**The Biden administration and Af-Pak**

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Joe Biden has finally been sworn in as the new President of the United States, and in choosing his cabinet, he has surrounded himself with seasoned and astute diplomats such as Anthony Blinkin, Susan Rice and Samantha Matthews. Biden’s foreign policy will be a continuation of Trump’s doctrine, with no major changes anticipated regarding the US’ stance on China, Israel, India or Iran. Similarly, Pakistan’s ties with the US are correlated to peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The first act of the Biden administration on the Af-Pak front is a review of the Afghan Reconciliation Agreement. Pakistan is in a very delicate situation, as it is primarily held responsible for all Taliban related violence in Afghanistan and has been constantly viewed as a destabilising factor in Afghanistan. The following is a brief overview of US experience in Afghanistan and future strategies that Pakistan might consider to stabilise Afghanistan.

[Governor KP meets President Alvi in Peshawar](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2021/governor-kp-meets-president-alvi-in-peshawar)

The US departs Afghanistan in the midst of a deteriorating political situation, however, its legacy includes giving the country a progressive constitution which guarantees women and minority rights; building of a social infrastructure, building of NDS and Army, as a result of which all major ethnic groups in Afghanistan now view the US as a mediator and a peace broker for the region.

Due to prevailing ethnic misgivings, corruption, warlords, opium trade and a crippling economy, the political landscape of Afghanistan has become complex and complicated. The US strategically retained the balance of power of the Afghan government by separating divisions of power between the various ethnic groups: The Presidency of the country to the Pashtuns, Defence to the Tajiks, and a sizable representation (approximately thirty percent) of the parliament to the Uzbeks and Hazaras. Currently, the political situation in Kabul is increasingly unstable as Mr Ghani, the current President, has lost popular support in Kabul and the current political crisis is heading towards the formation of an interim government with Abdullah Abdullah and Mr Karzai both vying for key positions.

[When I interviewed Ali Sadpara...](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2021/when-i-interviewed-ali-sadpara)

Dealing with Afghanistan in an open and transparent manner is perhaps a top priority for Pakistan. To address the Afghan quagmire, Pakistan must set up comprehensive, long-term bilateral agreements dealing with trade, security, water resources, immigration, and education with Afghanistan. America’s demand for higher commitment from Pakistan for the peace process should be responded with concrete plans that ensure tangible results in a short span of time.

Firstly, Pakistan should divert US, Chinese and Turkish economic and financial influence on Afghanistan to repair its fractured relationship with the Afghan National Army and NDS on a long-term basis. A new bilateral security agreement with joint patrolling, drone surveillance of the border, and narcotics control is the need of the hour for both countries.

Secondly, given the mobility of Afghan/Pakistani traders and labourers, Pakistan and Afghanistan should come up with a permanent work permit or iqama with biometrics for citizens travelling across their porous borders frequently. For security reasons, iqama holders should have local guarantors and utilise bank accounts for financial transactions. This will lead to creating a joint mechanism against money laundering and reduction of Hawala.

[National Covid-19 vaccination drive falls prey to delay](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2021/national-covid-19-vaccination-drive-falls-prey-to-delay)

Thirdly, Pakistan should let Afghan seminaries affiliate their madrassas with Wifaq-ul-Madaris and Tanzeem-ul-Madaris in Pakistan. The condition of affiliation should be stringent including student registrations, similar curriculum, training of staff and a foolproof monitoring system. Afghanistan’s madrassas desperately need modernisation.

Lastly, Hazaras and Uzbeks make up thirty percent of the Afghan Parliament—Pakistan should adopt a soft humanitarian-based policy in dealing with these groups. From a humanitarian perspective, deserving members of the Hazara community in Pakistan should be enrolled in the Ehsaas programme and Pakistan should build a hospital in Quetta exclusively for this community with access available to Hazaras from Afghanistan. While the suggestions mentioned above seem generous, in the international arena, Hazaras are now a litmus test of Pakistan’s treatment of its minorities.

Concurrently, Pakistan should approach Turkey to use its leverage in bringing the Pakistanis and Uzbeks closer and help Islamabad set up NGOs and enterprises in Mazar-i-Sharif. Working with these groups will generate a genuine goodwill for Pakistan in Afghanistan and give it a differential advantage in the Afghan Parliament.

['No farmers, no food, no future': commercial on protests in India aired during super bowl](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2021/no-farmers-no-food-no-future-commercial-on-protests-in-india-aired-during-super-bowl)

The strongest voice against Pakistan in Afghanistan is that of Tajiks. Ignoring Amrullah Saleh, Pakistani government should invite moderates like Salhuddin Rabbani, and Ahmad Wali Massoud to address different think tanks in Pakistan and give them ample airtime to express the need for peace in Afghanistan. A majority of the Afghan foreign service is Tajik, Pakistan should work with them in the UN to jointly vote on key global issues and build up harmony. Afghanistan is Pakistan’s fourth largest trading partner, More than ever, given the political crisis at hand, this is the optimum time for Pakistan to play its constructive role in Afghanistan and lay the foundation of extending CPEC to Central Asia.