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Taliban and Tajikistan relationship, challenges and obstacles, perspective

Relations between Tajikistan and the Taliban will probably remain somewhat cold. But practical engagement in trade and acceptance of reality by neighbors, as well as important foreign partners, may reduce broader security and political frictions.



During the Taliban's dominance in most areas of Afghanistan, the Tajik government did not recognize the Taliban, and Tajikistan fully supported the Rabbani government. Relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan began in 1992. Afghanistan had an embassy in Dushanbe and a consulate in Khorog. Tajikistan had an embassy in Kabul and a consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Faizabad, and Kunduz.

Disputes and threats

The establishment of intra-Afghan dialogue is an important basis for achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan

In the last three years, Tajikistan has not given any legitimacy to the Taliban government. But consular services have not been stopped.

The Afghan embassy in Dushanbe, refused to accept the Taliban in coordination with “Amrullah Saleh”, the first vice president of the former president.

Dushanbe was in severe tension with the Taliban, but it seems that Tajikistan has agreed to accept a Taliban diplomat in the Afghan embassy in Dushanbe. According to many, the definite support for the unity and independence of Afghanistan is always at the top of the foreign policy of the Republic of Tajikistan, so it does not support the division of Afghanistan.

In a realistic view of the nature of the crisis in Afghanistan, the crisis is beyond the borders of this country. So, to solve it, in addition to the national agreement, an agreement should be reached at the regional and international levels.

The need to form an inclusive government in Afghanistan is the focus of constant talks between Tajik authorities and regional and neighboring countries. In this regard, the President of Tajikistan considers the establishment of intra-Afghan dialogue and the establishment of an inclusive government with the participation of representatives of all ethnic groups, nationalities, and political and social groups as an important basis for achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

After the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, some military, opposition, and political leaders opposed to the Taliban, took refuge in Tajikistan and lived in the country. From Dushanbe’s point of view, the elimination of Tajiks and the marginalization of Tajiks by the Taliban pose a security threat to Dushanbe.

Emomali Rahmon announced in August 2021 that the country’s Tajik ethnic minority with 46% of the total population should be given a “deserving role”.

From this point of view, the continued presence of Tajiks in the future composition of the final government in Afghanistan is considered an important variable. Tajiks are the second most important ethnic group in Afghanistan, mostly located in the northeast, west, and the big cities of the country. This is while the Taliban considers these requests illegitimate or interference in its internal affairs.

Previously, Tajikistan considered Afghanistan as one of its most important partners in the fight against extremism and terrorism. The national security of the Republic of Tajikistan is tied to the security and stability of Afghanistan. The issue of ensuring security and

stability in northern Afghanistan is an important component of Tajikistan's foreign policy. Most of the 1,344-kilometer Tajik-Afghan border runs through a mountainous region. Afghanistan is the largest drug producer in the world. The border between the two countries is a major route for drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe. Drug trafficking is still a threat and monitoring is difficult. On the other hand, the Taliban authorities have declared their commitment to fight drug cultivation and trafficking and demand restraint and non-interference. ISIS-K considers northern Afghanistan as a base to expand its presence in Central Asia. In the past years, contagious symptoms such as rockets launched from Afghanistan on the Tajik border by ISIS-k and clashes on the Tajik-Afghan border have been seen. ISIS-k is still an important threat to the security of Tajikistan.

Previously, the Taliban accused Afghanistan's neighboring countries, including Tajikistan, of supporting ISIS-k, or mentioned the cooperation between Pakistan and Tajikistan in the development of ISIS-k.

Also, the danger of Jamaat Ansarullah and Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Tajikistan can appear as a powerful weapon to put pressure on Tajikistan.

In 2022, Rahmon claimed that there were more than 40 training camps for militants near the southern borders of Central Asia. In response to the security concerns of the Tajik authorities from Afghanistan, the Taliban has repeatedly said that the concerns are unfounded and that Afghanistan will not pose a threat to other countries.

Earlier, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon asked the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to create a security belt around Afghanistan. This has caused this organization to complete the plan to strengthen the borders of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Also, the concern of "increasing terrorist threats" has caused Tajikistan to hold joint military exercises with Russia "against any possible threat" on the border with Afghanistan.

In addition, Tajikistan's concerns have made it even more opposed to the participation of the Taliban in the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. However, the Taliban believes that their absence will cause disharmony in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

The Taliban previously demanded the return of military planes and military helicopters from Tajikistan, which was not agreed to.

From Tajikistan's point of view, one of the ways to normalize the situation in Afghanistan is to pay serious attention to solving the social and economic problems of this country.

Afghanistan can still become a source of massive migration and instability in Tajikistan. One of the serious threats to the flow of migrants is the infiltration of militia forces affiliated with terrorist groups among the refugees.

The Taliban has been considered a terrorist organization by Tajikistan since March 2006. From August 2021 onwards, Tajikistan sees the Taliban as a serious threat to its national interests and regional security. Secular Tajikistan sees the fundamentalist Taliban as a threat. Also, the Taliban and its social media channels strongly criticize the Tajikistan government. Certainly, if the Taliban creates an umbrella for foreign extremist groups, it can be dangerous for Tajikistan.

Reducing tension and expanding cooperation opportunities

The Persian language is widely used in both countries, and the number of Tajiks in Afghanistan is more than in Tajikistan. The joint threat of ISIS-k to create a better relationship between Dushanbe and Kabul can encourage security cooperation. Previously, two high-ranking officials of the Taliban, especially Qari Fasihuddin, had traveled to Dushanbe in July 2024.

According to some sources, some agreements between Tajikistan and the Taliban in the past years regarding the deployment of several diplomats from Kabul in Dushanbe city, the cessation of the activities of forces opposing the caretaker government in Tajikistan, the limitation of the Taliban opposition, the transfer of Tajikistan's electricity to Afghanistan, and border disputes have been made.

Tajikistan, which previously opened border markets between the two countries, has revived the activity of border markets with Afghanistan and has established several border checkpoints along the border with Afghanistan.

Also, while the Afghanistan Electricity Company under the Taliban extended the contract to extend the import of electricity from Tajikistan to 2024, Tajikistan is going to create a logistics zone on its border with Afghanistan.

Tajikistan has decided to relaunch the "Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan" (TAT) railway project with the support of South Korea. In addition, Tajikistan is interested in logistics investment in Chabahar port and plans to launch the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) road corridor. In addition, Tajikistan demanded to start the practical work of road and railway construction along the "China-Tajikistan-Afghanistan trade corridor".

Afghanistan is among the major trade partners of Tajikistan. In the first half of 2024, Tajikistan's agricultural exports to Afghanistan increased by 85%. Afghanistan and

Tajikistan can complement each other. Still, the two countries can cooperate to use the water of the Amu River.

Perspective

Recently, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister has said that the political relations of the Islamic Emirate with Tajikistan are improving and there have been frequent exchanges of representatives between the two sides and there are significant differences compared to the past. However, relations between Tajikistan and the Taliban will probably remain somewhat cold. But practical engagement in trade and acceptance of reality by neighbors, as well as important foreign partners, may reduce broader security and political frictions.

Negotiations to establish relations between Tajikistan and the Taliban with China's mediation in areas such as military and anti-terrorism cooperation and security and defense issues have also had relative results. The Afghan embassy has a relationship with the Taliban. Suppose the diplomatic staff of Tajikistan is completed to improve relations with the Taliban in Afghanistan. In that case, it indicates that Tajikistan is gradually taking steps towards reducing tension and positive interaction with the Taliban.

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