**Afghanistan: A battleground**

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On January 28, 2022, disturbing news surfaced in the Afghan news agency Tolo; ‘Faced with starvation, Afghans sell kidneys. Donors are mostly women and children who are forced to sell their organs.’ The people of Afghanistan have been living under stress due to insurgency for a long time. But presently, the country faces an acute shortage of food, water and medicines. Such food security issues are a product of sanctions which were imposed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the US Federal Reserve on Afghanistan’s $9.5 billion assets.

Unemployment, poverty and hunger have reached alarming levels in the country. If the US releases the $7 billion held with its reserve bank, it will ease the Afghan situation and save precious human lives. Chaos and unrest in South Asia is yet another strategic quest of the US to counter China. India is helping it in achieving this objective by destabilising the whole region. A new game is being played by punishing 23 million innocent Afghan citizens through the freezing of assets.

[US, NATO ignore Russia's principal security concerns: Putin](https://nation.com.pk/02-Feb-2022/us-nato-ignore-russia-s-principal-security-concerns-putin)

The geostrategic positioning of Afghanistan is a nightmare for the country as it provides an incentive to external forces to play their game in the region. The US is creating unrest amongst the civil population to rise against their own government and ultimately leave their country and run to Pakistan and Iran. In the same breadth, it is also trying to influence the ruling elite and terrorists inside the country which are trying to settle and align themselves against the Taliban government. However, Pakistan cannot remain isolated in this situation because it’s equally threatened by terrorists in Afghanistan. The US and India are using all its covert and overt leverages to mould the behaviour of the Taliban government and are pushing it to accept the Northern Alliance. This political move has been named an ‘inclusive government’. The US is not only putting pressure directly on the Taliban government but indirectly through the G20, India and Central Asian Republics. The G20 countries met with representatives of the Islamic Emirate and civil society in Oslo on January 24. The forum expressed their concern about human rights violations in Afghanistan, stressed the need for an inclusive government and a peaceful future for the country. The participants of the meeting also stressed the need for urgent help.

[Ukraine to increase army by 100,000 amid tensions with Russia](https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2022/ukraine-to-increase-army-by-100-000-amid-tensions-with-russia)

India is playing its game through the Central Asian states. On January 29, Prime Minister Modi held a virtual meeting with 5 CAR heads and discussed the situation in Afghanistan. India also held the meeting immediately after the US forces withdrew from Afghanistan. It considers itself as a regional hegemon and wants its influence in Afghanistan to counter China and Pakistan’s interests. The Northern Alliance has supported India through Tajikistan, as well as the ISK. This combination of support to terrorist outfits in Afghanistan has been pitched by India and other external forces, particularly the CARs, to bring the Taliban regime under pressure. This will put Afghanistan on the path towards instability which will further escalate the law-and-order situation in the country. India’s quest to have control over Afghanistan is driven by multiple objectives; access to Central Asian states via Chahbahar and to contain the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and to pursue their strategic autonomy objective. One contradictory aspect of the US-Indian collaboration on the Afghanistan issue is Iran. India has a soft corner for Iran due to its strategic economic and defence ties. Meanwhile, the US has imposed sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear programme.

[PSL 7: Multan Sultans beat Islamabad United by 20 runs](https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2022/psl-7-multan-sultans-beat-islamabad-united-by-20-runs)

The Taliban spokesman has expressed his dismay over the response of developed nations and has repeatedly asked them to define the inclusive government. The spokesman said the Afghan caretaker government is inclusive in all ways and it represents all sections of the society. Pakistan recently announced its National Security Policy for the next five years and termed Afghanistan’s situation a big variable for stability. On January 27, 2022, ten Pakistani soldiers embraced shahadat in a fight with terrorists who entered from across the border which Pakistan shares with Afghanistan and Iran. No more details were available but it explains the vulnerability of Pakistan. Analysing the situation, it is easy to conclude that all external stakeholders are making efforts to control the security situation in the region. The Taliban, which were the main disrupting force before the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, has now been trapped in governance issues, external pressures and the rising threat of ISK and TTP.

[Trends in Indo-Pakistan relations](https://nation.com.pk/01-Feb-2022/trends-in-indo-pakistan-relations)

The country is almost at a standstill due to a lack of resources, an ineffective government, external pressures, the existing threat of ISK and the TTP and rising inflation. Only limited amounts of aid is reaching Afghanistan. Global powers are moving on a contradictory path to recognise the Taliban government and help the 23 million Afghans who are undergoing a traumatic situation. Pakistan has fenced its western border and fortified its defence to plug in gaps at the porous border. The internal situation is also being monitored for any links with external forces to thwart any terrorist threat. However, the region still remains vulnerable due to the great game being played in Afghanistan.

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