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Resetting India's Foreign Policy

Pragmatism and strategic interests are the new shift in India's foreign policy. India has been found recalibrating and ramping up its bilateral relations with Afghanistan. Bilateralism between both these countries has taken a new turn. Both are prioritizing their pragmatic engagement to promote their strategic interests. Their convergence will surely mark notable shift in geopolitics of the region and would have great implications for regional power dynamics.

India hosted Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban foreign minister of Afghanistan on October 9, 2025. Muttaqi came to India for high-level meetings for nearly eight days. He flew from Russia to New Delhi after relaxation by United Nations to move outside Afghanistan. Russia is the only country which has accorded full recognition to Taliban government. Even India has not done so, thus far to the de facto government of Taliban in Afghanistan. However, India continued to be one of countries that maintain some form of diplomatic or informal relations with Afghanistan. Muttaqi's visit was something which could have been unimaginable as India always accorded idealism a place of primacy in its conduct of foreign relations and have largely refrained from entering into any engagement with non-democratic regimes. It is clear indication of growing pragmatism in its foreign policy choices.

India had earlier in August 2021 shut down its embassy in Kabul and had withdrawn its then existing staff amidst the worsening law and order situation with Taliban-II takeover of political power and overthrow of Ashraf Ghani, the democratically elected Prime Minister. Even the Indian Consulates in Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat were closed when the conflict gradually intensified in early 2021.

Later India had sent a technical team to Kabul to run the mission on June 23, 2022. The mandate of the mission was to facilitate humanitarian assistance and provide consular support to some of the elites (mainly political) of Afghanistan. India then allowed Taliban to appoint an envoy in Delhi and to open consulates first in Mumbai, then a few months later in Hyderabad. It was during the visit of Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi that India committed itself to restore the diplomatic ties with Kabul by upgrading the Technical Mission into an embassy on October 21, 2025. India agreed to appoint CDA (Charge d'affaires) in the said Indian embassy.

Over the last three years both these countries have been gradually rebuilding ties with high-level engagements. India has also been advancing its strategic and security interests. It is a win-win situation for Taliban in its quest for recognition. It is bound to provide greater sense of legitimacy to Taliban both within the country as well as in the external world. Muttaqi is said to have discussed diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties with India during his visit.

Convergence between India and Afghanistan is bound to be an eyesore to Pakistan which is the arch-rival of both India and Pakistan. Afghanistan shares its boundary with both these countries. Taliban which is said to be the creation of Pakistan only is now at loggerheads with Afghanistan and more recently both have engaged in limited theater war in October 2025 itself.

India, Taliban and Pakistan would have hardly ever anticipated that Pakistan and Afghanistan would ever enter into war and that India would ever establish multilateral relationship with the Taliban government in Afghanistan. India always supported the Western-backed Afghan government, which Taliban-II has ousted. Thus, the visit smacks of pragmatism and realpolitik on both sides. Both sides are serious about upgrading their diplomatic, political and trade links. Indian government has been committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan. Muttaqi called India a close friend and expected the bilateral relations to grow in future. Taliban sent strong signal to Pakistan that it is no more dependent on Pakistan either for security or for its economy. India and Pakistan have been engaged in zero-sum game in Afghanistan and had been trying hard to dominate the political landscape of the country. Pakistan has been making all efforts to oust India from Afghanistan. Accordingly, India along with Iran and Russia has been supporting factions against Taliban to oust them from power in 2001. Then India continued to extend support to US-supported political dispensations for next twenty years. Pakistan enjoyed good relations with Taliban-I (1996-2001) and with Taliban-II (2021 onwards) in the beginning, which later got increasingly strained. Hence, it is indeed a notable and complex shift in the geopolitics and power dynamics of the region, as India is resetting its foreign policy priorities.

—BK