

# 'NEO-TALIBAN' RULE IN AFGHANISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY IN THE CONTEXT OF EURASIA

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**O**n 15 August 2021, amidst a hasty pullout by the United States from Afghanistan, the Pashtun dominated militant and religious extremist group Taliban (meaning 'students' in Pashto) took control of the capital Kabul. By that point, almost all the country had already been overrun by Taliban. As Kabul fell under Taliban control, primarily Western backed Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani quickly collapsed. With Taliban claiming complete control over Afghanistan and changing its official designation from a 'Republic' to an 'Emirate,' many countries pulled out their diplomatic representations from the country. This was especially true for Western countries - most notably the US - who had poured at least a trillion dollars into Afghanistan since the ousting of Taliban from power in 2001 to boost the country's development and solidify the Afghan government.<sup>1</sup> Among the countries that did not pull out its diplomatic representation has been Turkey.

Turkey's presence in Afghanistan amidst the Taliban takeover constitutes a curious case. From the perspective of Taliban, Turkey has been a part of the NATO forces that 'occupied' the country since 2001. However, Turkish forces only served in non-combatant support roles in the

NATO-led missions in Afghanistan<sup>2</sup> and did not engage in armed hostilities against Taliban, while Taliban employed terrorism against both the Afghan government and Turkey's NATO allies. Additionally, Turkey has deep historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan and no history of imperialist ambitions against the country. This has prevented Taliban, which adopts an extremist interpretation of Islam, from branding Turkey, a Muslim majority country, as an 'enemy' unlike Turkey's NATO allies. In fact, as can be gathered from statements by Taliban officials, the above-mentioned factors help explain why Turkey has been one of the countries that Taliban has prioritized cultivating cordial ties with.<sup>3</sup>

Whether cordial ties can be established between Turkey and an Afghanistan run by Taliban will depend on Turkey's expectations from Taliban, Taliban's expectations from Turkey and its conduct towards the Afghan people and the world. Before proceeding with this analysis, this study will first answer the question of what the term 'neo-Taliban' that is a part of the title of this article means.

## What Does 'Neo-Taliban' Mean?

The first Taliban rule of Afghanistan between 1996-2001 was marked by an Afghanistan ruled under an extremely strict and distorted interpretation of Islam (from the perspective the global Islamic community), systemic persecution of minorities, severe curtailment of cultural activities, misogynistic policies that included barring women from receiving education, cruel and archaic forms of punishment, and close contacts with international terror groups.

While the world was stunned by the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, news outlets and commentators began to argue that today's Taliban was no longer the Taliban of the 1990s. These arguments were bolstered by the Taliban's own statements and actions. Today's Taliban has been described as "very tech and media-savvy," as having acquired the skills to negotiate with major powers and a global perspective after having travelled the world, and having "a sharper awareness of each country's interests and how to — at least rhetorically — pander to them."<sup>4</sup>

Taliban has sought to give the impression that, while still adhering to their extremist interpretation of Islam, this time they will be more pragmatic and inclusive and that they want every Afghan to have a stake in the future of the country. In line with this, they have declared full amnesty for Afghans who worked for the collapsed government and NATO countries who operated in Afghanistan. They have also declared that they would allow women to receive education, take part in the workforce, and engage in public life within "the bounds of Sharia."<sup>5</sup> Taliban also argue they will be more pragmatic in pursuing Afghanistan's foreign policy, including cultivating good relations with the US, and pledge to prevent the country from turning into a haven for terrorist groups that could threaten the region and beyond. Lastly, Taliban officials have stated that they would allow the use of modern devices such as television and mobile phones "because this is the necessity of the people, and we are serious about it."<sup>6</sup>

For all these reasons, news outlets and commentators have begun to refer to today's Taliban as the 'neo-Taliban' or 'Taliban 2.0,' signifying that Taliban of 2021 is a supposedly improved or updated version of Taliban of the 1990s.

There is an undeniable need for Taliban to behave more pragmatically, because Afghanistan needs massive amounts of financial and humanitarian aid to continue its functions as a state and foreign investment for the development of its weak infrastructure. Even before the political and economic turmoil triggered by Taliban's takeover of the country, foreign aid already accounted for

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nearly half of Afghanistan's economy.<sup>7</sup> To pull in the necessary aid and investment, Taliban will need to demonstrate to the international community, most of which is reluctant to engage with the group, that it can run Afghanistan in a responsible manner.<sup>8</sup> To ascertain the veracity of the claims of an improved or updated Taliban, this study will consider some of the developments that have taken place since Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

## Has Taliban Truly Changed?

Various developments in Afghanistan point out that the assurances made by Taliban since their takeover of the country is meant to create a facade to calm an alarmed international community and thus do not reflect a genuine change within Taliban. For this reason, it can be stated that, as of this moment, 'neo-Taliban' should be approached with caution.

Several examples can be given for this pessimistic assessment:

90 percent of the 33-member Afghan interim government initially set up by the Taliban on 7 September were Pashtun, despite Pashtuns comprising no more than 50 percent of the total population of Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> The remaining members included 2 Tajiks and one Uzbek, while Hazaras, who make up 10 percent of the country's population, were not given any positions. All members of the interim government announced on 7 September were male. No positions were given to any of the officials from the previous Afghan government. Many of the members of the interim government also served in the notorious first Taliban government of the 1990s.

The interim government was expanded on 22 September to 53 members.<sup>10</sup> Though still dominated by Pashtuns, the current composition is slightly more inclusive and now includes four Tajiks, two Uzbeks, one Turkmen, one Hazara, and two others from other ethnicities. The new additions to the interim government include people who are not connected to the Taliban, but who are still sympathetic to them. Women and officials from the previous Afghan government continue to be barred from the interim government, though the inclusion of



women remains a possibility according to Taliban's statement. Rather than a response to the calls made from the international community about more inclusivity, the additions to the interim government reportedly reflect Taliban's attempt to distribute governmental positions to satisfy various factions within the group who felt left out by the initial composition of the interim government.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of women and officials from the previous Afghan government is reportedly being met with resistance from Taliban leadership<sup>12</sup> out of fear that it may trigger backlash amongst Taliban ranks interpreting this as a "betrayal of Taliban's ideals" and bolster anti-Taliban rhetoric of the Afghanistan branch of Daesh/ISIS (known as Daesh-Khorasan Province of Daesh-K). In sum, although Taliban is asking for patience and promising more inclusivity in the future, as of now, the Afghan interim government formed by Taliban is still exclusionary in its composition.

Strict gender segregation has been imposed throughout the education system of Afghanistan. While women have been allowed to pursue higher education, this has been restricted receiving courses from only female academic staff. Women will also be required to wear 'Islamic dresses,' a nebulous concept that Taliban can interpret arbitrarily.<sup>13</sup> Due to universities' resource constraints for operating separate courses for both genders and the low

number of female academic staff, women will face considerable difficulty in pursuing higher education. While the continuation of primary education has been announced for both girls and boys, the continuation of secondary education has only been announced for boys.<sup>14</sup> Taliban has argued that the absence of secondary education for girls is only temporary, and secondary education for girls will be announced once 'the necessary arrangements' are made. Critics argue that these are classic Taliban tactics that indirectly bar women and girls from pursuing proper education.

Women have been strongly encouraged to stay at home until "the security situation" improves, according to Taliban, and have been effectively discouraged from participating in the workforce. Even in high profile positions such as the Kabul city government, women "have been told to stay home, with work only allowed for those who cannot be replaced by men."<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been shut down and replaced with the Ministry of Encouragement, Instruction to Virtue, and Prevention from Vice,<sup>16</sup> the 1990s version of which was known for enforcing Taliban's extremist interpretation of Islam.

Showcasing Taliban's intolerance for dissent, people protesting the Taliban rule have been dispersed using live ammunition and beatings in cities such as Kabul, Herat,

Jalalabad, and Asadabad,<sup>17</sup> reportedly resulting in several casualties.

While Taliban has not outright banned music throughout the country, venues and artists playing any kind of music have been actively discouraged by the violence and intimidation perpetrated by Taliban officers and guards.<sup>18</sup> It is not known whether such violence and intimidation is sanctioned by Taliban command or is the result of the unruliness amongst Taliban ranks. As for a specific example, Department of Virtue and Vice of Helmand Province has prohibited shaving beards and playing music in barbershops and public baths, with no right for complaint if faced with punishment for the violation of the prohibition.<sup>19</sup>

Reminiscent of the cruel and archaic forms of punishment of the Taliban rule of the 1990s, the bodies of four alleged kidnappers of a merchant and his son killed by Taliban security forces were publicly hanged in different locations around the city of Herat.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Nooruddin Turabi, the Taliban official in charge of Afghanistan's prisons, has stated that amputations as a form of punishment are "necessary for security and deterrence", but added that Taliban is deliberating whether to carry out punishments in public or in private.<sup>21</sup> Responding to international criticisms about such manner of punishments, the official argued that Taliban never commented on other country's laws and forms of punishment, and added; "No one will tell us what our laws should be. We will follow Islam and we will make our laws on the Qur'an."<sup>22</sup>

Although Taliban has repeatedly assured the international community that they will not allow the presence of international terror groups within Afghanistan, several reports have reported that the Taliban has been unable or unwilling to fulfill this promise. CIA, the foreign intelligence service of the US, has stated that members of al Qaeda potentially moving back into Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Tajik officials have stated that they received reports that extremist groups affiliated with the Taliban are planning to cross into Tajikistan.<sup>24</sup> The statements by Tajik officials should be seen in the wider context of tensions between Tajikistan and the Taliban. Tajikistan, unlike Afghanistan's other neighbors, has outright rejected interacting with Taliban, fearing its extremism could have a spill-over effect into Tajikistan angry at the Pashtun dominated group's historical poor treatment of Tajiks. Tajikistan is reportedly becoming a base for Afghan actors resisting Taliban rule.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, Taliban has accused Tajikistan of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.<sup>26</sup>

These developments, putting considerable doubt on the 'neo-Taliban' discourse, can alternatively be viewed as

Taliban's difficult transition from being a reactionary Afghan group solely focused on waging a jihad to rid Afghanistan of 'foreign/imperialist occupation' into a government responsible for running a highly diverse and unruly country of 35 million people. In the words of one commentator, this process can be summarized as "an uncertain transition from militancy to government."<sup>27</sup>

The negative developments listed above could be interpreted as Taliban's current inability to properly adjust to the realities of modern domestic and international politics. A brief examination of Afghanistan's history gives clues as to why Taliban is suffering from such an inability. Throughout Afghanistan's history, Islam has been a unifying force for the Afghan people and rallying cry for those seeking to combat foreign forces seeking to dominate Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> Taliban rose to prominence in the 1990s amidst the lawlessness and chaos of an Afghanistan embroiled in a civil war. Rallying destitute and disillusioned people under its archaic understanding of Islam, it brought an unpleasant but functional security and order to wherever it controlled and thus won popular support.<sup>29</sup> It may take time for Taliban let go of this past steeped in war and extremism and embrace an outlook that will carry Afghanistan into the future.

Perhaps to deflect international attention away from its shortcomings, Taliban has directed blame at both the United States (and its NATO allies) and the previous Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani. Concerning the United States, Taliban has stated that 20 years of wars has greatly harmed the country:<sup>30</sup>

[...] All our infrastructure such as in agriculture, economy, and industry has fallen into ruin. The reconstruction of [such] sectors [...] is a moral obligation of Western countries. The West should collaborate with [the Afghan state headed by Taliban] to ensure recovery in healthcare, education, and other areas. Their freezing of Afghanistan's monetary assets instead of supporting developments in these areas is damaging the Afghan people.

[...] Thousands of women have been widowed and hundreds of thousands of children have been orphaned. One of the worst consequences of the US occupation of Afghanistan has been the turning of 6 million Afghans into drug addicts. About 1 million of these are women and children. [...]

As for the government of Ashraf Ghani, Taliban and its supporters have often depicted it as a corrupt and incompetent Western puppet regime that was more interested in serving its own interests rather than of the Afghan people. Ghani's abrupt departure from Kabul as Taliban



entered Kabul on 15 August and the rapid collapse of the government has been widely used to justify Taliban's rhetoric against the previous government. In response to allegations of a "cowardly" departure from Kabul and that he stole state money during his departure, Ghani issued a statement<sup>31</sup> that contains the following parts:

[...] I left at the urging of the palace security who advised me that to remain risked setting off the same horrific street-to-street fighting [Kabul] had suffered during the Civil War of the 1990s. Leaving Kabul was the most difficult decision of my life, but I believed it was the only way to keep the guns silent and save Kabul and her 6 million citizens.

[The charges of stolen money] are completely and categorically false. Corruption is a plague that has crippled our country for decades and fighting corruption has been a central focus of my efforts as president. I inherited a monster that could not easily or quickly be defeated.

Considering that Afghanistan suffered tremendous damage during the civil war of the 1990s, Ghani's statement makes a valid argument for preserving the Afghanistan's infrastructure so that it can be utilized for building a better future no matter who is in charge of the country.

### What Are 'Neo-Taliban's' Expectations from Turkey?

Taliban's expectations from Turkey are similar to its expectations from the international community, but with a special emphasis on Turkey's status as a 'brotherly' country. These expectations include:

- The recognition of the government set up by Taliban as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan.

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- Respectful bilateral relations and non-interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, which includes abstaining from criticisms against Taliban for the way it approaches social issues (such as women's rights) and maintenance of law and order (such as forms of punishment).
- Humanitarian aid to alleviate the social and economic turmoil caused by the hasty departure of the US and the subsequent collapse of the previous Afghan government.
- Infrastructure investment to develop Afghanistan's impoverished economy and ensure the country becomes a part of regional connectivity projects.

The following statement<sup>32</sup> by Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesperson and Acting Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, touches upon important points on how the Taliban views Turkey:

Turkey is a friendly and brotherly country, [...] We are striving to preserve our relations with Turkey in their best form, [...]. We would like to utilize Turkey's experience in statecraft and governmental management, as well its experience in Islamic and other trade and investment areas. Turkey should strive to maintain good relations with us as well, and our intentions towards each other should be clear and sincere.

In a more recent statement,<sup>33</sup> another Taliban official, Second Acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi, again touched upon the theme of "brotherly nations" by expressing gratitude for Turkish state and people's support to the Afghan people during the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989) and added:

Our expectation from the Turkish people is that institutions and people who engage in humanitarian aid and charity work should help the Afghan people in various issues. We expect them to help the people of Afghanistan in education, health, and all areas where people are needed. Our expectation from Turkey is for it to be the first country to recognize the new state in Afghanistan. We would like Turkey to help us in the economy and other areas, let us engage in cooperation and consultation, [...]

### What Are Turkey's Expectations from Afghanistan under 'Neo-Taliban'?

As pointed by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey's traditional foreign policy towards Afghanistan has been based on the following objectives:<sup>34</sup>



- Maintenance of unity and integrity of Afghanistan,
- Providing security and stability in the country,
- Strengthening of broad-based political structure in which popular participation is a priority,
- Restoration of peace and prosperity by eliminating terrorism and extremism,
- Making comprehensive contributions to Afghanistan both on bilateral level and through the efforts of the UN and NATO,
- Contributing to enhancing Afghanistan's relations with its neighbor.

Based on what Turkish officials have so far stated, Turkey's policy towards Afghanistan despite the Taliban takeover remains mostly the same. However, ensuring the stability of Afghanistan and eliminating terrorism and extremism is receiving special attention.

The primary motivation behind Turkey's emphasis on stability in Afghanistan is Turkey's status as the world's largest host of refugees and asylum seekers who number around 4-5 million.<sup>35</sup> Many of these are from Syria due the civil war that erupted there in 2011. The influx of Syrians to Turkey, hoping to either stay there or pass through to European Union countries, has put enormous strain on Turkey's economy and has caused considerable

tensions between the Syrians and the locals of places where the Syrians have settled. Besides the Syrians, according to official statements, there are already around 300,000 Afghans refugees in Turkey, with many more who are seeking ways to come to Turkey after fleeing Afghanistan out of fear of Taliban's ways or seeking for a better life in Turkey and beyond due to having no hope that Taliban will ensure the development of Afghanistan. Due to difficulties faced by the Turkish economy and the social tension caused by a huge refugee population, Turkish officials at the highest level have made it clear that Turkey can no longer accept any more refugee influx. In response to EU plans to convince Turkey to host even more refugees, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has argued that the EU "cannot stay out of (the refugee) problem by harshly sealing its borders to protect the safety and well-being of its citizens," and reminded the EU that "Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse."<sup>36</sup>

It is for this reason that Turkey, beyond its historically benign approach to Afghanistan, needs Afghanistan under Taliban rule to be as stable and prosperous as possible to prevent Syrian Civil War-like refugee influx overburdening Turkey. This is one of the reasons why Turkey has strived to ensure contacts with Taliban while the other Western countries quickly pulled out of the country after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

The other pressing issue, eliminating terrorism and extremism, is highly relevant because of Turkey's historic

struggle against the terrorism of the likes of PKK, Justice Commandos and ASALA, and the rise of DAESH in Syria and Iraq and PKK's US-backed branches in Syria. As stated earlier, reports are already being made of Al Qaeda moving back to Afghanistan. It should be reminded that it was Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks against the US that started a chain reaction leading to the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq, causing tremendous instability in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The rise of Daesh, the world's most notorious and violent terrorist organization, has had considerable influence in world politics in recent times such as chronic instability and war in Iraq and Syria and the rise of the Far Right and Islamophobia in Western countries, all of which have impacted Turkey. The rise of Daesh-K spells trouble not only for Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but also for the Central Asian countries with whom Turkey has close cultural ties and who function as Turkey's economic connection to East and South-East Asia. It is for such reasons that Turkey expects Taliban to stamp out the extremism and terrorism of groups such as Daesh-K in Afghanistan and prevent their potentially de-stabilizing spillover effects in Central Asia.

Turkey has not responded positively to Taliban's request for official recognition but maintains its embassy in Kabul and continues to engage in dialogue with Taliban at the ambassadorial level.<sup>37</sup> Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has stated that current discussions focus on delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and that the Turkish Red Crescent is already operating in the country:

We are talking about the humanitarian aid, such as food, medicine and other necessities before winter comes. [...] There is no official request [from Taliban about humanitarian aid]; it is verbal. It's something the whole world already knows. We are currently advising everyone in this direction. In other words, the country should not collapse; its economy should not collapse.<sup>38</sup>

In line with Minister Çavuşoğlu's statements, Turkey's Ambassador to Kabul, Cihad Erginay, met with both Afghanistan's Second Acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi and Acting Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi, affirming commitments to further bolster bilateral relations and discussing ways to boost bilateral trade volume and increasing industrial output.<sup>39</sup>

However, during a recent interview,<sup>40</sup> Turkish President Erdoğan clearly expressed dissatisfaction at the current trajectory of Afghanistan, indicating that the improvement of ties between Turkey and Afghanistan under the rule of Taliban is dependent on the group ful-

filling its pledges to the Afghan people and the international community. President Erdoğan also highlighted that, unlike what was previously reported by several news outlets, Turkey is only present in Afghanistan through its diplomatic mission in Kabul and currently has no personnel (civilian or military) at the Kabul airport. Other important points of President Erdoğan's assessments are as follows:

- Turkey and Taliban currently have no agreement or consensus on any issue,
- Turkey has historic relations with Afghanistan and has shown "unprecedented" support to the country,
- Turkey has been involved in "major investments" in Afghanistan's economy and will continue to do so in the future,
- Whether Turkey will help operate Kabul airport will depend on "possible agreements and caution, because here, [Turkey and Taliban] can reach a reciprocal understanding",
- The current composition of the interim government in Afghanistan is not inclusive, nor does it embrace the different factions in the country. So long as this is the case, Turkey will not "be present in Afghanistan",
- Turkey expects "all women to be involved in every aspect of life in Afghanistan in a very active way". If there is need, Turkey will provide support to Afghan women in terms of healthcare, security, and education.

### **The Implications of the Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan in the Context of Eurasia**

Just like Turkey, Afghanistan occupies a highly strategic location within the heart of Eurasia, which is a giant landmass stretching from the European Union to China with Turkey in the middle.<sup>41</sup> Although a landlocked country, it has borders and thus access to multiple countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Because of this, Afghanistan sits in the middle of many of the regional connectivity projects taking shape in Eurasia. China's Belt and Road Initiative is at the forefront in this regard, and, for example, entails billions of dollars in trade revenue for China, Afghanistan, and the countries of the region with projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.<sup>42</sup>

Besides its potential for serving as a key component for regional connectivity projects, Afghanistan sits on top



of natural resources that may be worth 1 to 3 trillion dollars.<sup>43</sup> The country possesses huge mineral deposits of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and more. More importantly, its deposits of lithium are estimated to be among the world's largest, leading the US Department of Defense to label Afghanistan as the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."<sup>44</sup> Lithium's value will continue to rise as it is a key component of the batteries of modern electronic equipment. More importantly, it is a key component of the battery of electric vehicles. With China, the US, and EU countries rapidly transitioning from fossil fuel-powered vehicles to battery-powered vehicles due to the latter's superior performance and lower environmental impact, Afghanistan stands to gain enormous amount of revenue from the production of batteries needed for these vehicles. Up until now, the chronic instability caused by the fighting between the previous Afghan government and Taliban meant that companies faced considerable difficulties and risks in extracting and transporting valuable minerals from Afghanistan. With Taliban having basically won the war for the control of Afghanistan, the difficulties and risks associated with mineral extraction can now be remedied. If true stability is attained in Afghanistan, mineral extraction can even lead to its processing and utilization for the domestic industry in the country.

The future of the viability of connectivity projects involving Afghanistan and the utilization of the wealth of its natural resources will largely depend on Taliban's ability to form cohesion and stability in Afghanistan through an inclusive government, enforce law and order in the country, stamp out international terrorist organizations such as Daesh-K, and attract foreign investment for the construction of the infrastructure necessary to extract, transport or perhaps process the mineral deposits of Afghanistan.

In terms of foreign investment, around 76 Turkish companies were already in operation in Afghanistan before Taliban's takeover.<sup>45</sup> Considering that most of these companies are in the construction sector and the globally recognized competitive nature of Turkish construction companies, Turkey is set to play a key role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan if the necessary domestic conditions are met in the country.

A recent statement<sup>46</sup> issued by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States/Turkic Council<sup>47</sup> (of which Turkey is a member) on the situation in Afghanistan is important in terms of how regional countries approach Afghanistan's future. The key points of the statement are as follows:

- Respect for the "sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity" of Afghanistan (a point frequently brought up by Taliban),

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- Emphasis on the right of all Afghan people to live in "safety, security and with dignity",
- Emphasis on ensuring "the safety and security of diplomatic missions, staff and their families",
- Calls for an "inclusive and participatory governance" in Afghanistan,
- Calls for "preventing and combating terrorism in Afghanistan to ensure that its territory will not be used to threaten or attack any country by any terrorist organization",
- Concern about the "current dire state of the Afghan economy and particularly the risk posed to Afghan people's livelihoods due to the sharp decrease in economic activity",
- Calls for sustained efforts for and unhindered access to "humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan through effective, transparent and accountable mechanisms,"
- Commitment to contributing "to all efforts to assist the Afghan people in their endeavor to achieve lasting peace, national reconciliation, stability and development,"
- Commitment to maintaining consultation and coordination amongst Turkic Council "regarding the various aspects and repercussions of developments in Afghanistan".

Considering that Turkey adopted a fresh Eurasian perspective with its Asia Anew policy in 2019<sup>48</sup> and the points outlined above, it would be appropriate to state that Turkey will view Afghanistan not only from the lens



of its bilateral relations with the country but also from the lens of Afghanistan's place within Eurasia.

## Conclusion

Although the international community was concerned about Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan with the departure of the military forces of the United States and its allies, the speed with which it happened was shocking to many. This has forced the international community to rapidly react to the events unfolding in Afghanistan, including shutting down their diplomatic representations.

Amidst this rush, Turkey has been one of the few countries to adopt a "wait and see" approach and has thus maintained its diplomatic representation in the country. However, this has not yet resulted in Turkey issuing formal recognition to Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. Instead, Turkey has actively engaged with Taliban at the ambassadorial level to search for ways help

stabilize Afghanistan and help its struggling people. This approach is based not only on Turkey's historic friendly relations with Afghanistan, but also on Turkey's regional economic and security concerns.

Meanwhile, Taliban is keen to gain international recognition to solidify its control and legitimacy in Afghanistan. With Afghanistan already receiving humanitarian aid from Turkey, Taliban wants this relationship to develop into formal ties between Turkey and Afghanistan under Taliban. This will depend on Taliban delivering on its promises of inclusive governance that reflect Afghanistan's multi-ethnic composition, ensuring a dignified life for the Afghan people, respect for women's rights, and effective fight against extremism and terrorism.

Turkey will be closely monitoring the difficult days ahead for the Afghan people as Taliban attempts to "transition from militancy to government".

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