**Taliban Two-Year On**

[Yasir Habib Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/yasir-habib-khan/)

September 6, 2023

Against the backdrop of the completion of the Taliban’s two-year rule, yet to be formally recognized, brimming with pros and cons of pleasant and unpleasant challenges, soft global diplomacy is the ultimate way forward.

The world needs a “fresh charter of engagement” to let Afghanistan be a positive contributor to world peace and development instead of providing an opportunity for miscreants to rot Afghanistan on the geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic landscape.

Mainstreaming Afghanistan is a clarion call and in today’s world Taliban’s international hobnob is much easier, pragmatic and executable than last time in 2001. Previously, the Taliban had handed a stance at all that caused distastefulness around the globe. Since August 15, 2021, when the Taliban came to power toppling the “Ashraf Ghani government”, excluding women’s rights plight and sanctions on female education, the rest of the character of the Taliban regime appears to be moderate and progressive.

Furthermore, within Taliban ranks difference of opinion does exist as one voice has been blaring restoration of all female rights. It means with convincing talks and terms, international stakeholders may help the Taliban to finetune women-related policies and others. However, it is only possible unless the period of alienation comes to an end for Afghanistan.

Let’s be fair and if analyzed impartially, hindsight is that the Taliban has made sound progress in many areas during two years that is steering Afghanistan toward stability and prosperity in spite of a serious economic crunch highly plagued by about $7bn in central bank assets frozen in the US Federal Reserve Bank of New York that was later transferred to a Swiss trust.

The world needs a “fresh charter of engagement” to let Afghanistan be a positive contributor.

Economically, Afghanistan faces significant challenges. According to the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, the country’s economy contracted by approximately 30 per cent between 2020 and 2022. More than 24.4 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian assistance, with a staggering nine out of 10 people living in poverty. Agriculture, which supports a significant portion of the population, has been hindered due to unexploded ordnance left behind by the U.S. troops, creating further economic strain. The international response to the Taliban’s return has varied. While most of the powerful Western bloc has been cautious in recognizing the new government, while other powerful countries like China and Russia have engaged in diplomatic efforts. While dialogue continues, formal recognition of the Taliban’s government remains limited due to ongoing apprehensions.

Amidst, poverty crises prospects of issue-based cooperation between the Taliban and the international community have surfaced, presenting a unique avenue for progress. The potential for collaboration on security and economic matters has gained attention, offering a ray of hope even as political tensions persist. Experts suggest that detangling certain security and economic concerns from political complexities could be instrumental in fostering mutual progress. Notably, security discussions have transpired between the Taliban and both the United States and regional players, indicating a nascent willingness for cooperation, particularly against common threats like Daesh/ISIS. However, an underlying lack of trust remains an obstacle. To facilitate coordination and information-sharing, the notion of reinstating a UN monitoring team dedicated to Afghanistan is gaining traction. This cooperative effort could yield benefits for the Taliban, such as access to equipment, training, and assistance.

Amidst the complex landscape of post-withdrawal Afghanistan during the last two years, China and Russia have emerged as pivotal players in stabilizing the nation. With a proactive stance, China is engaging in various avenues to contribute to Afghanistan’s development and stability. Chinese companies have been actively exploring business opportunities within Afghanistan, exemplified by the Fan China Afghan Mining Processing and Trading Company’s plan to invest around $350 million across diverse sectors. Moreover, strategic agreements and investments, such as the deal between the Taliban and China’s Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co. for oil extraction, demonstrate China’s commitment to aiding Afghanistan’s economic growth. China’s diplomatic initiatives, including regular meetings between its Ambassador Wang Yu and Taliban ministers, underline its dedication to fostering dialogue and cooperation, even amidst ideological differences. China’s engagement in Afghanistan aligns with its broader regional aspirations and underscores its role as a responsible global actor invested in promoting stability and mutual benefit. Despite challenges, China’s multi-faceted approach holds promise for a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan, contributing to the nation’s long-term growth and security.

Similarly, Russia has emerged as a significant player in extending a helping hand to the country. By signing a preliminary agreement, Moscow has positioned itself alongside a handful of capitals willing to engage with the Taliban. Under this agreement, Afghanistan is set to receive a substantial amount of essential commodities, including 1 million tons of gasoline, 1 million tons of diesel fuel, 500,000 tons of liquefied petroleum gas, and 2 million tons of wheat annually. This initiative showcases Russia’s pragmatic approach to dealing with the current situation, as it becomes one of the limited number of countries engaging in export and import activities with the Taliban.

Two years of Taliban rule in Afghanistan have been marked by a complex interplay of challenges and developments. The aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal has led to a shift in power dynamics that continues to impact the nation’s governance, economy, and society. While some progress has been made, concerns about human rights, inclusivity, and stability persist. The Afghan people’s resilience in the face of adversity remains commendable. As the world reflects on this milestone, it is essential to consider the facts and figures that provide insight into Afghanistan’s situation. International collaboration, based on a comprehensive understanding of the nation’s needs and complexities, remains vital in shaping a more stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan and its citizens.

The re-established Taliban rule has raised concerns about human rights and inclusivity. The treatment of women and ethnic minorities has been at the forefront of international discussions. Reports from the United Nations show that women’s rights and participation in public life have been curtailed in various regions. Additionally, the internal displacement of people due to conflict and insecurity has been on the rise. The Taliban has asserted that their governance adheres to Islamic principles and that they are committed to upholding the rights of all citizens, including women, within the framework of Sharia law. However, the international community remains cautious and continues to monitor developments closely and is still reluctant to accept the Taliban regime. The United Nations has expressed concerns about the Taliban’s commitment to human rights, inclusivity, and counter-terrorism measures.

Moreover, The Taliban’s stringent policies on women’s education have sparked global outrage, with a series of bans severely restricting educational opportunities for girls and women. Starting with the prohibition of girls attending school beyond the sixth grade shortly after the Taliban’s resurgence to power in August 2021, Afghanistan stands as the sole nation with a complete ban on female education. In a move that further exacerbates gender inequality and limits women’s access to knowledge, the Taliban imposed a ban on women’s presence on university campuses in December last year. The Minister of Higher Education in Afghanistan, Nida Mohammed Nadim, cited the need to prevent gender interactions and perceived contradictions with Islamic principles as reasons for the ban, which was issued by Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada from the city of Kandahar. The ban remains in effect until further notice, leaving countless young women’s educational aspirations in limbo. While an adviser at the Higher Education Ministry expressed readiness to readmit female students once the ban is lifted, the uncertainty surrounding the timeline for such an event leaves Afghan women’s future in academia hanging in the balance. Moreover, recent curbs on women’s public life continue to unfold under Taliban rule, with the closure of the Band-i-Amir National Park to women, justified by claims of non-compliance with Islamic dress codes.

*The writer is a senior Journalist. He is also President of Institute of International Relations and Media Research (IIRMR).*