



**ACPIS**

Afghanistan Center for Peace  
and International Studies






# Report

## **The First Round of the “Afghanistan and the Region” Dialogue**

**Hosted by the Afghanistan Center for Peace and International Studies ACPIIS**

### **An Analysis of Middle Eastern Foreign Policy Toward Afghanistan Before and After the Taliban**

**Thursday, April 03, 2025 (Via Zoom)**

 [www.acpis.org](http://www.acpis.org)  
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The Afghanistan Center for Peace and International Studies has launched a series of dialogues under the title "**Afghanistan and the Region.**" The first round of these dialogues is dedicated to examining the **foreign policy of the Middle East toward Afghanistan before and after the Taliban.**

## The First Round of the “Afghanistan and the Region” Dialogue An Analysis of Middle Eastern Foreign Policy Toward Afghanistan (Before and After the Taliban)

The first round of the "Afghanistan and the Region" dialogue, focusing on Middle East foreign policy toward Afghanistan before and after the Taliban, was hosted by the Afghanistan Center for Peace and International Studies on Thursday, April 3, 2025, via Zoom.

The dialogue addressed the foreign policies of Egypt, the State of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation OIC regarding Afghanistan, and examined the role of these countries in bilateral relations as well as in the peace process.

**The list of speakers at this event is as follows:**

Name	Topic of Discussion	Short Bio
<b>Ahmad Tariq Noorzadeh</b>	Moderator	Ahmad Tariq Noorzadeh is the president and CEO of the Afghanistan Center for Peace and International Studies ACPIS. He has 17 years of experience working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions in China and Turkmenistan. Mr. Noorzadeh holds a Master's degree in International Relations and has published numerous articles in the fields of China and Central Asia.
<b>Azimullah Warsaji</b>	Review of the Peace Talks Between the Afghanistan Government and the Taliban in Doha: Key Points of Agreement and Disagreement, and Qatar's Role and Influence in the Peace Process of Afghanistan.	Azimullah Warsaji is the Deputy of the Afghanistan Center for Peace and International Studies ACPIS. He has 16 years of experience in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and has served in diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, India, and Qatar. His area of expertise is the Middle East, and he has published numerous articles. Mr. Warsaji holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Egypt and is fluent in Persian, English, and Arabic.
<b>Ahmad Husaini Marvi</b>	Review of Afghanistan-Turkey Bilateral Political Relations until 2021, Turkey's Role in the Peace Negotiations, Current Relations between Turkey and the Taliban, and the Iran-Turkey Proxy War in Afghanistan.	Ahmad Hosaini Marvi is a scholar of Nawai and a translator of Arabic and Chagatai Turkish languages. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies/Theology in Afghanistan and his master's degree in Oriental Studies from Baku State University. He has served for nearly two decades in various departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Afghanistan's diplomatic and consular missions in Turkey and Azerbaijan. In addition to Persian, he is proficient in Arabic, Turkish, and English. Mr. Husaini Marvi has translated ten books into Persian so far.
<b>Abdul Moeen Shahid</b>	A Look at Afghanistan's Political Relations with Saudi Arabia Until 2021 and beyond, and the Importance of Saudi Arabia for the Taliban.	Abdul Maeen Shahid is an experienced diplomat with 20 years of working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. He has served in Afghanistan's diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Malaysia and is proficient in Persian, Arabic, and English.
<b>Mohammad I. Ghafoori</b>	History of Afghanistan's Membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Key Actions of the Organization in Peace Negotiations, Influential Members of the OIC, and the Current Status of Afghanistan's Representation in the Organization.	Mohammad Ibrahim Ghafoori is a former diplomat with 26 years of experience working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. Mr. Ghafoori has served in diplomatic missions in Uzbekistan, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), as the head of the Afghanistan Embassy in Bulgaria, and as Afghanistan's representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). He holds a master's degree in International Relations and is fluent in Uzbek, Persian, Arabic, and English, with knowledge of Turkish and Russian.

The Middle East is one of the most significant regions both regionally and globally. Its vast oil resources, deep-rooted religious divisions, intense political and security rivalries, shared religious, sectarian, and linguistic characteristics, conflicting interests, and the outbreak of wars among the countries of the region have placed the Middle East at the center of global attention. Moreover, as

the birthplace of terrorism—which remains a fundamental challenge to security and stability in Afghanistan—the Middle East highlights the need to examine the root causes of this issue.

However, Afghanistan also shares many commonalities with Middle Eastern countries. Religion, sect, history, and culture are among the most important commonalities between Afghanistan and the Middle East. Over the past twenty years, with the extensive presence of Western actors in Afghanistan, relatively less attention was paid to the Middle East. However, in the later years of the Afghanistan Republic government, the importance of Middle Eastern countries became more evident. Saudi Arabia, as the birthplace of Islam; the religious and spiritual ties of the Afghanistan people with Al-Azhar in Egypt; trade, economic relations, and investment in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Jordan; migration and job-seeking in Iran and Turkey; and finally, Qatar as the host of the peace negotiations—these are among the most prominent examples that can be mentioned.

Terrorism, often referred to as Afghanistan’s greatest challenge, originates in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda, and later ISIS, were born in this region before finding fertile ground for expansion in Afghanistan. The September 11 attacks in New York, carried out by Al-Qaeda, and the mass killings of religious minorities in Iraq and Syria by ISIS, are clear examples of the crimes committed by these groups. Extremist ideologies and divergent interpretations of religion have led to the formation of numerous branches of terrorist organizations in other countries, even as far as Africa. The Taliban, given their deep historical ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, have received support from certain Middle Eastern countries. They have established their governance on the foundation of extremist religious beliefs, the consequences of which are now evident in the fate of the Afghan people—particularly women. The more we strive for stability and security in Afghanistan, the more essential it becomes to understand the roots of insecurity and extremism and to trace their origins and supporters back to the Middle East.

### **Qatar and the Afghanistan Peace Talks:**

The peace negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban began in 2020, hosted by the State of Qatar. From the outset, the dialogue process between the delegations of both sides faced numerous challenges, obstacles, and serious disagreements. The Afghanistan government’s negotiating team was introduced with a six-month delay and lacked the authority to make decisive progress in the negotiations. At no point did they propose a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban to accelerate the process.

Additionally, the Afghanistan delegation failed to effectively inform the public about the developments of the negotiations. Due to the composition of the Afghanistan negotiating team, there was no unified narrative among its members. Intense political rivalries, particularly between the Presidential Palace and the High Council for National Reconciliation, had a negative impact on the delegation’s performance.

From Afghanistan’s side and within the domestic context, there were four main actors involved:

- The Presidential Office;
- The High Council for National Reconciliation;
- Political party leaders, and ethnic figures; and
- Civil society groups and media organizations.

These actors not only played roles in the peace negotiations but also significantly contributed to their failure. The then-President of Afghanistan played a key role in the breakdown of the peace talks, particularly due to his unwillingness to step down from political power, his failure to grasp the shifting geopolitical dynamics of U.S. foreign policy, and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. He actively weakened domestic political forces, ignored growing dissatisfaction, and failed to address rising levels of corruption, ethnic favoritism, and power monopolization, all of which contributed to worsening economic conditions for the Afghanistan people—without seeking practical solutions.

The High Council for National Reconciliation was ineffective in seriously pursuing peace talks. Instead of focusing on mobilizing support to confront the challenges of the peace process, it became preoccupied with internal political rivalries and retaliatory policies against the President. The Council relied excessively on promises made by the U.S. envoy, which underscores Dr. Abdullah Abdullah's role in the eventual failure of the peace negotiations.

The political factions in Afghanistan also never acted in an organized or unified manner to ensure the success of the peace negotiations. They mostly relied on intelligence reports from foreign countries, lacked sufficient motivation to politically and militarily resist the Taliban, and some placed excessive hope in the outcomes of the Doha talks. These groups also largely complied with the demands of the Afghanistan president and had a poor understanding of the real capabilities of the Afghanistan security and defense forces in facing the Taliban.

There were also commonalities between the negotiating teams of the Afghanistan government and the Taliban—particularly the prioritization of personal, familial, and factional interests over those of the Afghanistan people and the nation as a whole, as well as a failure to accurately identify Afghanistan's allies and enemies. Both sides were unwilling to consider each other's proposals objectively and focused more on secondary issues.

The Taliban's delegation primarily followed directions from the battlefield and instructions from Pakistan's intelligence apparatus. They operated within the narrow framework of Pashtunwali culture and refused to recognize the rights of other sects, ethnicities, and languages in Afghanistan. The Taliban were firmly committed to securing the release of their prisoners and establishing a regime in Afghanistan based on their own ideological interpretation. As a result, they consistently emphasized the failures of the Republic and insisted on implementing their version of Sharia law. The State of Qatar, as the host of the Afghanistan peace negotiations, also played an influential role in the process. In the past, Qatar had hosted peace talks for countries such as Sudan, Djibouti, Lebanon, Yemen, Hamas, and Iraq—and most notably, the peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban.

However, Qatar lacked a clear understanding of Pakistan's role in the peace talks or chose to overlook it. The country also misjudged the self-centeredness of the Afghanistan President and instead placed greater trust in the Taliban's negotiating team and their ability to make decisive commitments.

On many occasions, Qatar downplayed the sensitivities and interests of Afghanistan's neighboring countries regarding the peace process. It assumed that peace in Afghanistan would benefit everyone, and therefore, believed that all regional actors would naturally support any peace proposal.

The United States played a decisive role in the Afghanistan peace process. However, this role ultimately faced failure for several reasons. The U.S. did not exert sufficient and maximum

pressure on President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani to respond to the demands of the Afghanistan people. Similarly, it failed to apply the necessary pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting the Taliban. Another key reason for the failure was Afghanistan's exclusion from the signing of the Doha Agreement and the lack of explicit reference to Afghanistan's two decades of achievements, particularly in the areas of women's rights and democracy.

Egypt held importance for Afghanistan in educational, cultural, and judicial fields, and there were opportunities for cooperation. Al-Azhar University, as a center of moderate Islamic scholarship, had played a significant role in training influential figures, and the continuation of this relationship could have been very beneficial—but that did not happen.

Egypt's objectives in Afghanistan, like those of other Arab countries, are primarily security-related. Moreover, some Egyptian nationals affiliated with al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist groups were active in Afghanistan under the Taliban's protection. The killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian national, in Kabul is a clear example of Egypt's growing concerns in Afghanistan.

## **Afghanistan and Turkey: Political and Economic Cooperation**

Diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Turkey were established with the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1921. Turkey's embassy was the first foreign diplomatic mission to open in Kabul, and Afghanistan was the second country to recognize the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the first to recognize Ankara as the capital of Turkey.

Between the 1920s and 1960s, Turkey supported Afghanistan's modernization efforts and played a significant role in strengthening and supporting Afghanistan state institutions—including administrative, military, cultural, educational, and healthcare sectors. Between 1932 and 1960, a total of 212 Turkish teachers, doctors, officers, and other specialists were sent to Afghanistan.

The close friendship and cooperation between the two countries continued until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Afterward, Turkey supported the Mujahideen who were fighting against the Soviet occupation.

Turkey's foreign policy toward Afghanistan is based on four key principles: supporting Afghanistan's unity and territorial integrity; ensuring security and stability; strengthening an inclusive political structure that enjoys the support and participation of all segments of society; and eliminating terrorism and extremism from Afghanistan to bring peace and prosperity to its people.

To achieve these goals, Turkey has provided extensive support to Afghanistan both bilaterally and through international organizations. Strengthening Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors is another element of Turkey's approach. To this end, the Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral summit was launched in 2007, and the Istanbul Process – Heart of Asia initiative began in 2011. Turkey's developmental program worth approximately one and a half billion dollars, carried out in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2021, is one of Turkey's largest foreign aid programs to another country.

As part of high-level visits, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey, made an official visit to Afghanistan in October 2014, becoming the first Turkish president to visit Afghanistan in five decades. During this visit, a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement was signed between the two countries.



After the Taliban's capture of Kabul on August 15, 2021, the Republic of Turkey, along with the international community, has pursued a balanced and pragmatic policy of engagement with the Taliban administration. Turkey's embassy in Kabul and its consulates in Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat remain active. Turkey has stated that these collaborations, both bilaterally and within the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations, aim to reduce the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The Turkish Red Crescent established its representation in Afghanistan in 2018 and has continued its operations, with its aid reaching a total of 18.1 million dollars by 2023.

Although Turkey has not recognized the Taliban, at the request of the Taliban administration, it handed over the Afghanistan embassy and consulates to representatives of the group. While Turkey's approach to its relationship with Afghanistan may differ from that of its neighbors and some other countries in the region, it still has its own interests, both in terms of regional competition and cultural ties.

### **Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia:**

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan over the past 50 years has been that of a country with various influential tools engaging with a crisis-ridden, responsive country. Therefore, analyzing this relationship essentially answers the question of what role Saudi Arabia has played in Afghanistan's developments.

The bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia since 1932 can be divided into four distinct periods: the era of Zahir Shah and Daoud Khan, the era of Jihad, the first Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and finally, the 20 years of the Republic government.

In the periods of Zahir Shah, Daoud Khan, and the Jihad of the Afghanistan people, Saudi Arabia provided significant support for Afghanistan's resistance against Soviet invasion. Additionally, the country made efforts to mediate the disputes among the Jihad leaders, particularly during the Makkah Conference of 1993. With the rise of the first Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia shifted its stance and recognized the Taliban administration in May 1997. During this period, Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance to the Taliban until diplomatic relations were severed in September 2001.

During the 20-year period of the Afghanistan Republic government starting in 2001, Afghanistan's relations with Saudi Arabia can be categorized into several key areas.

Saudi Arabia has focused on different interests at various points in time, which can be categorized as follows:

1. **Political Interests:** Saudi Arabia seeks political and regional influence in Afghanistan, taking into account the geopolitics of the region. This includes alliances and coordination with other countries, especially Pakistan.
2. **Security Interests:** Saudi Arabia has been concerned with issues such as the presence of al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, as well as maintaining stability in the country to control terrorist groups, and the drug trade, and prevent regional instability.
3. **Cultural and Religious Interests:** Saudi Arabia aims to promote its religious ideology in Afghanistan, aligning with its vision of Islam.

4. **Economic Interests:** Saudi Arabia is interested in gaining access to Central Asia and investing in Afghanistan's minerals.

During the Republic era of Afghanistan, the country also sought to establish diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Afghanistan's interests included political recognition, economic assistance, facilitating exports and investments, and creating job opportunities. Culturally, facilitating the performance of Hajj and Umrah for Afghanistan citizens was a priority.

However, there have been conflicts of interest between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, including:

- **Ongoing Political Instability:** The continuous political instability and changing governments in Afghanistan have been a major concern.
- **Taliban's Rule:** The rule of the Taliban has been a major point of contention.
- **Terrorism and Opposing Groups:** The presence of terrorist groups and groups hostile to Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan has caused tension.
- **Saudi Arabia's Political Priorities:** These include competition with Iran, alliances with Pakistan, and supporting the Taliban during the first period of their rule.
- **Religious and Ideological Promotion:** Saudi Arabia's attempts to spread its religious ideology in Afghanistan have been a source of friction.

For the Taliban, their primary interests in establishing relations with Saudi Arabia have been recognition, seeking economic aid, and gaining political support. However, challenges such as the lack of recognition by other countries, the Taliban's support for terrorist groups, shifts in Saudi foreign policy, and regional competition between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan have complicated their relationship.

## Afghanistan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the largest international organization after the United Nations, comprising 57 member countries. It controls about 70% of the world's oil reserves and 50% of the global natural gas resources. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, and especially after World War II, there was a surge in the desire for independence and the growth of nationalist thought in Islamic countries. The political developments in 1948 in Palestine and the defeat of Arab countries in the 1967 war were among the main factors that led to the idea of creating a larger structure to defend the interests of the Islamic world. The fire at the Al-Aqsa Mosque by an Australian tourist in 1969 further accelerated the formation of the organization.

King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan II of Morocco, and other leaders from Arab and Muslim countries decided to establish the Organization of Islamic Cooperation during a historic summit in September 1969 in Rabat. In 1970, foreign ministers of Islamic

countries officially announced the creation of the organization during a meeting in Jeddah, and its charter was adopted at the 1972 summit in Jeddah.

Over the past 56 years, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has faced numerous challenges, including conflicts and bloody wars between member countries. In some cases, the organization has been able to play a positive role, such as resolving the relatively peaceful conflicts



between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Jordan in 1970 and the bloody wars between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971. In these two instances, the presence of charismatic and influential leaders in the Islamic world and strong leadership within the organization's secretariat played a fundamental role. However, in some cases, such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), due to the lack of strong leadership among member countries and Iran's weak diplomacy, the organization was unable to play an effective role.

The relationship between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Afghanistan has always been influenced by political, military, and security developments within Afghanistan and the interventions of neighboring and regional countries. Following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, an extraordinary meeting of the OIC foreign ministers was held in Islamabad in 1980. In a resolution, the invasion was condemned, and the communist government of Afghanistan was deemed illegitimate, leading to the suspension of Afghanistan's membership. However, in 2021, after the Taliban took control of Kabul, another emergency meeting of foreign ministers was held in Islamabad. This time, the organization, while urging member countries to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan, established a fund to facilitate this aid.

Afghanistan's membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has been suspended twice: the first time in 1980 due to the Soviet invasion, and the second time in 1996 due to the Taliban's rise to power. Despite this, the organization continued its cooperation with the Mujahideen groups in Pakistan. The OIC's efforts to resolve Afghanistan's crises failed due to the lack of active diplomacy and Afghanistan's excessive reliance on external powers, as well as the conflicting interests of influential regional countries within the organization. The policies of Afghanistan's southern and western neighbors complicated the peace process and even made it nearly impossible.

Despite these obstacles, the OIC held several meetings to end Afghanistan's internal conflicts and issued resolutions, but these efforts did not lead to tangible results. Overall, the OIC's approach to the Afghanistan crisis, like other crises in its member countries, has been largely advisory, moral, and emotional, without having binding mechanisms to compel countries to end conflicts.

The organization's relationship with the Taliban is not much different from its relationship with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The OIC's political office remains active in Kabul, and Afghanistan's representation in Jeddah continues to operate.

With its current structure and decision-making methods outlined in its charter, the OIC is not equipped to address the serious challenges among its member states. Factors such as weak governance and lack of democracy, ideological and sectarian differences, absence of binding legal frameworks, emphasis on consensus in decision-making, intra-organizational unions, and reliance on external factors are among the main reasons for the organization's failure to achieve its goals and address existing crises.

## Conclusion:

- The Middle East is considered one of the most important regions in the world.
- The origin of terrorism, one of Afghanistan's major challenges, is the Middle East.
- Countries such as the State of Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates have played significant roles in the developments in Afghanistan.
- The failure of peace negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in Doha led to the Afghanistan people experiencing the worst possible conditions.
- The main reasons for the failure of the peace negotiations include a lack of understanding of domestic and international developments, failure to align with the broader interests of Afghanistan and its people, division, and lack of unity among political groups and decision-making bodies within the Afghanistan government.
- Key actors in Afghanistan's peace talks included the presidency, the National Reconciliation Council, political parties, civil society organizations, and media institutions.
- Al-Azhar University in Egypt, as a moderate religious institution where some Afghanistan jihad leaders studied, failed to play a constructive role in resolving Afghanistan's crisis.
- Turkey's largest foreign aid program has been directed to Afghanistan.
- The relationship between Turkey and Afghanistan is also influenced by regional rivalries.
- Current relations between Turkey and the Taliban are described as efforts to assist the Afghanistan people.
- The relationship between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia is that of a country with multiple tools for influence engaging with a crisis-stricken country.
- Saudi Arabia, being the birthplace of Islam, has always played a significant role in Afghanistan's developments.
- Saudi Arabia's policy shift and decreased interest in extremist groups has impacted its relationship with the Taliban.
- The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), after the United Nations, is the largest non-governmental entity that has played an important role in resolving conflicts and supporting the Islamic world.
- Afghanistan's membership in the OIC was suspended twice.
- The OIC has failed to play a constructive role in Afghanistan's crises.

**End.**