have left an indelible fear on the Hindu elite, which continues to the present day. Second, the return of Taliban means the return of Pakistan's strategic depth, which forces India's military planners to rethink warfare between India and Pakistan.

China Weighs Risk and Reward in a Taliban-Led Afghanistan

The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and seemingly unstoppable march of the Taliban opens a strategic door to China that is laden with both risk and opportunity. China abhors a power vacuum, especially on its borders, and maintaining stability after decades of war in its western neighbour will be Beijing's paramount consideration. But if stability requires a Taliban-dominated government, an equal concern would be the support such an administration might provide to Muslim separatists in China's Xinjiang region. "For China, the risk does not come from who holds the power in Afghanistan, but from the risk of persistent instability," Fan Hongda, a Middle East specialist at the Shanghai International Studies University, told AFP. Afghanistan shares only a small 76-kilometre (47-mile) border with China, at high altitude and without a road crossing point. But the frontier is a big concern because it runs alongside Xinjiang, and Beijing fears its neighbour being used as a staging ground for Uyghur separatists from the sensitive region. "China can deal with the Taliban... but they still find the Taliban's religious agenda and motivations inherently discomfoting," said Andrew Small, author of *The China–Pakistan Axis*. [Source: France 24]

The return of the Taliban has shaken great and regional powers alike. America, Russia, China and India constantly fret about Taliban victory. Can one imagine what would happen if Pakistan annexed Afghanistan and declared the establishment of the rightly guided Caliphate? In a short span of time, the Caliphate would expand into Central Asia thereby eliminating American, Russian and Chinese primacy. The nascent Islamic state would be too much for India and Iran, and will be able to project power into the heart of the Middle East. The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «لتخرجن من خراسان راية سوداء حتى تربط خيولها بهذا الزيتون الذي بين بيت لها وحستا» "Surely black flags will appear from the Khorasan until the people (under the leadership of this flag) will tie their horses with the olive trees between Bait-e-Lahya and Harasta (names of places in Jerusalem)." [Nuaim Ibn Hammad in Kitab Al-Fitan].