

IRAN AND TALIBAN: FROM ENMITY TO PRAGMATISM

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Iran, Taliban, Mazar-i Sharif, Terrorism.*

The Taliban's seizure of the reins of power in Afghanistan has a significant impact on regional and international political processes. During years negotiations between US and regional States with Taliban was aimed at involvement of the moderate part of Taliban in the political life of the country. Taliban's return to power went dramatically differently from the planned agreement.

Along with the accelerated withdrawal of the international coalition forces, Taliban conquered almost all the provinces of the country without a fight. They took the presidential palace and returned to power. The new reality created in Afghanistan led regional and international actors to change their positions more or less.

The Iranian government is actively involved in the ongoing events in neighboring Afghanistan. After the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, Iran has adopted a flexible policy toward the group, the elements of which are non-confrontation, pragmatism, necessary cooperation and opposition to rapid recognition.

During the Taliban's first reign in power Iran was among the group's key adversaries. Iran and Taliban were almost led into war in 1998 following the killing Iranian diplomats and journalist by the group after the capture of Mazar-e-sharif. In 2001 Iran supported the overthrow of the Taliban by the US-led international coalition.

Iran is concerned about the presence of ISIS on its eastern border and Tehran's major reason in relation with Taliban is to counter the threat posed by IS-K. Taliban's current cabinet largely excludes minorities and Iran supports the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan with the participation of all ethno-religious groups. Tehran seems to be supporting the National Resistance Front led by Ahmad Massoud. After Taliban's return to power negotiations were held between Taliban and Ahmad Massoud in Tehran. There is a problem of refugees – Iran already hosts about 3, 5 million of Afghans. They are not popular in Iran, they are suspected of terrorism. Islamic Republic's harsh behavior has stirred controversy in Afghanistan, protests erupted outside the Iranian consulate in Herat. The issue of drug trafficking is not a new problem. The Taliban officially banned the production and export of opium, but it has continued. The water problem also has important influence on Iran-Afghanistan relations. For years Iran has accused Afghanistan of violating 1973 water-sharing treaty. This problem is relevant under the Taliban. In early 2022 Protesters in Iran's southeast attacked Afghan trucks due to the alleged lack of water.

Iran's relations with the Taliban became more conciliatory in past decades. Nowadays Tehran is trying to maintain balance in bilateral relations with the group. The Continuation of the current pragmatic relations between Iran and Taliban depends on the way the Taliban decides to rule. The strengthening of radical elements within Taliban's ranks makes serious confrontation with Iran possible on ideological grounds.