

Journal of Peace Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly



Journal Homepage: <https://www.icpsnet.org/journal-of-peace-studies>

Engagement Without Recognition: India's Recalibrated Afghanistan Policy Under Taliban 2.0

Shah Alam Shaikh, PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

To cite this article: Alam Shaikh, S. (2026), "Engagement Without Recognition: India's Recalibrated Afghanistan Policy Under Taliban 2.0", *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol 33, Issue 1, 66-82, January - March 2026. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20083298



© 2026 Published by Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), New Delhi.



Published: 31 March 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Vol. 33, Issue 1, January - March 2026



CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES, NEW DELHI, 110070
Website: www.icpsnet.org

Engagement Without Recognition: India's Recalibrated Afghanistan Policy Under Taliban 2.0

Shah Alam Shaikh*

Abstract

With the emergence of the new Taliban government, India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has undergone a pragmatic recalibration, shifting from disengagement to cautious re-engagement. In its outreach to the new Taliban government, New Delhi has managed to restore diplomatic relations with Kabul without formally recognising it. This changed approach reflects New Delhi's prioritisation of core interests such as counterterrorism, regional stability, and the safeguarding of its long-standing developmental investments in Afghanistan. Furthermore, India has maintained strategic cooperation with regional and major powers, such as Russia, to ensure that its diplomatic gains in Afghanistan are consolidated. This kind of multivectoral policy demonstrates India's efforts to reconcile normative concerns with strategic considerations through maintaining relations with the Taliban without formally recognising it. This article analyses the rationale and implications of India's policy of engagement short of recognition by using a descriptive-analytical methodology and content analysis, drawing on official statements, Taliban pronouncements, UN Security Council reports, and other scholarly works.

Keywords: India, Afghanistan, Indo-Afghan relations, Afghan Taliban



Introduction

A f g h a n i s t a n occupies a strategic position in the geopolitics of South Asia. For India, it is not just a neighbouring country,

but also a key arena for shaping the regional balance of power, particularly in countering the geopolitical influence of Pakistan and China. In terms of historical and cultural relations, the Indo-Afghan engagements have existed since

**Shah Alam Shaikh, PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations,
Jadavpur University, Kolkata.*

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20083298

antiquity, rooted in several shared linkages, such as the Indo-Aryan connections, the Gandharan civilisation, and the spread of Buddhism. Being located on the intersections of vital trade routes, Afghanistan was regarded as a cultural corridor linking South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia.¹ It is this geostrategic location which has made it a focal point of imperial competition, particularly during the 19th-century rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, referred to as the "Great Game" in world politics. Afghanistan finally gained independence in 1919 after three Anglo-Afghan Wars (with British India).

India and Afghanistan signed a Friendship Treaty in 1950, which marked the formalisation of their bilateral ties. These engagements were further strengthened by India's developmental investments in the country during the Soviet-backed government of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) between 1979 and 89. However, the withdrawal of Soviet forces after a decade-long war against the United States-backed and Pakistan-trained *Afghan Mujahideen* saw the country descend into civil war in the early 1990s. This anarchy resulted in the rise of Pakistan-supported Taliban in 1994, a hardcore Deobandi Sunni Islamist and predominantly Pashtun

militant group led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, a veteran of Afghan Jihad. The group consolidated its rule over Afghanistan by 1996, which lasted merely five years before being removed from power after the US invaded the country in 2001. For Pakistan, as the group's external patroniser, the Taliban's emergence gave Islamabad a considerable degree of influence in shaping the developments in Kabul. It allowed Pakistan's military establishment to leverage Afghanistan in pursuing its strategic depth doctrine, which carried direct implications for Kashmir, where it sponsored proxy terrorism.² These developments deeply impacted India's influence in the country, which was further aggravated by its backing of the Ahmad Shah Masoud-led Northern Alliance in the civil war context, making it the second country to do so, after Iran.

India's policy during the first Taliban regime (1996–2001) was characterised by non-recognition and strategic distancing, evidenced by closing its Kabul embassy shortly after the Taliban established its Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. It was primarily driven by two reasons: firstly, due to the Taliban's deep ties with Pakistan, and secondly, its association with extremist and terrorist networks, which extended to

ENGAGEMENT WITHOUT RECOGNITION: INDIA'S RECALIBRATED AFGHANISTAN POLICY UNDER TALIBAN 2.0

Pakistan-backed Kashmir-focused insurgent groups. Additionally, the Taliban's rigid interpretation and implementation of Islamic Sharia law, which deprived Afghan women of their basic rights, including undermining girls' education, stood in sharp contrast to India's democratic values. Yet, during this phase of formal disengagement, India adopted an indirect strategy by cultivating ties with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, as alluded to above, and providing extensive yet covert support between 1996 and 2001. It included military, medical, logistical, and financial aid, which was largely coordinated through Tajikistan.³

Though the Taliban's ouster in 2001 saw India rapidly rebuild its relations with the new Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai, emerging as its major development partner and reasserting its influence in the regional landscape,⁴ the group's return in August 2021 following the withdrawal of the US forces marked a critical turning point in New Delhi's Kabul policy. Initially, India responded by closing its embassy and evacuating personnel amid the collapse of the previous Afghan government. However, rather than remaining in prolonged disengagement, India has since demonstrated the capacity for policy adaptation, with its approach

evolving into a calibrated yet cautious re-engagement. This shift is reflected in the restoration of a limited diplomatic presence in Kabul and the exchange of envoys, signalling a functional reset in relations, albeit without extending formal recognition to the Taliban government. As such, India's policy reflects neither passivity nor compulsion, but a pragmatic effort to reinsert itself into Afghanistan's evolving political landscape while safeguarding its core interests. This engagement is driven by New Delhi's strategic priorities, including counterterrorism, regional stability, and the protection of its earlier developmental investments in Afghanistan. Concurrently, it has sought to maintain its influence by preserving relations with actors such as Iran and Russia, which play significant roles in Afghanistan's geopolitical environment alongside China and Pakistan (till a few years ago).

As such, a strategic duality has long characterised India's approach towards Afghanistan. On the one hand, realism emphasises the imperatives of security, power, and survival within an anarchic international system, framing India's engagement with the Taliban as a rational response to shifting regional dynamics.⁵ On the other hand, constructivism highlights the importance of identity, norms, and

values, which help explain India's continued reluctance to formally recognise a regime whose ideological orientation diverges from its democratic principles.⁶ This interplay between realist and constructivist considerations is central to understanding India's current policy. Against this backdrop, India's Afghanistan policy is best understood not as a reaction to external pressure, but as a deliberate strategy of engagement without recognition. By reopening channels of communication and restoring a diplomatic presence while withholding legitimacy, India has sought to "get its act right" in navigating the complexities of Taliban rule. This article examines this evolving approach through the lenses of realism and constructivism, analysing how India has recalibrated its policy to adapt to new geopolitical realities while preserving its long-term strategic interests.

India's interest in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's location at the intersection of South and Central Asia not only makes it a gateway to landlocked inner Asian republics but is also strategically significant to both global and regional powers, including India. India's interests in the country primarily concern security, economic interests, regional

balance, and diplomacy. A stable Afghanistan with a functional government is therefore essential to New Delhi's strategic interests, as any instability there carries both direct and indirect implications for the region and beyond, including India's internal security and regional trade. In this context, India's approach reflects a pragmatic effort to safeguard its interests through calibrated engagement rather than disengagement, even in the absence of formal recognition of the Taliban regime.

Firstly, New Delhi considers Kabul as a strategic site to counter Islamabad, shaped by its interest in ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a platform for anti-India terrorist activities, extremist networks and offsetting Islamabad's so-called 'strategic depth' policy through its presence in the country.⁷ However, this objective is no longer pursued through overt alignment with any particular regime but, driven by realism, is maintained through relevance and influence by engaging with the existing power structure. Secondly, it has direct economic interconnections, with Afghanistan serving as a potential trade and transport bridge to the hydrocarbon-rich regions of Central Asia.⁸ This necessitates maintaining channels of communication with the Afghan Taliban and restoring a

limited diplomatic presence to allow India to preserve its long-term economic and strategic stakes in the region despite the absence of formal diplomatic recognition. As such, India's Afghan policy demonstrates how Afghanistan continues to function as its strategic buffer space, where considerations of security, power, and regional balance guide engagement with the Taliban government.

After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks on American soil, removed Mullah Omar's IEA government and reestablished a new republican government under President Hamid Karzai, extensive international assistance flowed to the country to rebuild its economy, infrastructure and military.⁹ India leveraged its anti-Taliban policy under which it had backed the Northern Alliance, to reestablish its relations with the new republican government and reopened its Kabul embassy within two months of the Taliban's removal in December 2001. It emerged as a major international supporter of the Karzai government, aligning itself with the broader international commitment to Afghanistan's unity, integrity, and prosperity. New Delhi relied heavily on a soft-power approach and extended generous developmental

assistance over the next two decades to help rebuild the war-torn country. By the time Taliban returned in 2021, it had spent over \$3 billion in Afghan's reconstruction, which positioned it as Afghanistan's major development partner and the largest regional and fifth largest international donor to Afghanistan.

Some of India's notable projects in Afghanistan included the provision of food aid under the United Nations World Food Programme in 2002, the launch of the Indian Medical Mission (IMM) in the same year to provide healthcare assistance, and the Salma Dam project, later renamed the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam in 2016, initiated in 2004 to support electricity generation. In 2009, Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee inaugurated the Zaranj-Delaram Highway to expand trade connectivity. India also constructed the Afghan Parliament Building in 2009 as a symbol of democratic partnership and, in 2014, supported the establishment of the Afghan Agriculture Science and Technology University, the country's only agricultural university. Through these efforts, India contributed to governance, trained and supported security personnel, expanded education and healthcare services, improved transportation and

communication infrastructure, enhanced telecommunications, and strengthened power systems. While these initiatives were framed in terms of development and capacity-building, they also reflected India's long-term strategic objectives in Afghanistan.¹⁰

When the Taliban returned to power in 2021 with explicit support from Pakistan's military establishment, it was perceived by many in Islamabad as a vindication of its regional policy seeking 'strategic depth' in Kabul. This caused visible strategic anxieties in capitals far and near, including New Delhi, given its previous policy of perceiving the group with suspicion due to its deep ties with both Pakistan's intelligence and Pakistan-based India-focussed terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad. These groups have been involved in sustained terrorism against India, including orchestrating attacks such as in Mumbai (2008), Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019) and Pahalgam (2025).¹¹ These precedents reinforced apprehensions in New Delhi that Afghanistan could once again emerge as a haven for anti-India terrorist networks, thereby posing risks to the security and stability of Jammu and Kashmir.¹²

In its initial response, India, like during the Taliban's previous power

consolidation, closed its Kabul embassy and evacuated its diplomats, civilians, several foreign nationals, besides many from Afghan minorities, including Hindus and Sikhs, under 'Operation Devshakti'.¹³ Analysts suggest that Taliban 2.0 represents both continuity and change when compared to its earlier iteration. While there have been concerns about the Taliban's governance, which has been characterised by authoritarianism, brutal oppression of women, repression of minorities and cultural intolerance,¹⁴ the Taliban 2.0 has been able to navigate the regional geopolitics in a better way, even as formal recognition has eluded it, save for Moscow. Giustozzi (2019) argues that the Taliban has evolved towards a more centralised and pragmatic governance structure, particularly in its approach to international diplomacy and regional engagement post-2001. Similarly, Rubin (2013) observes that the movement has acquired greater political awareness during its years of isolation and is more inclined to seek external legitimacy, even while maintaining restrictive domestic policies. This dual character of being externally pragmatic and internally rigid helps explain both the Taliban's outreach to India and New Delhi's cautious but deliberate response. Accordingly, India has opted to engage selectively

with the Taliban to secure its interests, preserve its developmental footprint, and influence outcomes wherever possible. This reflects a strategic shift from reactive apprehension to managed engagement, demonstrating how India has adapted to the realities of Taliban rule while maintaining both its security priorities and normative reservations.

In such a context, the significance of India's previous developmental investments has acquired renewed relevance in the post-2021 Afghanistan. Rather than abandoning its developmental footprint following the Taliban's return, India has sought to preserve and protect these assets through calibrated engagement with the new regime. These developmental investments now function not only as instruments of soft power but also as strategic leverage in its re-engagement with Afghanistan. The continuation of humanitarian assistance and limited cooperation with the Taliban reflects an effort to sustain India's presence and goodwill among the Afghan population, even in the absence of formal diplomatic recognition. While India had previously sought to prevent the resurgence of fundamentalist groups like the Taliban, its current approach acknowledges the political reality of the Taliban's control and hence prioritises safeguarding its long-term

investments and interests. In this sense, India's use of soft power has evolved into a pragmatic tool for maintaining relevance under altered circumstances: companies from a democracy investing in another.¹⁵

At the same time, these initiatives continue to serve broader realist objectives, including balancing Pakistan's influence and preventing Afghanistan from being used as a strategic space against India.¹⁶ Thus, India's investment strategy in Afghanistan reflects a continuity of purpose but an adaptation in approach, where earlier developmental engagement now underpins a policy of cautious re-engagement with the Taliban. This demonstrates how India has recalibrated its tools of influence, using its developmental legacy as a foundation to "get its act right" in navigating the complexities of Taliban-led Afghanistan while maintaining a position short of formal recognition.

India's Regional Challenges in Afghanistan

The withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban government created a significant geopolitical churn in the region. The resultant vacuum led China, Russia, Pakistan,

and Iran to seek a role in the country. China became an early mover and wooed the Taliban regime by proposing to extend the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, thereby strengthening its strategic dominance in South and Central Asia.¹⁷

For India, which withdrew from Kabul by closing its embassy and evacuating diplomatic staff, this was a challenge, as this absence could be construed as a handover of its carefully nurtured diplomatic capital and popular goodwill in the country to its competing powers, such as China and Pakistan. Despite their substantive economic relations, with annual bilateral trade exceeding \$150 billion as of 2025, India and China remain geopolitical competitors with deeply contested borders, along which there have been multiple confrontations over the years. For instance, in 2020, their militaries clashed in Ladakh's Galwan Valley with casualties on both sides – 20 Indian and four Chinese, even as independent assessments put China's casualty count up to 44. This border clash also affected their bilateral political relations with India, imposing restrictions on several Chinese-owned companies, including ByteDance, the company behind TikTok. At the same time, China is considered an all-weather

friend of Pakistan, another hostile state toward India, and allowing the two states to consolidate Afghanistan would have put India in a restrictive position to preserve its influence not only in Afghanistan but also in the broader Central Asian region.¹⁸ Therefore, any expanding and deepening Chinese role in Afghanistan becomes a challenge for India's regional interests.

Similarly, Iran and Russia also remain important regional actors with significant stakes in Afghanistan, with both engaging the Afghan Taliban government from the very beginning to secure their interests in the country. For Iran, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, any instability across the fence carries direct implications, including drug smuggling, arms smuggling, refugees and illegal immigration, political disagreements over water, and financial pressures.¹⁹ Similarly, in the case of Russia, whose predecessor, the Soviet Union, had a bitter Cold War experience in Afghanistan, which contributed to its eventual disintegration in 1991, it left the previous inhibitions and engaged with the Taliban's Islamic Emirate government. Moscow removed the group from the list of proscribed insurgent organisations in 2023 before eventually recognising the Taliban government in July 2025 – the only country to do so as of today.

Russia's engagement is driven by its interests in regional trade, access to mineral resources, and the containment of terrorist threats such as the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) in its periphery.²⁰

In the case of Pakistan, it saw the withdrawal of American forces with much pragmatism, hoping that the Taliban's return, whom it supported through two decades of American War on Terror (WoT), would grant it the so-called 'strategic depth' in the country. This, as many Pakistani policymakers believed, would also deny India a strategic space in the country, which it accuses of backing Baloch nationalist militant groups besides TTP from Afghanistan, which have emerged as the biggest internal security threats for Pakistan. However, that balloon of strategic depth was punctured within two years of the Taliban's return,²¹ with Islamabad blaming TTP resurgence on Kabul's patronisation. Adding to Pakistan's woes is the Afghan Taliban's refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the Durand Line as an international boundary.²² Resultantly, Islamabad has adopted a hardline coercive approach to get the Afghan Taliban to accede to its demands, including repatriating hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees from Pakistan²³ and military strikes across the border targeting dozens of

Afghan provinces from Kabul to Kandahar and Nangarhar, among others. As this approach hardened the Afghan Taliban's response and deteriorated bilateral relations to the lowest point yet, it has complicated Pakistan's long-standing objective of maintaining strategic influence in Afghanistan and created a more fluid regional environment.

A comparative analysis highlights how India's approach to Taliban 2.0 differs from that of other major powers. For instance, while Russia transitioned from hesitation to formal recognition in 2025, driven by counterterrorism and economic interests,²⁴ China has prioritised integrating Afghanistan into its connectivity and security frameworks.²⁵ Iran, despite ideological differences with the Sunni Taliban, has also engaged it pragmatically to protect Shia communities and manage refugee flows.²⁶ Pakistan, historically the Taliban's principal backer, now faces a more complex relationship marked by tensions over the Durand Line and the resurgence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).²⁷

In this context, India has adopted a "middle path" — engaging without formal recognition, providing assistance without political endorsement and nurturing

dialoguing channels while ensuring the country's democratic credentials at home. From a realist perspective, India is advancing its own interests while balancing against adversaries. Simultaneously, from a constructivist perspective, it underscores India's self-perception as a democratic actor, which constrains full political endorsement of the Taliban regime while still enabling pragmatic engagement.²⁸ This dual strategy illustrates how India has adapted to a complex regional environment by neither withdrawing nor fully embracing the Taliban, but by navigating a nuanced path that aligns with its long-term geopolitical objectives.

India's Initiatives for Afghanistan

As highlighted above, India initially adopted a cautious approach when the Taliban returned to power in 2021 following the American withdrawal. However, this caution gradually evolved into a calibrated strategy of engagement, with India maintaining contact with the Taliban through multiple diplomatic and regional initiatives. Rather than being compelled, India's outreach reflects a deliberate effort to safeguard its internal security, preserve regional stability, and protect its long-term economic and

strategic interests. In this regard, India's first step was the convening of a 'Regional Security Dialogue' on 10 November 2021 to discuss the evolving situation in Afghanistan and the region following the Taliban's takeover.²⁹ This was followed by the 'Third India-Central Asia Dialogue' from 18-20 November 2021, during which Afghanistan's evolving situation, including the need to enhance humanitarian assistance, featured prominently.³⁰ India further signalled its re-engagement by reopening its mission in Kabul in mid-June 2022 after a 10-month closure, thereby restoring a limited diplomatic presence, described as a technical mission.³¹

India also actively participated in multilateral platforms to shape outcomes in Afghanistan, including the fourth meeting of the 'Moscow Format Consultations' in November 2022, where discussions focused on the human rights situation, the need for an inclusive political framework, counterterrorism, and regional security. It is these confidence-building measures that facilitated bilateral engagements with the Indian government and led to the formal engagement of Taliban officials. For instance, a delegation led by J. P. Singh, Joint Secretary, Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran division

of MEA, visited Kabul on 6 November 2024 to meet the Taliban government's Defence Minister, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, during which India offered access to Iran's Chabahar Port to facilitate trade and pledged to expand humanitarian assistance. Afghanistan reciprocated by deputing Ikramuddin Kamil, the first diplomat of the Taliban government to India, as Acting Consul in Mumbai.³² But it was the January 2025 meeting between India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai,³³ which signalled the growing confidence and trust between the two countries and a gradual normalisation of functional ties.

The relations took a further leap after the Afghan Taliban government categorically condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack of 22 April 2025 conducted by Pakistan based-terrorist group, Lashkar-e-Toiba, through its local proxy, *The Resistance Front (TRF)*, killing 26 Hindu tourists, barring one local, in cold blood. The Afghan government stated that "such incidents undermine efforts to ensure regional security and stability."³⁴ Following this, India's EAM S. Jaishankar held a telephonic conversation with his Afghan

counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi, appreciating Kabul's condemnation of the attack, thereby showing how the interests were slowly aligning between the two countries as the victims of terrorism originating from the common source: Pakistan. These high-level contacts led India to ease travel restrictions on Afghans by reopening its visa portal after almost 4 years.³⁵ New Delhi also called on Kabul to "remain vigilant" and not be influenced by provocative statements made against them by Pakistan, which tried to link the attackers to elements within Afghanistan.³⁶

It was these confidence-building measures and regular engagements that finally enabled Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to lead a high-level delegation to India in October 2025.³⁷ This was the first visit by a top Afghan Taliban leader to the country since the Taliban took over Kabul in 2021, during which the two sides discussed diplomatic, trade, and economic ties. Following this, India formally restored the status of its technical mission in Kabul to a full embassy on 21 October 2025, with Karan Yadav being elevated from head of the technical mission to Chargé d'Affaires (CDA) and Head of Mission at the Indian Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.³⁸ These developments were followed by

Afghan Commerce and Industry Minister Noorudin Azizi's six-day visit to India from 19 to 25 November 2025.³⁹

Thus, India's initiatives illustrate a coherent strategy of engagement without formal recognition of the Taliban government, grounded in pragmatic considerations of security and regional influence, reflecting realism. At the same time, India's continued humanitarian assistance, its advocacy for inclusive governance, and its emphasis on rights and development demonstrate the influence of constructivist principles. These efforts reveal India's ability to balance realist pragmatism with constructivist commitments, enabling it to reestablish its presence in Afghanistan while maintaining normative distance from the Taliban regime. This calibrated "middle path" underscores how India has adapted effectively to the post-2021 reality, engaging the Taliban where necessary while preserving its broader strategic and ideological positions.

India's dilemma towards Afghanistan

In the last nearly five years, only Russia has formally recognised the Taliban's Islamic Emirate government.⁴⁰ While the question of

recognition continues to present a diplomatic and strategic challenge for India, New Delhi has increasingly moved beyond a static dilemma towards a calibrated policy that balances security, economic interests, regional stability, and global diplomatic positioning. Rather than treating recognition as a binary choice, India has adopted a flexible approach that allows it to secure its interests without committing to formal legitimacy. At the same time, significant risks persist.⁴¹ The Taliban's historical linkages with militant groups, despite the current bonhomie between New Delhi and Kabul, do pose security concerns for India, particularly in relation to cross-border terrorism. Moreover, given the absence of broad international recognition, such a move could complicate India's global diplomatic standing. Conversely, by refraining from formal recognition, India reinforces its commitment to democratic values, human rights, and alignment with broader international positions, particularly those of Western countries that remain cautious of legitimising the Taliban. However, non-recognition does not imply disengagement. India has mitigated the risks associated with distancing itself by maintaining functional ties with the Taliban, thereby avoiding the loss of its strategic foothold in Afghanistan.

In this sense, India is no longer confined to a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” position. Rather, it has transformed this apparent dilemma into a manageable strategic framework. By combining short-term security imperatives with long-term normative commitments,⁴² India has demonstrated an ability to navigate a complex geopolitical environment with flexibility and restraint. The “middle path” thus emerges not merely as a compromise, but as a deliberate and adaptive strategy that enables India to engage Taliban 2.0 while safeguarding both its strategic interests and its international standing.

Conclusion

An analysis of India-Afghanistan relations demonstrates how the strategic calculations and evolving interests shape their policies. India has consistently aimed for a stable and sovereign Afghanistan that is not a sanctuary for terrorist organisations, while Afghanistan itself continues to seek security, economic stability, and autonomy from excessive external influence. Within this dynamic, India’s policy has undergone a notable transformation, reflecting not hesitation but strategic recalibration

in response to changing regional realities. Thus, it can be argued that India’s approach, ranging from reopening diplomatic channels and sustaining humanitarian assistance to engaging the Taliban without granting formal recognition, represents a coherent and adaptive strategy suited to the current context. Rather than being constrained by a rigid dilemma, India has demonstrated an ability to navigate competing pressures by adopting a flexible “middle path” that preserves its interests while maintaining its normative stance. This approach allows India to remain an active and relevant stakeholder in Afghanistan’s future while avoiding the risks associated with both full recognition and complete disengagement. At the same time, New Delhi’s Afghan strategy continues to reflect the interplay of Realism and Constructivism, given its emphasis on security, regional balance, and economic interests, which align with realist imperatives, while its commitment to democratic values, human rights, and humanitarian assistance reflects constructivist considerations. Such a calibrated approach underscores India’s ability to adapt effectively to Taliban 2.0, reinforcing its position as a pragmatic yet principled actor in the evolving regional order. ■

References

1. Wahab, S. (2007), *A brief history of Afghanistan*, Infobase Publishing: Afghanistan.
2. Kaura, V. (2017), "India-Afghanistan Relations in the Modi-Ghani Era", *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 30(1/2), 29–46.
3. Ashraf, F. (2007), "India-Afghanistan relations: Post-9/11", *Strategic Studies*, 27(2), 90–102. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242397>
4. Kaura "India-Afghanistan Relations."
5. Waltz, Kenneth N. (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
6. Wendt, A. (1999), *Social theory of international politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Pant, H. V. (2010), "India in Afghanistan: A test case for a rising power", *Contemporary South Asia*, 18(2), 133–153.
8. Sharma, R. (2009), "India & Afghanistan: Charting the Future," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Special Report 67, Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09279> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
9. Prabhu, S. (2024, May 8), "The future of India's development cooperation in Afghanistan", Observation Research Foundation, Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-future-of-indias-development-cooperation-in-afghanistan/?amp>
10. Kaura "India-Afghanistan Relations."
11. Saxena, C. (2021), "The American exit, the fall of Afghanistan and the Indian dilemmas", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 13(4), 8–13.
12. Thomas, J. K. (2022), *Taliban 2.0: Fall of Afghanistan and what it means for India*, Bangalore: The Write Order.
13. "Evacuation of Indians and Afghans under 'Operation Devi Shakti' and shipment of humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan",

Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 11 December 2021,
Available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm>

14. Ruttig, T. (2021), "Have the Taliban changed?", Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Available at: <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/> (Accessed 10 January 2026).
15. Nye, J. S. (2004), *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
16. Pant, "India in Afghanistan."
17. Basu, N. (2024). *The fall of Kabul: Despatches from chaos*. New Delhi: Bloomsbury.
18. Ruttig, "Have the Taliban changed?"
19. "Afghanistan: Iran-Afghanistan relations - the geostrategic importance of Afghanistan", *Friedrich Naumann Foundation*, 1 December 2024, Available at: <https://www.freiheit.org/germany/iran-afghanistan-relations-geostrategic-importance-afghanistan> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
20. Awasthi, S. (2024), "Russia's strategic shift: Embracing the Taliban in Afghanistan", *Hindustan Times*, 5 June, Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/russias-strategic-shift-embracing-the-taliban-in-afghanistan-101717573302428.html> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
21. Shekhawat, S. (2022), "Three in Trouble: The United States and Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations (translated)," *Observation Research Foundation*, 23 November, Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/bangla/expert-speak/united-states-and-the-afghanistan-pakistan-relationship> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
22. Basu, "The fall of Kabul", p. 65-66.
23. Bhattacharjee, K. (2025), "India to do whatever is necessary to build ties with Afghanistan: officials", *The Hindu*, 16 May, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-to-make-a-bold-move-on-afghanistan/article69584396.ece>

24. Rubin, B. R. (2013). *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*. London: Oxford university press.
25. Small, A. (2014), *Afghanistan: the view from China*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/alerts/afghanistan-view-china>
26. Mattoo, A. et. al., (2014). "Beyond the great game: Towards a national political process in Afghanistan post-2014", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [Online], Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2014/05/beyond-the-great-game-towards-a-national-political-process-in-afghanistan-post-2014>
27. Cohen, S. P. (2004), *The idea of Pakistan*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
28. Wendt, "Social theory of international politics."
29. "Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 10 November 2021, Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dt1/34491/Delhi_Declaration_on_Afghanistan (Accessed 10 January 2026)
30. "3rd meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 16 December 2021, Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dt1/34677/3rd_meeting_of_the_IndiaCentral_Asia_Dialogue (Accessed 10 January 2026)
31. Haider, S. (2022), "India reopens Embassy in Kabul", *The Hindu*, 24 June, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-reopens-embassy-in-kabul/article65558557.ece> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
32. Laskar, R. H. (2024), "Taliban says Ikramuddin Kamil appointed 'consul' in Mumbai", *Hindustan Times*, 12 November, Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/taliban-says-ikramuddin-kamil-appointed-consul-in-mumbai-101731412650300.html> (Accessed 10 January 2026)
33. "Foreign Secretary's meeting with the Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 8 January 2025. Available at:

<https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38898/foreign+secretarys+meeting+with+the+acting+foreign+minister+of+afghanistan>

34. "IEA-MoFA Spokesperson's Remarks on the Recent Attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 23 April 2025, Available at: <https://mfa.gov.af/en/43638>
35. Singh, V. (2025), "Afghans can apply for Indian visas again, including investors, artists, sportspersons, " *The Hindu*, 25 May, Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/afghans-can-apply-for-indian-visas-again-including-investors-artists-sportspersons/article69615134.ece>
36. Parashar, S. (2025), "In special gesture, India allows entry of 160 Afghan trucks carrying dry fruits through Attari India for new projects, more aid to Afghanistan," *The Times of India*, 30 May, Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-gives-special-entry-to-160-afghan-trucks-via-attari/articleshow/121221556.cms>
37. "Taliban foreign minister makes groundbreaking visit to India", *BBC*, 10 October 2025, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8exzzz5dp5o>
38. Gupta, M. (2025), "India Reopens Full Embassy in Kabul After 4 Years, Marks Re-Entry in Taliban-Era Afghanistan, *News18*, 22 October, Available at: <https://www.news18.com/india/india-reopens-full-embassy-in-kabul-after-4-years-marks-re-entry-in-taliban-era-afghanistan-ws-kl-9651877.html>
39. "Visit of Minister of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan to India", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 November, Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40335/Visit_of_Minister_of_Industry_and_Commerce_of_Afghanistan_to_India
40. Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Afghanistan (2025), X handle [@MoFA_AFG] 3 July, Available at: https://x.com/MoFA_Afg/status/1940824370089545839?t=8cxG8BZ6nxXgaq5b8CqUOA&s=19
41. Saxena, C. (2021), "The American exit, the fall of Afghanistan and the Indian dilemmas", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 13(4), 8–13.
42. Pant, "India in Afghanistan"; Wendt, "Social theory of international politics."

Journal of Peace Studies



FOUNDING EDITOR
LATE PROF. RIYAZ PUNJABI

ADVISORY BOARD

SALEEM KIDWAI
SANDRA DESTRADE
RENÉ WADLOW
G BALACHANDRAN
PRAFULLA PRUSTY

EDITORIAL BOARD

NOOR AHMAD BABA
AJAY DARSHAN BEHERA
SMRUTI S PATTANAİK
P.V. RAMANA
RAJESH KHARAT

EDITOR (HONY)
ASHOK BEHURIA

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
MOHMAD WASEEM MALLA

ASSISTANT EDITOR
PRATEEK JOSHI

DESIGN
BRINDA DATTA

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY
SHEIKH KHALID JEHangIR

Centre for Peace Studies

Printed at:
A.M. Offsetters
Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi
PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

Office Address:
157/9, Block 4, Second Floor,
Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj,
New Delhi-110070

Regd. Address:
C-11 Jangpura Extension
New Delhi – 110 014
Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9810317972
<http://www.icpsnet.org>
Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com;
jps@icpsnet.org

SUBSCRIPTION

In India

This Copy	Rs. 350.00
Annual (Individual)	Rs. 1400.00
(Institutional)	Rs. 2000.00

Overseas (Air Mail)

This Copy:	US\$ 15.00 UK£ 11.00
Annual:	US\$ 60.00 UK£ 44.00

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the references. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard Manual Style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, preferably Ms Word. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

Journal of Peace Studies Research Section

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers
RNI No. 57199/93



CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

C-11, Jangpura Extension,
New Delhi – 110 014, INDIA

Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9560126157, 9810317972

Websites: <http://www.icpsnet.org> (Main),
www.icpsorg.com (Kashmir chapter)

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org