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Political Relations between Afghanistan-Tajikistan since 2021: An Assessment of the Challenges and Possible Cooperation

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Abstract

The withdrawal of the U.S. military from Afghanistan in 2021 triggered a pivotal moment in the region's geopolitics. Since 2021, the political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan have witnessed significant transformations, shaped by a dynamic regional landscape characterized by the resurgence of the Taliban, evolving security concerns, economic interests, and the significance of external actors. Sharing a border with Afghanistan, Tajikistan experienced immediate security concerns related to potential cross-border threats and instability. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its impact on regional security dynamics have been central to the evolving political relations between these two countries. The evolving political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan since 2021 represent multifaceted, complex interplays of security, diplomacy, economics, and regional dynamics. This paper explores the challenges posed by security threats, shifting alliances, and regional complexities, examining the prospects for stability and possible cooperation.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Political relations, Security Concerns, Taliban

1. Introduction

Due to the altered political context brought on by the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the political relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan has undergone significant changes and difficulties since 2021. This has resulted in an intricate interaction of security issues, financial concerns, and local factors, shaping the relationship between the two countries.¹ Afghanistan, situated in South Asia, has long been a region marred by conflict and instability as numerous invasions and interventions characterize its history. In addition, Afghanistan has faced prolonged civil wars and the emergence of the Taliban, which came to power in the 1990s.

On the other hand, Tajikistan, a neighbouring country to the north of Afghanistan, has a complex history. It was once part of the Soviet Union and experienced a brutal civil war following the country's independence in the early 1990s. The civil war had ethnic,

¹ MelanieSadozai, "Taliban at the Border: A New Regime Neighboring Tajikistan", *Central Asia Program* (2021).

political, and regional dimensions, which impacted Tajikistan's social and political landscape.²

Significant geopolitical changes in the region marked the period between 2001 and 2021. In 2001, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 attacks, which marked the beginning of a new phase in Afghanistan's history. During this time, Tajikistan was a significant neighbour and regional actor. It shared concerns about the stability of its southern neighbour and collaborated with international efforts to combat terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan. The border between the two countries remained a source of concern due to its porous nature, making it difficult to control the movement of militants and drugs.³

Over the years, the relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan evolved, reflecting the region's changing dynamics. They engaged in trade, energy cooperation, and efforts to address common security challenges. Both countries recognized the importance of regional stability and economic development; however, the period also witnessed considerable challenges. The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan in 2021, following a peace agreement with the Taliban, raised concerns about the future stability of Afghanistan and its implications for Tajikistan. The Taliban's resurgence and the potential of increased extremism in the region posed threats to both countries.⁴ The vacuum created by the U.S. departure left Tajikistan wary of potential security threats emanating from Afghanistan. As the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, Tajikistan closely monitored the situation, with concerns regarding the group's intentions and potential spillover effects.⁵ Apart from security concerns, economic interests have also played a significant role in shaping Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations. Since 2021, the political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan have undergone significant changes and challenges, reflecting the evolving regional landscape in the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The bilateral relationship thus revolves around comprehending the historical context of instability in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, their evolving relationship since 2021, and the challenges they faced during this time. This understanding is essential for formulating effective strategies to address the complex regional security, stability, and cooperation issues. The paper examines the complex dynamics and historical context surrounding Afghanistan and Tajikistan and their evolving relationship since 2021.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the historical context and political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Bawa and Ashish delve into Tajikistan's evolving stance towards the Taliban regime and its implications on bilateral relations.⁶ They further highlighted the immediate consequences of the withdrawal on Tajikistan's security concerns and emphasized the potential for cross-border threats and instability following the U.S. withdrawal. Jiayi Zhou has discussed the prospects for stability and cooperation between the two countries in the face of these challenges.⁷ Smith explores

² Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev, "Afghanistan-Tajikistan Relations: Past and Present," *Asia-Pacific Review* 21, no. 1 (2014): 120-136. doi:10.1080/13439006.2014.921966.

³ Vinay Kaura, "Tajikistan's Evolving Relations with the Taliban 2.0," *Middle East Institute*, December 1, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/tajikistans-evolving-relations-taliban-20>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jagmeet Bawa and Ashish Sheokand, "The resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan and its implications for Tajikistan," *Indian Journal Of Political Science*, no.4 (2023): 705-714.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jiayi Zhou, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbourhood: A Stocktaking of Regional Cooperation Since the Taliban Takeover*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, December 15, 2022. Accessed at:

Tajikistan's evolving stance towards the Taliban regime, including its diplomatic engagement and approach to safeguarding its regional interests.⁸ Vinay Kaura examines the potential for economic cooperation, particularly in energy transit and trade routes, and the prospects for enhancing economic ties between the two countries.⁹ However, there is a notable research gap in comprehensively analyzing the multifaceted dynamics of their political relations in the post-2021 period. Most studies focus on the pre-2021 era or offer limited coverage of the recent developments and their broader regional implications. This paper addresses this gap and provides a more nuanced and up-to-date understanding of the complex relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the current geopolitical landscape.

This paper holds significant importance for several reasons: First, the stability and security of Central Asia are of global concern, particularly in the context of counterterrorism efforts and the potential spillover of conflicts. Understanding the dynamics between Afghanistan and Tajikistan is vital for assessing regional security. Second, Afghanistan and Tajikistan possess economic potential, particularly in energy transit, trade, and connectivity projects. Enhanced cooperation can lead to economic growth and development, benefiting the region. Lastly, the evolving relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan can show how diplomacy and international institutions can manage regional tensions and promote cooperation with implications extending beyond Central Asia. This paper is based on a case study approach, and thematic analysis has been used to analyze the wide range of academic papers, studies, official declarations, and updates on this topic.

2. Analysis of Political Changes in Afghanistan post-2021

Tajikistan's relations with Afghanistan are not isolated but are part of a broader regional context. The involvement of regional and external actors, including Russia, China, and Iran, has influenced the dynamics between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.¹⁰ The political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan have faced numerous challenges since 2021, including security threats, uncertainty about the Taliban's behaviour, and the broader regional context.¹¹ One of the most pressing issues in Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations has been the security concerns stemming from the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Beyond security concerns, economic interests have played a crucial role in shaping Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations. For instance, Kaura has examined the potential for economic cooperation, particularly in energy transit and trade routes, and the prospects for enhancing economic ties between the two countries.¹² The political relations between Afghanistan and Tajikistan cannot be analyzed in isolation but must be understood within the broader regional context. The roles and interests of regional and external factors, such as Russia, China, and Iran, and their influence on the dynamics between the two countries are of particular significance.¹³ The challenges posed by

<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2022/afghanistan-and-its-neighbourhood-stocktaking-regional-cooperation-taliban-takeover>.

⁸ A Smith, "The Taliban Resurgence and Tajikistan's Response: Implications for Bilateral Relations." *Central Asian Security Studies*, no.8 (2022); 45-62.

⁹ Kaura, "Tajikistan's Evolving Relations."

¹⁰ "Tajikistan Resumes Border Relations with Afghanistan in A Sign of Thawing Tensions," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, September 2, 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-afghanistan-border-relations-resume/32575848.html>.

¹¹ Zhou, "Afghanistan and Its Neighborhood".

¹² Kaura, "Tajikistan's Evolving Relations."

¹³ Zhou, "Afghanistan and Its Neighborhood".

security threats, shifting alliances, and regional complexities are central to understanding and evaluating Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations.

The political changes in Afghanistan post-2021 have profound and far-reaching implications for both countries and the broader region. The most significant event during this period was the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, which culminated in the collapse of the Afghan government and the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces.¹⁴

2.1 Return of Taliban Rule

The Taliban's return to power marked a significant shift in Afghanistan's political landscape. The collapse of the Afghan government was swift and unexpected as the Afghan security forces, despite receiving extensive training and support, were unable to withstand the Taliban's offensive, leading to a rapid disintegration of government control. The power transition triggered a humanitarian crisis, with many Afghans trying to flee the country because of uncertainty and hopelessness. The de-facto authorities faced immediate challenges in governance, including economic instability, providing essential services, and forming a cohesive government. Their administration largely lacks international recognition, which affects their ability to access foreign aid and engage in diplomatic relations.¹⁵

2.2 Regional Dynamics

Neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, closely monitored the developments in Afghanistan. They have concerns about security, potential refugee influxes, and the situation's impact on regional stability. The de-facto authorities have sought to improve relations with various countries, including Russia, China, and Pakistan. They have also engaged in talks with the United States and other Western nations. A desire for international legitimacy and support drives these diplomatic efforts.¹⁶ Regional powers, particularly Russia and China, have shown interest in Afghanistan's stability and have been engaging with the Taliban. They aim to protect their regional interests, including countering terrorism and ensuring regional economic connectivity.¹⁷ The international community continues to grapple with how to engage with the Taliban-led government and address the multifaceted challenges posed by the new political landscape in Afghanistan.

3. Assessment of Tajikistan's Response to the Changing Afghan Landscape

As a neighbouring country, Tajikistan has had to respond actively and strategically to the changing landscape in Afghanistan post-2021. Following is an assessment of Tajikistan's response, with references to critical actions and considerations:

3.1 Security Concerns and Border Management

Tajikistan has been concerned about the potential spillover of instability and violence from Afghanistan. To address this, they have enhanced security along their shared border

¹⁴ Ubaidulloev, "Afghanistan-Tajikistan Relations: Past and Present".

¹⁵ Ahmad ShujaJamal and William Maley, *The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan*. Oxford University Press, 2023.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group. "The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan." *Crisis Group Asia Report N°337*, January 30, 2024, 1-3. https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/337-afghanistan-regional-dynamics_0.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid.

with Afghanistan, which includes deploying additional troops and fortifying border infrastructure, such as checkpoints and fences.¹⁸ In addition, Tajikistan has closely monitored the actions and policies of the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, particularly concerning the treatment of minorities and women. They have expressed concerns about potential radicalization and extremism.¹⁹ Furthermore, Tajikistan has faced a growing humanitarian crisis, with Afghan refugees seeking shelter and assistance and has set up refugee camps and provided aid to thousands of Afghan refugees. In response to humanitarian crises, including Afghan refugees seeking shelter in Tajikistan, there have been diplomatic discussions on providing assistance, ensuring humanitarian access, and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.²⁰

3.2 Diplomatic Engagements

Tajikistan has engaged diplomatically with various regional and international actors to address the situation in Afghanistan. They have participated in meetings and discussions within regional forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.²¹ Tajikistan has cooperated with neighbouring countries, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to coordinate responses to the Afghan situation. This includes discussions on border security, the refugee crisis, and economic cooperation.²² Tajikistan has maintained a careful balance in its relations with external powers, including Russia and China, which have regional interests. They have sought to protect their sovereignty while engaging in regional security discussions.²³

4. Challenges and Opportunities in Bilateral Relations

As neighbouring countries in the heart of Central Asia, these two nations share common borders and, to a significant extent, intertwined destinies. While the international community's engagement in Afghanistan has brought about specific opportunities for regional cooperation, it has also posed challenges and uncertainties. The economic potential within the Afghanistan-Tajikistan relationship includes the prospects for trade, energy cooperation, and infrastructure development. These areas present significant opportunities for both countries to enhance their economic integration and resilience. On the other hand, security concerns, which include the threat of transnational terrorism, drug trafficking, and regional rivalries, have cast a shadow over their relationship.

4.1 Pre-2021 cooperation between the two Countries: Diplomatic Initiatives and Engagements

Afghanistan and Tajikistan have engaged in bilateral meetings to discuss various aspects of their relationship. These meetings often covered border security, trade, energy cooperation, and cultural exchanges. Tajikistan has been interested in enhancing energy

¹⁸ "Tajikistan Calls up Reservists to Bolster Border as Afghan Troops Flee Taliban." *Reuters*, July 6, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hundreds-afghan-security-personnel-flee-into-tajikistan-taliban-advances-2021-07-05/>.

¹⁹ Kamila Ibragimova, "Tajikistan Hopes Taliban Foes Pay for Power." *Eurasianet*, October 6, 2021. <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-hopes-taliban-foes-pay-for-power>.

²⁰ UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal (ODP)*. "Afghanistan Situation External Update - 20 September 2021." <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88763>.

²¹ Catherine Putz, "Emomali in Paris: Tajikistan, Europe, and the Afghanistan Problem," *The Diplomat*, October 20, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/emomali-in-paris-tajikistan-europe-and-the-afghanistan-problem/>.

²² Gavin Helf, Donald N. Jensen, Garrett Nada, Tamanna Salikuddin, and Andrew Scobell. "How the Region is Reacting to the Taliban Takeover." *United States Institute of Peace* 19 (2021), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/08/how-region-reacting-taliban-takeover>

²³ Temur Umarov, "Why Russia sees little threat in China's growing involvement in Tajikistan." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 31, 2021.

and infrastructure cooperation with Afghanistan. There have been discussions about the potential for transmitting electricity from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan, which could benefit both countries economically.²⁴ The two nations have explored opportunities for energy cooperation, including electricity transmission from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. One notable economic initiative between Afghanistan and Tajikistan was the CASA-1000 (Central Asia-South Asia) project. CASA-1000 aimed to transmit electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was expected to enhance energy security in Afghanistan and contribute to regional economic development.²⁵ In addition, infrastructure projects have been a part of economic cooperation discussions. These projects aim to improve connectivity between the two countries and promote trade and economic growth. Road and transportation infrastructure investments have been discussed to facilitate the movement of goods and people.²⁶

Furthermore, both countries have sought to enhance trade relations. Discussions have revolved around simplifying customs procedures, reducing trade barriers, and promoting cross-border trade to benefit their economies. Afghanistan and Tajikistan have sought to strengthen their trade relations. They have explored ways to simplify customs procedures, reduce trade barriers, and promote cross-border trade. Both countries are members of various regional trade organizations facilitating economic cooperation in Central Asia.²⁷ Likewise, cultural and educational exchanges have been part of their diplomatic efforts. These initiatives aim to strengthen people-to-people ties, foster understanding, and promote cultural cooperation between the two nations.²⁸

4.1.1 Regional Initiatives

Afghanistan and Tajikistan, along with other Central Asian countries, have participated in various regional initiatives and organizations, such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program and the Turkic Council. These platforms have been used for economic cooperation and infrastructure development projects.²⁹ Afghanistan and Tajikistan are members of the SCO, a regional organization focusing on security, economic, and political cooperation in Central Asia. Within the SCO framework, they have participated in meetings and discussions to enhance regional stability and security.³⁰ Both countries are members of regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These organizations provide platforms for security dialogue and cooperation among member states, including on regional security challenges.³¹

²⁴ Putz, "Winter Energy Woes Bedevil Central Asia".

²⁵ Asian Development Bank. "Regional Power Transmission Project." July 30, 2023. <https://www.adb.org/projects/43150-022/main>.

²⁶ Emily Carll, "An Afghanistan at Peace Could Connect South and Central Asia." *Atlantic Council South Asia Center*, May 18, 2021.

²⁷ Yelena Kalyuzhnova Hans Holzacker, "Enhancing Connectivity and Trade Between Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Countries and the World: Benefits, Risks, and Policy Implications." No. 1271. *ADB Working Paper Series*, 2021. <https://www.adb.org/publications/enhancing-connectivity-trade-between-carec-world>.

²⁸ Marlene Laruelle, Sebastien Peyrouse and Vera Axyonova. "The Afghanistan-Central Asia Relationship: What Role for the EU?" *Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt*, 2013.

²⁹ Helf et al., "How the Region is Reacting."

³⁰ *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, "Astana Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation", 9 July 2024, <https://eng.sectsc.org/20240709/1438929.html>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

4.2 Obstacles Hindering Closer Ties: Post-2021

Below are some key obstacles hindering their relations:

4.2.1 Security Concerns

The volatile security situation in Afghanistan has been a significant obstacle to closer ties. The establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism by other non-state actors like ISKP have raised concerns for Tajikistan's stability and security.³² In addition, Afghanistan and Tajikistan share a lengthy and porous border, which has experienced occasional disputes and disagreements over demarcation and control.³³ Furthermore, access to and management of shared water resources, particularly the Panj River, has been contentious. Both countries need water for agriculture and energy generation, leading to disputes over usage.³⁴

4.2.2 Political and Economic Issues

Infrastructural challenges, trade barriers, and limited connectivity have hindered economic ties. Improved trade relations could benefit both nations.³⁵ In addition, Afghanistan's and Tajikistan's internal politics, including governance issues and political stability, can affect their ability to engage in closer ties and cooperation.³⁶ Furthermore, cultural and linguistic differences between the Afghan and Tajik populations create communication challenges and contribute to misunderstandings.³⁷

4.2.3 Regional Rivalries and External Influences

Afghanistan and Tajikistan often find themselves caught in the geopolitical competition between regional powers, such as Russia, China, and Iran. This competition can complicate their relations.³⁸ The role of external factors, including the United States, Russia, and China, in shaping the region's dynamics and their interests can either facilitate or hinder closer ties.³⁹

5. Assessment of Potential Areas for Cooperation

Assessing potential areas for cooperation between Afghanistan and Tajikistan can help identify avenues for strengthening their bilateral relations. Here are some key areas where cooperation is possible:

5.1 Energy, Trade, Economic Integration and Security

Tajikistan has significant hydropower potential, and Afghanistan's growing energy needs could create opportunities for electricity trade and energy cooperation. Efforts to reduce trade barriers and facilitate cross-border trade can benefit both nations and

³² International Crisis Group, "The Taliban's Neighbourhood", 8-17.

³³ Ibid, 18-20.

³⁴ Ibid, 21-25.

³⁵ Ibid, 18-20.

³⁶ Dauren Aben, "Regional Security In Central Asia: Addressing Existing and Potential Threats and Challenges." *Eurasian Research Journal* 1, No. 1 (2019): 51-65.

³⁷ Martha Brill Olcott, "Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 15, 2012. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/10/15/tajikistan-s-difficult-development-path-pub-49587>.

³⁸ Max Ee Khong Kie and Boymurod Eshonov. *Tajikistan: Trade Facilitation and Logistics Development Strategy Report*. Asian Development Bank, 2009.

³⁹ Barnett R Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain: Ending Chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan." *Foreign Affairs* (2008): 30-44.

stimulate economic growth⁴⁰. Both countries can collaborate on infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and energy pipelines, to enhance regional connectivity. In addition, collaborative efforts to combat terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking can enhance regional security and stability.⁴¹ Furthermore, joint initiatives for the sustainable management of shared water resources, such as the Panj River, can mitigate potential conflicts and ensure equitable access.⁴²

5.2 Humanitarian Assistance, Environmental Protection and Regional Stability

Collaboration on humanitarian aid and development projects can address common challenges like poverty and access to healthcare and education.⁴³ In addition, promoting people-to-people connections through educational and cultural exchanges can foster mutual understanding and strengthen ties. Furthermore, joint efforts to address environmental challenges like climate change and water scarcity can promote sustainable development. Both countries can work together to promote regional stability by facilitating peace talks and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan. Both countries can engage with regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program to further cooperation.⁴⁴

5.3 Geopolitical Factors Shaping the Relationship

Geopolitical factors play a significant role in shaping the relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. These factors involve the influence of external actors and regional dynamics that impact their bilateral ties. For instance, Russia's historical and ongoing influence in Central Asia, including Tajikistan, can affect the geopolitical dynamics in the region and its relations with Afghanistan.⁴⁵ The role of regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) can impact the alignment of Afghanistan and Tajikistan with other regional players.⁴⁶ Likewise, China's BRI projects in Afghanistan and Tajikistan can create economic development opportunities and introduce complexities related to China's regional aspirations.⁴⁷ While as Iran's influence on the broader region, including its relationship with Afghanistan and Tajikistan, can impact the political and economic landscape.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the presence and policies of Western countries, particularly the United States, in Afghanistan and the broader region can influence the geopolitical balance.⁴⁹ Similarly, India's interest and involvement in

⁴⁰ Asian Development Bank, "Asian Development Bank and Tajikistan: Fact Sheet." November 9, 2023. <https://www.adb.org/publications/tajikistan-fact-sheet>.

⁴¹ UNODC, "Impacts of Drug Use on Users and Their Families in Afghanistan", 2014.

⁴² L. Z. Wang, Liping Fang, and Keith W. Hipel, "Water Resources Allocation: A Cooperative Game Theoretic Approach," *Journal of Environmental Informatics* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 2003): 11-22, <https://doi.org/10.3808/jei.200300019>.

⁴³ UNDP, "Human Development Report 2020," <https://www.undp.org/kuwait/publications/human-development-report-2020>.

⁴⁴ Asian Development Bank, "Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration Through Economic Corridor Development." *Proceedings of The 2023 Regional Cooperation and Integration Conference*, June 2024. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/SPR240296-2>.

⁴⁵ Svante Cornell, E., and S. Frederick Starr, eds *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*. ME Sharpe, 2009.

⁴⁶ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, "Astana Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," July 9, 2024.

⁴⁷ Mehmood Hussain, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): An Analysis of Potential Threats and Challenges." *South Asian Pulse* (2016): 1-7.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *Iran Sanctions*. Vol. 19. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011.

⁴⁹ Seth G Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Afghanistan can affect the region's geopolitical dynamics and its relations with Tajikistan.⁵⁰

Conclusion

This paper examined the evolving political relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the post-2021 era, delving into the key factors and events shaping their interactions, shared concerns, and the potential avenues for cooperation and engagement. The evolving relationship between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the post-2021 era reveals a complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and regional dynamics. As these two Central Asian neighbours navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing political landscape, their interactions are shaped by security concerns, economic interests, and global influences. Tajikistan actively responded to the changing Afghan landscape, including heightened border security, addressing the humanitarian crisis, diplomatic engagements in regional forums, and pragmatic approaches to external powers. The country has been pragmatic in its approach, considering its immediate security concerns and long-term economic interests. Tajikistan's response reflects its efforts to navigate the complex geopolitical dynamics of the region while safeguarding its stability and interests in the face of uncertainty in Afghanistan. Tajikistan's careful balance reflects its commitment to immediate security concerns and long-term economic interests.

Security concerns, border disputes, water resource management, and regional rivalries obstruct their bilateral relationship. However, these interconnected obstacles have evolved, reflecting the complex nature of Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations—a comprehensive approach is needed to address these security and economic concerns. On the other hand, infrastructure development, energy trade, economic integration, and cultural exchanges offer avenues for cooperation. These potential areas for cooperation reflect the shared interests and interdependencies between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. By focusing on these areas, both countries can build a more constructive and mutually beneficial relationship in the future, contributing to peace and development in the region.

In addition, geopolitical factors, including Russian influence, China's Belt and Road Initiative, Iran's role, and U.S. involvement, will play pivotal roles in shaping the relationship. The geopolitical environment witnessed diverse engagements, with the Taliban seeking recognition, regional powers like Russia and China involved in stability efforts, and neighbouring countries closely monitoring the situation. Afghanistan's relationships with countries like the United States and Tajikistan's alignment with Russia can affect the security landscape and regional politics. Moreover, the region's competition for control and access to energy resources can influence the geopolitical positioning of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the presence of transnational threats, including terrorism and drug trafficking, in the region can shape the security cooperation between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. These geopolitical factors are intertwined and continuously evolving, making the Afghanistan-Tajikistan relationship subject to a complex web of regional and international dynamics. Understanding these factors is essential for comprehending the broader context in which their bilateral relations will operate.

Afghanistan and Tajikistan stand at a critical juncture where diplomatic finesse, collaborative frameworks, and shared commitment are essential. The identified

⁵⁰ Rajan Jha, "India-Afghanistan Strategic Relations in The Post-Taliban Period." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 19, no. 4 (2015): 92-107. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48505249>.

challenges, ranging from security to economic barriers, necessitate strategic cooperation. The intricate web of historical, political, economic, and security factors demands a comprehensive and informed approach to navigating the complexities of Central Asian geopolitics. The success of their future relations lies in a shared commitment to regional stability and prosperity. In addition, the former Republic officials and actors earlier supported by Tajikistan on ethnic lines are disintegrated, split, and disunited. Thus, it provides a window of opportunity for the defacto-authorities of Afghanistan to reach out to the political establishment of Tajikistan to move forward positively and engage in the above-mentioned mutual areas of cooperation. In this context, Tajikistan's areas of concern must be considered. Lastly, how these two nations navigate the complex landscape of regional politics, security dynamics, economic partnerships, and international influences will be crucial to securing their interests and promoting stability in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen diplomatic ties through sustained bilateral dialogues, promoting mutual understanding, and addressing shared concerns.
2. Prioritize economic cooperation by facilitating trade, improving connectivity, and jointly participating in infrastructure projects.
3. Fostering people-to-people connections through cultural and educational exchanges to promote understanding and goodwill.
4. Enhance security collaboration to mitigate the impact of transnational threats, including terrorism and drug trafficking.
5. Actively engage in regional organizations like the SCO and CAREC to harness collaborative efforts for stability and development.
6. Establish mechanisms for joint management of shared water resources, ensuring equitable access and minimizing potential conflicts.
7. Collaborate on environmental initiatives to address challenges like climate change and contribute to sustainable development.
8. Navigate international partnerships carefully, considering the interests and influences of external actors and leveraging opportunities for mutual benefit.

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