

Q Explain the possible threats and opportunities for Pakistan created by re-emergence of Taliban regime in Afghanistan?

Introduction: Possible threats and opportunities for Pakistan created by re-emergence of Taliban regime in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a war torn country for the past several decades. Taliban first came into power in 1996, following the Soviet Union's led civil war and Pakistan was the first country state to recognize Afghan government. Now the re-emergence of Taliban government in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S forces in 2021 poses both challenges as well as opportunities for Pakistan. Now it is a responsibility of the Taliban regime to transform challenges into opportunities in order to steer Pakistan as well as the whole region on the path of progression, prosperity and peace.

"Politics is the Art of the Possible".

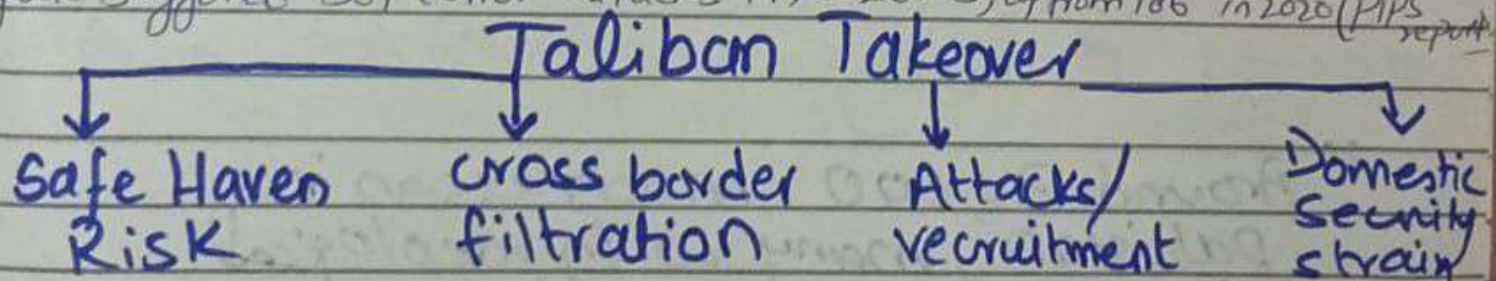
~ Otto von Bismark

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a 2600 km porous border (Durand line) with dozens of formal and informal crossing points, which makes Pakistan more dependent on the peace in Afghanistan as it also shapes Pakistan's security, economy and diplomacy.

1. Possible Threats for Pakistan from re-emergence of Taliban Regime:

(i) Revival of cross-border-Terrorism:

As seen from the history, increase in Afghanistan conflict intensity and instability have always resulted with surges in attacks along Pakistan's western belt. Hence there is a high chance of elevating the threat spectrum of terrorism inside KPK, Balochistan and major urban centers. Pak suffered 389 terror attacks in 2023, up from 186 in 2020 (PIPS report).



"Security is not a product, but a process"

~ Bruce Schneier

~~(2) Ideological Radicalization~~

(ii) Border Management and Refugee influx

The instability in Afghanistan causes its population to migrate into neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan, which ultimately causes a strain on the existing resources of Pakistan due to increased refugee influx and eventually leads to security risks.

"Pakistan hosts 3.7 million Afghan refugees".

~ UNHCR 2023

(iii) Ideological Radicalization and Extremism:-

The narrative of Taliban inspires the local radicals in Pakistan, hence expansion of extremist mindset occurs among the Pakistan's population.

"Around 30,000 madrassas in Pakistan, many with ideological leanings towards Taliban remain unregulated".

~ Brookings - 2022

(iv) Strained Relations with the West :-

Pakistan was the first country to recognize Taliban's government in 1996 and till now, it has diplomatic relations with Afghanistan which causes Pakistan to face western sanctions and isolation on international arena, that eventually results in Pakistan's economic pressure.

"Pakistan lost \$33 billion in trade opportunities due to its association with Taliban."

~ World Bank (2022)

(v) Regional Isolation and Strategic Dilemmas :-

The Pakistan's tilt towards Kabul and engagement with the Taliban's regime causes results in suspicion among Central Asian Republics and western pressure on Pakistan in the form of sanctions and isolation of not just Pakistan but Afghanistan also.

"Geopolitics has no vacuum; when one power retreats, another rushes in."

~ Henry Kissinger

2. Possible opportunities for Pakistan:

(i) Reduced Indian Influence & Strategic Leverage for Pakistan:

With the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, in 2021, India evacuated almost all of its Afghan projects, shrinking its footprint in Afghanistan drastically, which in return helped Pakistan gain strategic leverage. India had invested **\$3 billion** in Afghanistan infrastructure (roads, dams, parliament buildings) before Taliban takeover in 2021.

"In Afghanistan, every exit is an entry somewhere else"

~ Robert Kaplan

(ii) Enhanced Regional connectivity and Trade:

The stability in Afghanistan is crucial for extension of CPEC in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has According to US geological survey Afghanistan has **\$1 trillion** worth of untapped mineral reserves, which can prove to change the destiny of not just Afghanistan but also Pakistan through CPEC extension.

making Pakistan a gateway to Central Asia.

"Geography is a destiny in South Asia"

~ Lord Curzon

(iii) Countering Separatism in Balochistan

With the increased Taliban cooperation, there will be a reduction in cross border support for insurgents in ~~Afghanistan~~ Balochistan, leading to overall peace and stability in Pakistan.

"Pakistan claims Afghan soil was previously used to support Baluch insurgents."

~ ISPR report 2021

(iv) Religious and Cultural Leverage:-

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are 99.1% Muslim majority societies with share ethnic Pashtun ties.

This shared Islamic and cultural identity can motivate Pakistan to act as a mediator for the Global

2 Recognition of Taliban regime.

"Shared faith is not always unity, but it can be a bridge"

~ Allama Iqbal.

(v) Geopolitical Bargaining Chip:-

Having ties with Taliban will make Pakistan an interlocutor between Afghanistan and US, China and Russia which will help Pakistan improve its global diplomatic image and also it will increase Pakistan's own diplomatic leverage with China, Russia and US. Its Pakistan facilitated **US-Taliban Doha Talks (2019-20)** enhancing its global diplomatic role.

"Pakistan holds the key to Kabul's Doors"

~ Ahmad Rashid

Conclusion:-

Afghanistan under Taliban will create threats as well as several opportunities. Pakistan need to create a carefully balanced Afghan Policy to determine its fate with Afghanistan under Tal