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Commentary

Will the strained Afghan–
Pakistani relations lead to
new logistical realities in
Afghanistan?

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New strategy. With the rise of the Taliban to power, it seems to have completely reevaluated its foreign policy strategy. The Taliban no longer solely focuses on the Islamic world as it did during its first government (1996-2021) and instead seeks to foster diplomatic cooperation in all possible directions. Central Asian countries, China, Azerbaijan, and the Arab world appear to be the promising partners the Taliban is counting on. Taliban strives for recognition by the international community and aims to attain the status of an equal subject in international relations.

Pakistan's Policy. On the other hand, Afghanistan's current foreign policy is distancing it from Pakistan, which was the closest partner of the Taliban. Pakistan has taken the following measures:

1) Pakistan still hasn't recognized the authority of the Taliban, despite the previous close cooperation;

2) Islamabad enforces restrictions on border trade and crossings;

3) It conducts airstrikes against terrorist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the territory of [Afghanistan](#);

Pakistan's position can be characterized as dissatisfaction with the loss of the loyal Taliban, which aims for autonomy in its foreign policy.

Afghanistan's Measures. In turn, the Taliban is taking its own measures towards the neighboring country:

1) It likely supports the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan to influence [Pakistan](#);

2) Afghan movement is developing its transportation, logistics and foreign trade potential bypassing Pakistan:

A) The Taliban and China maintain warm and pragmatic diplomatic relations. The act of President Xi Jinping personally accepting the credentials of the [Taliban ambassador](#) signaled the elevation of relations to a high level. The countries are fostering economic dialogue through the [Wakhan Corridor](#). Currently, road construction is underway, which could eventually transform the corridor from an area of instability into a new economic corridor between China and Afghanistan, as well as between the Central and South Asian regions.

B) The Taliban is actively expanding economic cooperation with Iran and India through the development of the Chabahar port. Afghanistan intends to invest [\\$35 million](#) in the development of this port. Afghanistan's participation in this project will involve the country in India's mega-project, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which, in turn, serves as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, Afghanistan's interest in the

Iranian port might not be about seeking an alternative to China but rather about accessing maritime ports without relying on Pakistan. Kabul might be looking for an alternative to the Gwadar port and sees the Chabahar port as the most likely choice. **Firstly**, this provides an independent economic policy bypassing Pakistan; **Secondly**, the Indo-Afghan alliance through cooperation at the Chabahar port may serve as another political lever against Islamabad.

- C) The Taliban government is paying attention to the development of trade, transit, and transportation with its northern neighbors. In this context, Uzbekistan emerges as a likely partner for Kabul in diversifying the country's foreign trade routes. Thus, during the visit of the Uzbekistan Foreign Minister to Kabul in March of this year, the Taliban leadership called on the Uzbek side to facilitate transit (visa issuance process to Afghan businessmen and transport personnel). In turn, Kabul's initiatives were supported by the [Uzbek side](#).

Enhancing logistical pathways through Uzbekistan towards the north has the potential to bolster trade relations of Afghanistan with Kazakhstan, as well as Russia. This collaboration in the northern direction could advance Afghanistan's external trade diversification and is likely to strengthen its ties with Russia.

- D) Another route involves the development of trade routes in the northwest direction. Kabul and Ashgabat are working on the implementation of the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan railway. The Taliban leadership expresses readiness to participate in the Lapis Lazuli route, which could connect [Afghanistan to Turkey](#) via Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

This development may open up the prospect for Afghanistan to reach Europe, which would enhance the country's economic potential.

Conclusion. The Taliban's foreign policy behavior has raised doubts from Islamabad about Kabul's loyalty. This has led to measures being taken by Pakistan, prompting retaliatory actions from Kabul. The Taliban is increasingly pursuing economic self-sufficiency, bolstering its autonomy by exploring alternative routes that bypass Pakistan. The country is developing the Wakhan Corridor as a link to connect with China and actively seeks access to the Iranian port of Chabahar. Kabul's search for routes bypassing Pakistan presents it with a new choice: perhaps participation in the Chinese

Belt and Road Initiative or the Indian North-South Transport Corridor, which are considered alternative or even conflicting projects.

In addition, the Taliban is actively trying to develop alternative routes to the north through Uzbekistan and to the northwest through Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. In turn, this could lead to diversification of the country's foreign trade routes, creating new logistical realities in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the new priorities of Taliban's foreign policy can impact the plans of Central Asian countries. As a result, connectivity projects between Central and South Asia via Pakistan can face some challenges.