

India's Taliban Policy: Pragmatic Engagement Without Recognition

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India Taliban Engagement Latest News

- Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's eight-day visit to New Delhi marks the highest-level Taliban engagement with India since the group seized power in 2021.
- During the visit, India announced plans to re-establish its Embassy in Kabul, which has operated as a "technical mission" since June 2022 to oversee humanitarian aid and development projects.
- India's approach mirrors that of other nations and global institutions — **engaging the Taliban only on practical, humanitarian, and security grounds**, without offering diplomatic recognition or political endorsement.

India's 'Engagement Without Recognition' Policy Toward the Taliban Government

- Under international law, the acts of recognising a government and establishing diplomatic relations are separate processes.
 - Recognition implies acceptance of a government's legitimacy and lawful authority (de jure).
 - Diplomatic engagement, however, allows communication with a de facto authority without conferring formal legitimacy.
- If India were to officially recognise the Taliban-led Islamic Emirate, it would effectively validate the violent overthrow of the elected Afghan government in 2021 as a legitimate transition — a politically sensitive stance.
- India had done something similar once before, in the 1980s, when it became the only country to recognise the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan established after the 1978 coup.
- However, under the **Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic (1961) and Consular Relations (1963)**, nations are permitted to maintain or establish diplomatic contact with a de facto regime without extending formal recognition.
 - These conventions only codify the functions and rights of diplomatic missions, not the legitimacy of governments.

Managing the Afghan Embassy in New Delhi: A Diplomatic Compromise

- Following the Taliban's return to power, the Afghan Embassy in New Delhi became a focal point of the **legitimacy tussle between the former Republic's diplomats and the Taliban authorities**.
- Throughout 2023, both sides reached a practical compromise that allowed the Embassy to function without resolving the question of formal representation.
- The MEA informed Parliament in December 2023 that the Afghan Embassy "continues to function", with remaining diplomats maintaining essential operations even after some officials departed.
- By October 2025, Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi confirmed that "even those from the former government now work with us," signalling de facto coordination between the Taliban and existing Afghan diplomats in India.

India's Broader 'Engagement Without Recognition' Strategy

- India's approach to Afghanistan is part of a broader foreign policy model of engagement without recognition.
- This strategy allows India to protect strategic and humanitarian interests while avoiding the political implications of formal recognition.
- Similar approaches are seen in India's dealings with:
 - **Taiwan**, which operates through the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in New Delhi; and
 - **Myanmar**, where the junta-appointed diplomats continue to manage the Embassy following the 2021 military coup.

UN's Stand: No Recognition Yet

- The United Nations remains the benchmark for legitimacy, and recognition by it is the Taliban's top foreign policy goal.
- To gain recognition, the Taliban must ensure:

- An inclusive government,
- Dismantling terror networks, and
- Respecting human rights, especially of women and girls.
- Having failed to meet these conditions, the UN General Assembly Credentials Committee has rejected the Taliban's claim to Afghanistan's UN seat for the fourth consecutive year in November 2024.

Divergent Global Approaches

- Russia became the first country to formally recognise the Taliban government in July 2025.
- China (2023) was the first to send an Ambassador and accept a Taliban-appointed envoy.
- The UAE and Uzbekistan soon followed, accepting Taliban ambassadors.
- Despite strained relations, **Pakistan** upgraded its diplomatic ties in **May 2025**, appointing an **Ambassador to Kabul**, with the Taliban reciprocating by sending one to **Islamabad**.

India's Evolving Taliban Strategy: Pragmatism, Pakistan Rift, and Economic Leverage

- The Taliban's full control over Afghanistan and the absence of foreign-backed resistance have enabled India to adopt a more pragmatic approach than in the 1990s, when New Delhi supported the Northern Alliance.
- Today, **three key factors** underpin India's growing comfort with "engagement without recognition."

Taliban's Proactive Outreach and Anti-Terror Assurances

- Unlike its 1990s predecessor, the Taliban has sought foreign engagement, lobbying for India's re-entry even as New Delhi's missions remained closed.
- It has promised not to shelter anti-India groups, addressing India's long-standing security concerns rooted in the IC-814 hijacking.
- The Taliban's condemnation of the Pahalgam terror attack in May 2025 was viewed as a significant gesture of goodwill.
- This move helped India see the Taliban as distinct from Pakistan-backed terror networks, reinforcing cautious trust.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Rift: A Strategic Opening for India

- Ties between Pakistan and the Taliban have deteriorated sharply since 2021, reversing early optimism in Islamabad.
- The Taliban refuses to recognise the Durand Line as the official border and maintains ties with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whose attacks in Pakistan have surged.
- This breakdown has **created diplomatic space** for New Delhi to **expand engagement** with Kabul while watching Pakistan's influence wane.

Economic Leverage: India's Re-Entry Through Development

- India remains one of Afghanistan's largest development partners, with over \$3 billion in past investments across infrastructure, healthcare, and education.
- Following the Trump administration's withdrawal of foreign aid, the Taliban now seeks regional investment, particularly from India.
- In New Delhi, Muttqi invited Indian companies to invest in Afghanistan's mining sector and reiterated support for projects like the TAPI gas pipeline and Chabahar port connectivity.

Conclusion

- India's renewed engagement with the Taliban is driven by **security pragmatism, Pakistan's diminishing influence**, and **economic opportunity**.
- By carefully balancing outreach without formal recognition, New Delhi aims to **protect its strategic interests** while retaining flexibility in Afghanistan's uncertain geopolitical environment.

Source: **IE**

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