

**Analyzing the Post-August 2021 Afghan Humanitarian  
Crisis: A Case Study of Evaluating International Responses  
to the Crisis**



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(2024)

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, without whose unwavering support I would not have achieved any of the milestones in my life. And to the resilient people of Afghanistan, whose courage in the face of adversity continually inspires my work and reminds me of the importance of peace and justice in our world.



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## **Abstract**

The consequent turn of events in post-August 2021' Afghanistan, surged an economic crisis in the country, pushing forth the health, education, food, refugee, and security crisis, which has concerned not only the Afghani people but has extreme security and social impacts globally. In this regard, this study investigates the responses of the international community vis-à-vis post-August 2021 Afghanistan by evaluating the reasoning and possibilities of evolution in responses by examining the situation through the constructivist (Onuf, 1989) approach. Regarding that, this research employs a thorough insight into understanding the 'construct of international relations' concerning the Taliban government in Afghanistan through an in-depth consideration of constructivism. Concerning the focused study, a qualitative approach has been followed to undertake the research while using the purposive sampling technique to gather data by carrying out well-designed yet semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. Analyzing the collected data, this study demonstrates that the Taliban re-takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, has appealed to an inimical response from the international community which is continually being evolved with the transformation of dynamics. Employing a constructivist approach eventually assisted in explaining the inimical and diverse set of attitudes from the international community towards the Afghanistan situation, embodying the respective state's perceived reality, and suggesting their shared norms, goals, interests, fears, threats, and identities. Furthermore, this study unveiled the eventual evolution of international responses, from skepticism and condemnations to the expanding of diplomatic relations towards Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, amid the circumstances, subsequent to the post-August 2021' Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Constructivism, Humanitarian Crisis, International Community, International Organization

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Post August 2021' the humanitarian crisis in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon to come across when looking at Afghanistan's history. The historiography of Afghanistan shows it has always been a key point of great power's engagements. For more than half a century, the engagement has led to a systemic crisis (Ushakova, 2022) which eventually caused a long-lasting humanitarian crisis. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, a land-locked country, located within South and Central Asia, has been regarded as the "Graveyard of Empires" (Jones, 2010), a moniker representing Afghanistan's dated historiography, as over the centuries, none of the great powers i.e., Macedonians (during 330 BC), the Mongols (during 13<sup>th</sup> century), the Britishers (during 19<sup>th</sup> century), the Soviet Union (during 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the last invasion by the United States (for almost two decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century) were able to come across the real victory, even after the centuries of military struggles (Fergusson & Hughes, 2019). Thus, the eventual fallout of all the great powers denotes the significance of mythology denoted to Alexander the Great' reported quote, where he signified the complexity of controlling Afghanistan's state and society by saying "Afghanistan is easy to march into but hard to march out of" (Atwood, 2001).

Being an epicenter of continuous strategic competition over the centuries and more importantly invasion by the Soviet Union and the United States after its independence did not allow the potency of Afghanistan's state institution which caused the eventual institutional crisis with an impotent and no mechanized state authority. Eventually, an impotent state authority resulted in a systemic crisis with an unstable central government and weak social contract (Ushakova, 2022). The systemic crisis coupled with the impotent state institutions, ambidextrous actions of elites in power, and prevalent corruption of those in power further resulted in the lack of socio-political, educational, and economic opportunities (Sehgal, 2010). The situation eventually instigated the environment for insurgents thus pushing Afghanistan into a disordered society (Jones, 2008).

Nonetheless, August 2021 marked the surge of an already established economic crisis. As with the two decades-long presence in Afghanistan, the United States could not achieve what it intended to, i.e., to root out Al-Qaida and its effects to inspire terror globally. The half-baked strategy (Wadhen, Hali, & Jamil, 2019) from the United States and the short-termism by the United States and its allies eventually failed to root out transnational terrorism (Brands & O'Hanlon, 2021). Nonetheless, August 2021 marked the end of the United States presence in Afghanistan with the abrupt yet long overdue withdrawal of US troops. The eventual scenario of United States withdrawal was coupled with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan's administration in August 2021. However, the abrupt withdrawal neither provided a suitable environment for security sector reforms nor could elevate the process of post-conflict economic recovery for the country. This left the country on the brink of security and economic collapse after twenty years of security and financial dependence on international funding and support (Essar, Ashworth, & Arash, 2022).

Regarding the security outlook of the country, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the security of the country continuously remained shaky thus providing a way for the international powers i.e., the Soviet Union and the United States, to oversee the security situation of the country. Moreover, the United States invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, further made Afghanistan dependent on the defense support of the United States and its allied forces. The eventual establishment of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) was then assigned to look after the military and internal security of Afghanistan. However, the planned handing over of the responsibilities of Afghan security forces to local Afghans (Biddle, 2013) failed, with the abrupt withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan. The lack of training, equipment, and no national security strategy by the government (BAYIR, 2022) further failed the comprehensive security task force thus deteriorating the environment for any kind of security sector reforms.

Following the United States withdrawal, the already established economic and security crisis (Essar, Ashworth, & Arash, 2022) further deteriorated with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. The eventual situation instigated one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century. Explaining the magnitude of the crisis, Freshta Abbasi, an Afghan specialist at Human Rights Watch detailed that, the "Afghans' lives were turned upside down on August 15, 2021," where "People are dying of hunger amid one of the world's worst humanitarian crises" (CABOT, 2022).



The eventual situation mainly was the result of the Taliban government which came into existence on August 15, 2021, but remained internationally unrecognized till now. The sudden withdrawal of United States forces, and the eventual Taliban takeover of Afghanistan's administration received an inimical response from the international community. In response to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, several international sanctions have been imposed by several states, and international organizations, with the freezing of Afghanistan's assets. The United States alone has frozen almost \$9.4 Billion in assets of the Afghan central bank (Modebadze, 2022). The consequent situation rigorously impacted the already weakened economic situation of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban administration's advances on human rights fronts further alerted the international community as reports of human rights abuses mainly against women's rights and gender discrimination spiraled the inimical response of the international community towards Afghanistan's administration.

Consequently, the country had to face the humanitarian crisis on two fronts, where sanctions by the international community and the Taliban's violation of human rights laws, worsened the humanitarian crisis, instigating the exodus of refugees, which concerned the international community, with the threat of causing an economic burden to the already challenged world economy, amid the pandemic of COVID-19. The eventual menace of burdening the economy and the threat of terrorism from the Taliban's administration posed a serious concern to Western and regional security.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation and the consequent impact of the humanitarian crisis, a threat to jeopardize global security, eventually alerted and then compelled the international community to take several initiatives by carrying out humanitarian assistance (Narain, Rackimuthu, Essar, & Vink, 2022). Concerned with the security threats, Pakistan, along with the international community, took several initiatives, where Pakistan being a neighboring country suggested OIC meetings (OIC, 2022) to draw the attention of the international community towards the crisis because if ignored, it would jeopardize global security.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The consequent turn of events in Afghanistan, which surged an economic crisis in the country, pushing forth the health, education, food, refugee, and security crisis, has concerned

not only the Afghani people but has extreme security and social impacts for the international community.

Subsequently, this study investigates the responses of the international community towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan, and explores the impact of re-Talibanization of Afghanistan on the crisis, while looking at the subsequent and eventual evolution of those international responses. Furthermore, this research investigates the impingement of the current Afghan humanitarian crisis on the behaviors of the international community towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan and assesses the prospects of relieving Afghanistan's situation resulting from the eventual international responses.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- a. What kind of responses are being observed by the international community vis-à-vis Post-August 2021 Afghanistan?
- b. How is the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan, impacting the response of the international community towards Afghanistan?
- c. How is the current Afghan humanitarian crisis impinging on the behaviors of the international community towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

- a. To examine the responses being observed by the international community vis-à-vis Post-August 2021 Afghanistan.
- b. To investigate the impact of the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan on the responses of the international community
- c. To identify how the current Afghan humanitarian crisis is impinging on the behaviors of the international community towards Post-August 2021 Afghanistan.

### **1.5 Research Significance**

In today's globalized world, humanitarian crises, instigated by armed conflicts often affect more people in the world than at any other time in recorded history (Kohrt, Mistry, Anand, Beecroft, & Nuwayhid, 2019). Overcoming humanitarian crises requires a comprehensive policy. In case of Afghanistan, which had a significant strategic importance throughout

history, and whose instability may cause a huge consequence for global security, requires a comprehensive global strategy. Nonetheless, reviewing the literature, it has been observed that although the issue of the 2021' humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the eventual result of the Taliban's control of Afghanistan, has been widely discussed by Researchers from all around the world where most of their focus remained on the reasons behind the crisis.

However, the ensuing situation of Afghanistan's crisis and its eventual impact on its immediate neighbors has largely been lacking in the previous studies. Moreover, previous research studies did not show interest in exploring the international response to the crisis and any initiatives that are being taken by the international community. In this regard, this study investigates the transition of international responses from skepticism and condemnations (Byrd, 2023) to the upgrading of diplomatic relations (Mir & Watkins, 2024), towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan while correspondingly exploring the humanitarian initiatives that are being taken by the international community. Subsequently, this research is a bright way to contribute to analyzing the humanitarian assistance initiated globally. Likewise, this research will be a huge contribution to peace and conflict scholarship as this research not only investigates the crisis thoroughly but also comprehends its alarming consequence by observing the international community' response while looking out for the fault lines, if any, which could contribute to the halting of any improvement in the deadly crisis faced by the Afghan people.

## **1.6 National Relevance**

Being a neighboring country, Pakistan, which already hosts the biggest number of Afghan refugees, since the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, has faced the new biggest number of refugees, fleeing the country after United States withdrawal (Post August 2021). The eventual influx of refugees further stressed Pakistan's struggling economy. Besides economic implications, Pakistan which always hyphenates its security with Afghanistan's well-being could have massive security implications in the case of troubled Afghanistan under Taliban's administration which is now being illustrated by the re-emergence of Taliban in Pakistan (Afzal, 2022). Thus, investigating the impacts and responses from an international perspective while keeping in mind Pakistan's policies towards Afghan current humanitarian crisis under the Taliban regime can help observe the fault lines, if any, which could contribute to the halting of any progress in the deadly crisis faced by the Afghan people.

In this way, as expressed by the Afzal (2022) study, the current Afghanistan situation that is challenging for Pakistan can also be converted into an opportunity by fostering peaceful and mutual cooperation for stability and development because a stable and secure Afghanistan would mean a secure Pakistan.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 A Scoping Evaluation of the Literature' Conceptualizing Post August 2021' Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation**

The following chapter provides an overview of the literature that exists on Post-August 2021' Afghanistan's humanitarian situation and the subsequent response of the international community to the crisis that ascended, amid the end of the United States war on terror in Afghanistan. Abrupt yet long overdue withdrawal of the United States and its allies' forces, uncertain political control of the Taliban', lowest social contract, and subsequent halting of international support further put the country in an ominous economic situation which eventually worsened the situation and laid down an environment for human insecurity.

Although many elucidations have been detailed by the scholars concerning the crisis, explaining the eruption and basics of the crisis intensifying in Afghanistan, the focus of the analysis would be to sketch out an overview of the Post-August 2021' Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and the ensuing response of the international community. In consideration of looking at the response of the international community, this review will engage to identify and assess literature outlining the commonalities and differences between the 1990s and post-2021 international responses towards the Taliban-administered Afghanistan. Subsequently, reviewing the literature through this pattern has assisted in looking out for and evaluating the specific themes, that expedited the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and furthered an eventual evolution of international responses to the Taliban administration, by taking a theoretical understanding of constructivist approach in the framework of this research. The existing literature, in this regard, is thoroughly reviewed to critically synthesize and evaluate the literature in the context of undergoing research.

##### ***2.1.1 Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis***

Though the focus of the review emphasizes the post-August 2021 humanitarian crisis and an eventual evolution of international responses to the crisis, nonetheless the literature suggests

that the crisis has its roots back to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Afghanistan came under the radar of cold-war rivalry. Nwakanma and Irokansi (2020) assessed Afghanistan as a crisis-personified country whose history is flecked with the marks of insurgencies, civil wars, rebellion, and wars, intensifying its status as an “epicenter of great power politics”. According to Ushakova (2022), the Afghanistan humanitarian crisis is not a new phenomenon to come across amid the events of August 2021 that resulted in the Taliban administered Afghanistan but being a center of significant political aspirations and maneuverings from the last half century by the world powers, led Afghanistan to her systemic crisis which in due course instigated the protracted humanitarian crisis in the country. Subsequently, the Ushakova (2022) study compels us to identify the reasons behind the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

Exploring the reasons for deteriorating human security, amid the Taliban’s controlled Afghanistan Abawe et al. (2022) reiterated that having a low rating for human security has its roots back to the role of Western policies towards Afghanistan from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They further emphasized the way the Western policies were prescribed for Afghanistan, as according to their study it was the way that Western countries only saw Afghanistan from the lens of traditional security and thus policies were designed from the security-centric perspective. Subsequently, during the Cold War, the US-led Western block had its policies designed for Afghanistan to contain communism, led by the Soviet Union’s block. By the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US-led West, continued their security-centric approach towards Afghanistan, by launching a war on terror after the unfortunate and disastrous events of the 9/11 attacks to curtail and contain the transnational terrorism, emerging from Afghanistan. The decades-long war engulfed Afghanistan’s economic resources thus undermining human development and human security. Moreover, it was further observed that in the pursuit of their regional and global interests, human development and security were highly ignored by the Western powers. Their observation further reiterated that the eventual and abrupt withdrawal of United States and allied forces during August 2021 deteriorated the humanitarian situation as this abrupt departure of foreign forces from Afghanistan without elevating the situation for the smooth transitioning of the state’s administrative, economic, and security control eventually stirred the economic crisis in the country, pushing forth a health, food, educational, refugee, and security crisis in the country (Abawe, Daud, Daudzai, Jabarkhail, & Yousaf, 2023).

### ***2.1.2 Post August 2021' U.S. Withdrawal and Deepening Humanitarian Crisis***

The eventual situation raises questions on the reasoning for the consequent humanitarian crisis which according to Fereshta Abbasi, an Afghan specialist at Human Rights Watch, is the world's worst humanitarian crisis causing death and misery among the Afghan population (Cabot, 2022). Subsequently, Dreikhausen and Gaub (2022) analyzed the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in their study and their research assessed that the United States (U.S.) abrupt withdrawal left a mess in Afghanistan by not only worsening the environment for any possible elevation of the situation for the post-conflict economy and not fulfilling its duties of security sector reforms, further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country. As a result, immediately after the United States withdrawal, Afghanistan was struck with the security challenges and security sector collapse was then evident which made it difficult for the Taliban administration to steer the country in a positive direction. Instead, hunger and abject poverty following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan continued to sour and destitution is now expected to kill more Afghans than the killings that resulted due to the bomb killings of the past two decades. Furthermore, these dynamics, along with the worsening environmental conditions further intensify the possibility of conflict relapse due to the poverty-conflict nexus factor (Dreikhausen & Gaub, 2022). Moreover, worsening of natural environmental conditions unfolding earthquakes and floods, etc. with the adverse effects of climate change are precipitating a humanitarian catastrophe on multiple levels, thereby plunging Afghanistan into the throes of a multi-dimensional crisis (Rajmil, Morales, Aira, & Valles, 2022).

The literature suggests that the crisis has a lasting and most adversative impact on women and children. Alerted by UNICEF (2021), forewarned the impact of undergoing crisis on children by warning about approximately 3.3 million children not having access to basic food items while approximately 1.1 million children are under the severe consequence of critical malnutrition (Gannon & Faiez, 2022). In this regard, Rehmat et al. (2022) focuses on the scale of children who have been impacted by the humanitarian crisis, amid post-August 2021 events. Intensified sanctions asserting economic collapse resulted in the collapse of the health sector with insufficient hospital machinery causing malnutrition on a large scale mainly among children by depriving them of normally required essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals (Malnutrition). Meanwhile, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with the United States withdrawal intensified the economic crisis, pushing forth devastating long-

term implications for the country's health sector, especially affecting pregnant women and children's physical and psychological health (Essar M. , et al., 2022).

### ***2.1.3 Immediate International Response Affecting the Scale of Humanitarian Crisis***

Evaluating the post-August 2021 humanitarian crisis amid the United States withdrawal, Wadhen et al. (2019) assessed that the half-baked strategy and short-termism by the United States and its allies eventually failed to achieve what it intended to, i.e., to root out the transnational terrorism, after a long presence of almost two decades in Afghanistan. The eventual situation in Afghanistan further deteriorated the humanitarian situation in the country which was already facing a humanitarian crunch due to the decades of war-stricken state of the country, by remaining as an epicenter of continuous power competition among the world powers (Fergusson & Hughes, 2019). However, the end of the United States invasion and the withdrawal of its allied forces couldn't ease the situation, but the humanitarian situation worsened as the whole withdrawal process became faulty when the Taliban started occupying the different provinces of the country, escalating the abrupt withdrawal of NATO forces, in contrast to the gradual withdrawal which was prearranged by the United States and the Taliban' agreement (Bobkin, 2022).

The subsequent tactless and abrupt withdrawal failed any prospects of setting an environment for security sector reforms while elevating the process of post-conflict economic recovery for the country. This eventual scenario resulted in chaos which left the country on the brink of security and economic collapse. An observance done by Essar, Ashworth, and Arash, concludes that the sudden expulsion of foreign support contributed to the crisis, as for a larger part of the last twenty years after the United States and its allies' invasion in 2001, Afghanistan's security and financial' administration was largely dependent on the international funding and support, thus sudden removal of the financial support without elevating the process of post-conflict economic recovery pushed the country into the worst economic crisis pushing forth the humanitarian emergency in Afghanistan Essar, Ashworth, & Arash, 2022).

### **Intensification of Sanctions and Collapse of Economic Sector**

Exploring the prospects of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, Essar et al. (2022)



evaluated the abrupt withdrawal of the United States and its allies without providing security sector reforms or laying down an opportunity for post-conflict economic recovery while coupling it with the freezing of 10 billion dollars of Afghan’ assets has aggravated the economic collapse of country’s economy, exacerbating the worsening of humanitarian crisis. Another study done by Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs - Brown University (2023), when analyzing costs of war, observed that the United States and its ally’s financial commitment for human development and security totaled only a few billion in contrast to their total spending of \$2.26 trillion on the war (WATSON INSTITUTE , 2023). In this regard, the following figure describes the total spending of war on terror.



Figure 2.1: Editor Analysis from Al Jazeera

Source: Costs of War Project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (2023)

However, the following figure exhibits the difference shown by United States, regarding her financial commitment for Afghanistan developmental aid to her total spendings on the costs of war.



Figure 2.2: Difference between U.S. commitment for Afghanistan' Developmental Aid & Total Spendings of War in Afghanistan

Source: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/Afghanistanbeforeandafter20yearsofwar>

This study indicates how the war destruction outweighs any type of development project, but it further resulted in the dependence of Afghanistan's economy on international support and assistance, complying with the argument that the abrupt withdrawal of international aid and assistance, amid the withdrawal of United States and allied forces, eventually put the country into more devastating human insecurity by exploding the humanitarian crisis.

Brown (2021) through his study elucidated that the United States failure to stop the Taliban eventually resulted in the outcome of the Taliban gaining control of the Afghanistan administration. According to his study, United States failure is evident from the fact that the Western collision couldn't succeed in building an economically viable democratic state (Brown, 2021). The eventual situation, after the Taliban's control, resulted in an unstable government under an unhinged economic environment.

#### ***2.1.4 Taliban Taking Control of Afghanistan' Administration***

Talking about the relevance of the Taliban government to the eventual international response in igniting the crisis, Modebadze, Yousaf, Jabarkhail, Faheem and Majeed (2022) studies considered the impact of the Taliban administration on the international community behavior which contributed to the worsening of the crisis. Their analyses implied the reasoning for a humanitarian crisis on Taliban administration that came into existence post-August 2021,

two decades after being overthrown by the United States invasion of Afghanistan. An abrupt yet long overdue withdrawal of the United States and its allied forces from Afghanistan, coupled with the control of Afghanistan's administration by the Taliban, in such a short period, was not anticipated to such an extent and was a shock for the international community. As appraised by Yousaf and Jabarkhail (2022), the newly formed caretaker arrangement of the Taliban administration left the national and international observers in contemplation of whether to isolate their administration or engage with them. The observance by this study came from the fact of national and international observers' experiences developed during the 90's Taliban administered Afghanistan.

Considering that Modebadze's (2022) observance revealed that the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was highly impacted by the response of the international community, which resulted in the non-recognition of the Afghan administration amid the Taliban's control of the government after the United States withdrawal. While overlooking the failure of United States strategic policies regarding the catastrophic end of two decades of war, the focus of Modebadze's study focused the return of the Taliban's administration, which was ousted by the United States -led Western military coalition amid the 9/11 events of 2001. According to his study, the Taliban has not changed themselves from their 90s policies.

Discussing the situation of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, Modebadze (2022) assessed that the response of the international community towards Taliban administration eventually contributed to the humanitarian crisis. According to his study, the establishment of a theocratic state by the Taliban after the United States withdrawal alerted the international community, which led the Afghanistan's isolation from the international community after not being recognized by any state of the world. Ultimately, the world showed its concern for the Taliban's theocratic regime, having a concern of Afghanistan, being a hothouse of terrorism and extremism, by imposing economic sanctions. Immediately after the seizure of Afghanistan's central bank assets by the United States Federal Reserve, the country's economy collapsed which stirred the catastrophic financial crisis ensuing the worst humanitarian crisis with the sudden exodus of a large number of refugees and departure of businesses, impinging the shortage of food, health, education and employment facilities.

The following figure shows the indicators of poverty, food insecurity and human rights violation instigating the surge of humanitarian crisis in the country.



Figure 2.3: Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs Afghanistan Before and After 20 Years of War (2001-2021)

Source: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/Afghanistanbeforeandafter20yearsofwar>

Moreover, assessment by the studies of Essar et al. in 2021 and Zarmina et al. in 2022, implicates that the COVID-19 effects, along with the natural disasters i.e., earthquakes, floods, and the continued sanctions, and the noncompliance of the Taliban administration with international human rights, further worsened the humanitarian situation of the country.

### ***2.1.5 Impact of Human Rights Violation by Taliban Administration on the International Response***

Analyzing the world's reluctant response towards the Taliban-administered Afghanistan, existing literature evaluated the Taliban's behavior towards basic human rights to be responsible for world reluctance in engaging with the Taliban. Subsequently, this analysis explains how the Taliban administration's advances on human rights fronts further alerted the international community as reports of human rights abuses mainly against women's rights and gender discrimination spiraled the unwelcoming response of the international community towards Afghanistan's administration. The Taliban's treatment of the women of

Afghanistan got a spotlight in Roy's (2022) study, where she presented the deplorable conditions of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Alina (2021), Jami (2022), and Mirzayi (2023) research evaluated that the world's response towards the Taliban government in Afghanistan was impacted by the Taliban treatment of women's rights which received a lot of condemnation and became one of the most concerning issues for the international community in engaging with the Taliban. Their literature employed the commonalities of the Taliban government towards women's rights both during their rule in the 1990s and again after their resurgence of power in 2021.

Moreover, Mirzayi and Jami stressed the continuous pressure of the international community on the Taliban administration and their increasing exposure of media messaging to get international recognition as a possible prospect of improving human rights, especially women's rights in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, this analysis considered the blockage of women's rights as the main concern of the international community for their non-recognition of the Taliban government during their rule from 1996-2001 to 2021-2023. However, this analysis ignored the possible impact of other factors impinging on the lack of international recognition for the Taliban government (Jami, 2022 & Mirzayi, 2023).

Considering the impact of world experiences gained since the first Talibanization of Afghanistan (since 1996) and its consequent impact on the behaviors of international community towards second Talibanization of Afghanistan (2021), requires a thorough analysis of gained experiences impinging the state behaviors. Regarding this, Rubin (2021) evaluated that the main concern for the United States during the Taliban reign of power from 1996 to 2001 was their stance on Osama Bin Laden. Though women's rights and drug control were the reasons of concern for the international community but Taliban's averseness on the issue of handing over Osama Bin Laden led to the imposition of the first sanction on the Taliban government after the 1998 bombings of United States embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Likewise, when Taliban recaptured the Afghanistan's administrative control, United States and United Nations sanctions which had never been lifted against the Taliban since the first sanction against them in 1998, went into force instantly, against the Taliban's control of power, constraining their governmental authority and confining their control as illegal (Rodríguez, 2023).

In contrast to the existing literature on the current Taliban policies, Yousaf and Jabarkhail (2022) argue that the 2021's Taliban policies are not the same as they were, during

their 1996 tenure, before the United States war on terror. With time their media policies advanced to help them build their narrative and for political maneuvering. However, their study accepted the fact that despite being advanced in policies, the Taliban's behavior towards the country's human rights, especially gender discrimination has not been bright thus recommending the world, to build policies in a way to engage with the Taliban administration while ensuring the basic human rights of Afghanistan's population, instead of sanctioning all their interactions with the Taliban' administration. Simultaneously, the Taliban's de-facto government in Afghanistan, though not internationally recognized, is legally bound to ensure the disposal of equal human rights for all (Kadir & Nurhaliza, 2023). Nonetheless, the Taliban's lack of pragmatic governing policies and short-sightedness led to their isolation in the international arena which eventually deteriorated the humanitarian situation while pushing forth the myriads of catastrophes on several levels such as economic, health, education, human rights, and political (Achakzai , 2022).

#### ***2.1.6 Major Power's Responses towards Post-August 2021' Afghanistan***

Considering the word and time limitations of this research, this review of the literature focuses on the response of major international powers such as the United States, Russia, and China (Freedman, 2020) and countries having direct and immediate effects of the events undergoing in Afghanistan such as neighboring country Pakistan, Iran, and central Asia.

While exploring the response of the international community towards the Taliban regime after their takeover of Kabul in 2021, Faheem and Majeed Khan (2022) divided the response of the international community into two groups, where one kind of response to the sudden escalation of events in Afghanistan is being led by United States while the other group has been identified as the China-Russia led group. Their observation predicted the difference in behaviors, emanating from these two groups, towards the new unfolding situation of Afghanistan under the Taliban's administration. They further explored that the difference in international response emanating from the respective countries and allies was the result of the corresponding strategic goals, foreign policy considerations, and political values. Where United States-led group is now cautious regarding the recognition and diplomatic relations while the China-Russia-led group is enthusiastic to fill the US-left strategic gap by conducting diplomatic relations, though still not providing Taliban-controlled Afghanistan with their official recognition. Moreover, this consideration further elucidated that the United States' failure to achieve its goals and then sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan has

weakened the position of the United States in Afghanistan. Consequently, it gave away a strategic vacuum, which is now being tried to be filled by the China-Russia-led group. Regarding that other regional states are now aligning themselves with either of the groups by calculating their strategic and security considerations (Faheem & Khan, 2022).

While talking about the international community's contemplation of whether to interact with the Post-August 2021 Afghan government or to isolate them (the Taliban government) on an international system, Poornima and Muraviev (2022) elucidated that the immediate contemplation shown by the world towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan is through the pragmatic approach when looking at the situation through their national interests. Poornima in his research talked about the pragmatic approach of GCC countries towards post-August 2021' Taliban government. His study analyzed that the Persian Gulf countries, though contemplated, took a rational approach towards the situation as they avoided praising or fully criticizing the Taliban control of the Afghan administration, about their experience and national interests (Poornima, 2022). Likewise, Muraviev's study assessed the evolution of Russia's response to the post-August 2021 strategic retake of Afghanistan by the Taliban. His research focuses on the pragmatic style of Russia's response in approaching Afghanistan's situation. Acceptance of the Taliban as a new reality in Afghanistan politics compelled Russia to take a rational approach by evading the full opposition of their administration and engaging with them through the diplomatic talks while also avoiding its recognition. Subsequently, they kept the door open for the possible prospects of an evolving situation (Poornima, 2022).

The prose of their studies implies that the reasoning for world reluctance towards the Taliban government by not recognizing the Taliban administration while continuing to engage with them through diplomatic talks is to keep the door open for the possible turn of events and to look out for the prospect of filling the strategic gap that was left by the United States withdrawal. This assessment eventually explains the finding of Sullivan's study that the world response toward post-August 2021' Afghanistan is a varied but evolving one (Sullivan, 2022).

Considering the importance of regional states, and the close linkage of Pakistan as a regional neighbor to Afghanistan's affairs, several scholars studied the impact of post-August 2021' Afghanistan on Pakistan as she always cyphers its security with Afghanistan thus knowing the possibility of the significant impact of how the ensuing humanitarian crisis in

Afghanistan can impinge on the security situation of Pakistan. Regarding that, research carried out by Muzaffar et al. explored the possible impact of United States withdrawal from Afghanistan and its eventual humanitarian crisis on the immediate neighboring state of Pakistan along with its impact on India. Their study revealed that the United States withdrawal has strong strategic, security, political, and economic implications for Pakistan. Being a neighboring country, Pakistan, which already hosts the biggest number of Afghan refugees, since the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, has faced the new biggest number of refugees, fleeing the country after United States withdrawal. The eventual influx of refugees further stressed Pakistan's already struggling economy (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Afzal, 2021). Besides economic implications, Pakistan which always hyphenates its security with Afghanistan's well-being could have massive security implications in the case of troubled Afghanistan under Taliban's administration which is now being illustrated by the re-emergence of Taliban in Pakistan (Afzal, 2022). Moreover, their study concluded that though the eventual Afghanistan situation will be challenging for Pakistan but can also be converted into an opportunity by fostering peaceful and mutual cooperation for stability and development because a stable and secure Afghanistan would mean a secure Pakistan.

However, Tariq et al. (2021) study, reiterates the security concern felt by neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, where the eventual situation of the Taliban's takeover, after the United States withdrawal, has increased the vulnerability of Taliban-inspired insurrection in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Nonetheless, when considering the regional security complex, Russia as a protector of central Asia security, does not want central Asian countries to go with the United States block. In this regard, Russia is now looking for allies in the region and is even ready to talk with China and Iran to devise post-withdrawal policies, while filling the vacuum left by the United States' withdrawal by instituting peace in the region through engagement and cooperation (Yousif & Kakar, 2022).

As evaluated by Weinbaum (2006), most of Afghanistan's problems, even domestic problems have their roots in regional politics, being connected to the regional policies and strategies. Though Iran always had a stringy relationship with radical Islamic powers in Afghanistan, especially before United States led invasion after 9/11 attacks, nonetheless, with the emergence of Taliban regime in 2021, Iran immediately positioned itself by cheering the expulsion of United States troops (Dolbaia & Robinson, 2021) and got in friendly terms with the Taliban administration by welcoming their control of power yet delaying the



decision of recognition for Taliban government due to worrying about the possible collateral consequence of violent insurgencies by other terrorist groups such as ISIS-K. Ultimately, the concern felt by the neighboring countries pushed them to engage with the Taliban to have a stable Afghanistan by overcoming the chaos through regional cooperation thus enabling the region for peace while looking out for the hardening of security parameters (Yousif & Kakar, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

However, the above-mentioned studies undertaken by scholars represent the large section of post-August 2021 literature where most of the focus remained on the United States withdrawal, its consequent international response, and the humanitarian crisis that ensued, however, there is a lack of literary research and very little have been explored about the reasoning of post-August 2021' international responses and how the response evolved amid the eventual turn of events. Similarly, there has been little to no analysis of international behavior towards the Taliban government and how their experience with the 1990s Taliban-administered Afghanistan impacted their responses in 2021. Besides, there is no literary text on the humanitarian response that developed amid the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. For instance, the transitional evolution of literary discourse regarding humanitarian initiatives, taken by OIC member states, Pakistan, and the international bodies has not been investigated to evaluate the gradual evolution of international responses to assess the impact of these responses on Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

In conclusion, the literature identifies that post-August 2021, a lot of research has been done on the Taliban's administrated Afghanistan, the eventual humanitarian crisis, and its impact on global security. Subsequently, reviewing the literature, it has been observed that the focus remained on the reasons, instigating the humanitarian crisis while the focus remained on the fault lines in the Taliban administration. However, research on the ensuing situation and an analysis of international responses to the post-August 2021 Afghanistan, has been lacking by the research diaspora. As intended by the problem statement, analysis of international responses through the constructivist approach (Onuf, 1989) which analyzes the different approaches applied by different states while keeping in mind the transition of international behaviors and ideational change in discourse from anti-terrorism to human security discussion has not been explored by the peace and conflict scholarship thus causing a research gap to be explored by this study.

## **2.2 Contextualizing the Construct of International Responses through Constructivism**

This research employs a thorough insight into understanding the ‘construct of international relations’ concerning the current Taliban government of Afghanistan, through an in-depth consideration of constructivism (Onuf, 1989). This section specifies the groundwork of the theoretical framework that contributes to elucidating mainly the edifice of international responses to post-August 2021’ Afghanistan and also to reveal the eventual evolution of those international responses, from having skepticism and condemnations (Byrd, 2023) to the expanding of diplomatic relations ( Siddique, 2024), amid the circumstances, subsequent to the post-August 2021’ Taliban-administered Afghanistan. Contextualizing the theoretical agenda of this research, this study draws upon the analysis of constructivism (Onuf, 1989). The term ‘constructivism’ was first coined by Nicholas Greenwood Onuf for the scholarship of IR, in a book written by him, titled ‘World of Our Making’ (1989).

Although relatively new in the field of international relations theory (Checkel, 1998), constructivism has greatly impacted interpretations of international relations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2011; Checkel, 1998). The core premise of constructivism accounts for the concept that the social world is of our making (Onuf, 1989). Constructivism as an international relations theory has its emphasis on the interpersonal and social spheres of international politics which eventually constitutes an argument against the major two theories of international relations i.e., realism’ as it focuses on the material constraints and liberalism’ emphasis on institutional constraints (Griffiths, O’Callaghan, & Roach, 2008). The theory of constructivism focuses on the emphasis of ideas that in international politics, ideas are neither stable, conferred, nor fixed and the anarchic state of the international system is not innate and fixed but it is what we (people) make of it (Weber, 2013; Dormer, 2018).

The main thesis of constructivism (1989) argues with the core of already established international relation theories where the principle of prior theories i.e., realism and liberalism, lay on the point that both of the theories consider international actors as intrinsically atomistic and egoist, and whose actions and interests are modeled before any kind of their social interaction, but the bases of their interaction depend solely on their material gains and strategic tenacities. Meanwhile, from the constructivist point of view, actors in an international arena, are inherently social beings, whose interests, ideas, and

interactions are correspondingly, the yield of intersubjective social constructs (Reus-Smit , 2005).

Besides, constructivist focus on the actors or agents (usually influential or powerful people), highlights the concept of international relations being socially constructed as the theory emphasizes that these actors through their thinking, interaction, and action, constantly shape and at times reshape the very nature of international politics on an international arena. In the words of Chernoff (2007), international order is socially constructed as it comprises the “ways in which people reckon and interact with each other”. Likewise, Nicholas Onuf (1989), the father and main proponent of Constructivism, stressed the idea of international relations being socially constructed. As propagated by the theory, the constructivist approach involves itself with perceptions and ideas. Regarding ideas, the constructivist approach concerns itself with the perceived reality implying the goals, interests, fears, threats, and identities that shape the behavior of states in an international system (THEYS, 2017). It eventually explains the study of contrast in different states’ behavior towards the Afghanistan situation (Faheem & Khan, 2022), embodying the respective state’s perceived reality, suggesting their goals, interests, fears, threats, and identities.

The central theme of constructivism emphasizes on the pivotal role of ideas, norms, and identities in international relations, these central themes of ideas, norms, and identities eventually impinge the shaping of state behaviors and consequent international relations. Nevertheless, this explanation of constructivism, as the term suggests, analyzes the world as a venture that is continually being constructed, on the instance of ‘becoming’ in contrast to ‘being’ (Bolton, 1975). This exposition of change in an international arena specifically separates the elucidation of constructivism from the realists and many liberalists who have a more constrained belief of ‘change’ regarding international relations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2011).

### ***2.2.1 Identity and Perceptions Impacting the State Behaviors***

Established by Nicholas Onuf, and furthered by Emanuel Adler, Alexander Wendt, John Gerard Ruggie, Peter Katzenstein, and Friedrich Kratochwil, in the late 1980s and by the early 1990s (Behraves, 2011), constructivist theory focuses on how the ‘identities and perceptions’ of actors on an international arena and their comprehension about themselves against others can correspondingly impact their actions (Viotti & Kauppi, 2011) which

eventually explains the shaping of international structures (Reus-Smit , 2005). Regarding this study, constructivism can be applied to comprehend the international response to the crisis as it enables the study to investigate how already built ideas, perceptions, intended goals, and identity of the actors involved, through the experiences of their interaction with Taliban (as an actor involved) since the 1990s, is now shaping the international response to the crisis (Alina, 2021; Jami 2022; Mirzayi 2023).

Expounding the concept of identity, interests, and perceptions being socially constructed, this study implies that the international responses to the post-August 2021 Afghanistan crisis have their roots back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Talibanization of Afghanistan (1996) where after a series of violent events, Kabul was captured by the Islamic Taliban movement in September 1996, marking the collapse of old Afghanistan (Barnett R, 1997). The eventual situation created a contemplation for the international community, as to whether to recognize the government that came into power through the forceful takeover (Zemach, 2015), or whether the existing situation automatically made their recognition an illegitimate action (Cristol, 2010). Nonetheless, the Taliban government in 1996, was embodied by non-recognition on a larger scale, except for only three United Nations countries i.e., Pakistan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia who emerged as the main international supporters of the Taliban regime by expanding formal diplomatic recognition to their government (Siddiqi, 2019). However, at a larger scale on an international level, the first Talibanization of Afghanistan attracted the condemnation of the Taliban's gender policies, human rights violations, and most importantly their proximity with Al-Qaida. Furthermore, the Taliban's resistance and refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden to the United States further enticed the first imposition of sanctions against the Taliban government (Cristol, 2010).

Meanwhile, the late 1990s experiences of the international community against the Taliban government eventually paved the way for a cold and unfriendly international response to the post-August 2021' Talibanization of Afghanistan. Interactions and experiences gained during the war on terror, where the Taliban as non-state actors in trans-nationalized the terrorism, created a certain outlook of the Taliban as terrorists (Sahel, 2020). Taliban actions of carrying out and facilitating the terrorist attacks and suicide bombings abetted in socially constructing the identity and perception of the Taliban as a terrorist organization. This explains how constructivism as a theory is not only reserved by the concept of 'unit of analyses', but it also adept to and recognizes the ontological value of, both domestic and

international affairs (Girard, n.d.).

### ***2.2.2 Constructed Ideas and Experiences Impinging the State Behaviors***

Contended by the constructivist approach, the interests and identities of the international actors are socially constructed (Ruggie, 1998). Thus, expounding the reasoning of Taliban identity as socially constructed through the experiences and interactions of international actors. Moreover, international interaction with the Taliban government (1996-2001) and the subsequent interaction with the Taliban as non-state actors (2001-2021), further exacerbated the construction of the Taliban identity as the sponsor actor of terrorism. Meanwhile United States, being socially constructed and identified as a great power (Hopf, 1998) who is the protector of peace and democracy, launched a global war on terror and invaded Afghanistan. However, the socially constructed identities of the Taliban as terrorists (Sahel, 2020) and the United States as a great power, are not an inherent correspondence of reality which was always there (Peltonen, 2017), meaning that these factual identities are not the starting point on the pretext of international relations. As explained by Kratochwil and Onuf, the world has not been merely 'out there' for us to observe but it is one of artifice, continuously being constructed through our actions, deeds, perceptions, rules, and norms thus making a fact through the shared knowledge of ideas and rules (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989). Nevertheless, the socially constructed identification of the Taliban further aggravated their response to the Taliban, either as a non-state actor in an international arena or as a regulator of Afghanistan's administration. As explained by Hopf, actors in international politics foster their relationships with others and elaborate their understanding of themselves and other actors through the media of norms and practices (Hopf, 1998).

Correspondingly, comprehending the constructivist approach in the scholarship of international relations facilitates the understanding of international responses to the post-August 2021' Afghanistan. As described by Alexander Wendt anarchy has multiple meanings for different actors based on their intersubjective understandings and practices (Hopf, 1998), which explains the comprehension of the constructivist approach taken by this research. Subsequently, the fact of intersubjective reality accounts for the contrast analyzed in the behaviors of different states (Faheem & Khan, 2022), towards the Afghanistan situation, symbolizing the representation of their perceived reality, implying their respective goals, interests, threats, and identities. Eventually, in the context of the Afghanistan situation, the constructivist approach considers the importance of already built ideas, socially

constructed perceptions of actors, actors' intended goals, and the eventual identity of the Taliban, through the experiences of their interaction with the Taliban (since the 1990s), is now shaping the international response to the crisis.

Moreover as asserted by Theys (2017), powerful actors persistently shape and at times restructure the landscape of international relations via their actions and interactions, thus, in the context of the Afghanistan situation, the constructivist approach considers the importance of already built ideas, socially constructed perceptions of actors, their intended goals, and the eventual identity of the Taliban, through the experiences of their interaction with Taliban (since the 1990s), is now shaping the international response to the crisis.

### ***2.2.3 Altering Nature of Identity and Transitional International Structure***

Regarding world politics, constructivism is skeptical about the change in international relations as it restores lots of varieties and variances to international and global affairs (Srinivasan, n.d.). Explaining the change in world affairs, constructivists contend that the agency of actors and the international system are communally constituted which suggests the fact that international structure and anarchy in the international system are not inherent, but the actors' agency structure influences the international structures and that international structures influence the agency (Theys, 2018). Moreover, contending with Wendt's (1995) observations, that 'anarchy is what states make of it' emphasizes the importance of agents in an international arena that anarchy is not inherent but can be illuminated in different ways, conditional to the meanings that agents assign to it (Wendt, 1995).

The concept of international structure being socially constructed (Ruggie, 1998), argues that the identities of states, their interests, and their understanding of the global order are socially constructed instead of being predetermined and inherent. Moreover, the consideration of international structure not having an inherent or fixed nature (Weber, 2013; Dormer, 2018), eventually provides constructive insights into the altering nature of identity and the subsequent transition of ideational discourse in international relations. Meanwhile, Wendt's (1992) assertion of state identities not being fixed explains the phenomenon of change in international relations where international actors, theorize their identities through social interactions and engagement with other actors in the international system. This prospect implies that the identity is shaped by shared ideas, norms, and values instead of being a product of material interests (Wendt, 1992).

#### ***2.2.4 Ideas, Norms, and Transition of Ideational Discourse***

Subsequently, the concept of ideas constitutes a pivotal role in constructivism (1989), which suggests that ideas impinge the shaping of international discourse and behaviors. Driven by the change in perceptions, beliefs, and shared understandings of the actors involved, impact the evolution of the international system which eventually impinges the transition in the ideational discourse. Thus, the concept of ideas, norms, and discourses can influence state behavior and can eventually contribute to the transformation of the international system (Kratochwil, 1991).

Considering the focus of this study, international norms, shared values of human rights, and the obligation to safeguard vulnerable populations, shapes how the international community responds to the crisis that erupted amid the abrupt withdrawal of the United States when Afghanistan caught up in a worst humanitarian crisis. Moreover, international isolation against the Taliban' administered Afghanistan and sanctions further deteriorated the humanitarian situation of Afghanistan. However, the socially constructed responsibility to protect civilians and uphold human rights (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) alerted the world to focus on Afghanistan's situation as the eventual outcome poses a threat to already threatened Afghan human rights and could also compromise global security while igniting the refugee, food, security, and health crisis on a whole new level (Cabot, 2022). Besides, the eventual situation exposed the world to a new transnational threat of global refugee crisis and an escalated threat of terrorism. Observing the waning humanitarian situation of Afghanistan, and the consequential impact of the humanitarian crisis, with a menace to jeopardize international security alerted and ultimately compelled the global community to take respective initiatives by carrying out humanitarian assistance (Narain, Rackimuthu, Essar, & Vink , 2022).

The ensuing situation stirred humanitarian discussions on an international level. Subsequently, several United Nations meetings were held to discuss the humanitarian approach toward Taliban-administered Afghanistan, where the mandate of the United Nations assistance mission was granted further extension to assist Afghanistan's waning situation (Owden, Hakimi, & Ramalingam, 2022). Moreover, OIC, an Organization of Islamic States felt the urge to focus the attention of the international community on Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis as it would affect global security. Moreover, analyzing the situation, Pakistan being a neighbor state, that always links its security with the security of

Afghanistan, worked further to suggest the emergency OIC meetings in Afghanistan on December 19, 2021, and then also on 22-23 March 2022, Pakistan hosted 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) where Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis was one of the main thematic focuses of the conference (Azadi, 2021). However, the outcome of these conferences could not bring forth what the member countries intended. But in all the blurriness, it stirred a humanitarian discussion among the global community which implies the ideational transition of Afghanistan's discourse.

The ensuing discussions on humanitarian responses underline the concept of Ideational change which stresses the change in discourse among the international community from counterterrorism to human security discussions, reflecting in this scenario, a transformation in the ideas and norms that underpin international response (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) toward post-August 2021 Afghanistan, which explains the Ruggie (1998) idea of changing identity, based on the actors' interests. Moreover, it clarifies the constructivist idea, of ideational factors that explain that reality is not permanent or fixed, but rather is bound to change through the concept of social construction (Theys, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Reviewing the literature regarding the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the analysis of reasons behind the crisis, imply that the threat of de-securitization of global and state security compelled the United States to invade and carry out the war on terror in Afghanistan after the devastating events of 9/11. However, the abrupt end to the war, without achieving its intended goals, consequently resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, mainly because of the sanctions imposed by the international community and the subsequent enrichment of those sanctions in response to the Taliban's behavior further deteriorated the humanitarian upheaval in Afghanistan.

In this regard, the Constructivist Approach has been applied to the study to understand the international response to the crisis as it enables the research to investigate how already built ideas, perceptions, intended goals, and identity of the Taliban, through the experiences of their interaction with Taliban (since the 1990s), is now shaping the international response to the crisis. Besides, analyzing the international response further highlights the fact that ideas of security, sovereignty, norms, values of human rights, and the role of actors involved, have influenced the behavior of international responses throughout the crisis. The investigation



through the research explored the concept of Ideological change which stresses the change in discourse among the international community from counterterrorism to human security discussions, reflecting in this scenario, a transformation in the ideas and norms that underpins international response toward post-August 2021 Afghanistan (Kratochwil, 1991).

Eventually, analyzing the concept of humanitarian crisis and international response to it, through the constructivist lens assists in comprehending the complex and multifaceted nature of international responses while evaluating the effectiveness of humanitarian responses to the crisis by the international community which can further recommend overcoming the fault lines observed after analysis.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS UNDERPINNING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter of the study emphasizes the research methodology that has been followed to explore the international responses that are being observed by the international community vis-a-vis post-August 2021' Talibanization of Afghanistan. Following the techniques and methods to undertake research is a pivotal aspect of any research, as it provides a recognition that the evidence that we came across during the review of literature is not to be taken for granted as it demonstrates compliance with research (Bryman, 2012). Research methodology can be undertaken as an approach that unveils the answers to the research queries following the comprehension of the researchers (Greener & Martelli, 2015; Kothari, 2004).

Explaining the significance of research methodology in research work, Kothari (2004) explains that research methodology is an approach that solves research problems systemically. Nonetheless, this section of the study requires using tools and techniques, specified to the nature and extent of the research problem thus requiring the reasoning of using those specific methods instead of others (Kothari, 2004; Bell, 2005). Moreover, research methods employ a logical and systematic approach to the study that is free from any personal bias or preconceptions of the researcher thus ascertaining the investigations of research questions independently (Kothari, 2004).

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Research design accounts for a methodological framework that undertakes the research plan to carry out the research. Subsequently, opting for a good research design makes it easier for researchers to execute the analysis of poised data in comprehending the investigation of research questions through interpretative findings (Bryman, 2012). Concerning the focused study, a qualitative approach has been followed to undertake the research. Moreover, within the qualitative research study, a mixed approach embodying case study design and cross-sectional research design has been adopted which explicates the observational focus of the turn of events that came into the international system amid the post-August 2021'

Afghanistan Humanitarian crisis.

### **3.2 Sampling Population**

Considering the resource, time, and security limitations, usually it is not viable to study the whole population under consideration. Considering the phenomenon, this research intended to use a purposive sampling technique. It is a type of sampling technique that prompts the selection of samples while keeping in mind the research questions under consideration (Bryman, 2012). In this regard, in addition to a case study of international behaviors towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan, this research employs a technique of expert sampling to gather the data by carrying out well-designed yet semi-structured interviews.

Regarding that, a sample of nine (9) individuals, consisting of doyens having expertise in the Afghanistan situation were selected to collect data unveiling the answers to the research questions. Among them, five participants have their association with academic institutions, providing their scholarly perspectives. These five individuals were selected among the researchers who wrote scholarly articles regarding the post-August 2021' scenario of Afghanistan. Besides these five, other four individuals were selected by looking at their experience in the humanitarian services. These four (4) individuals have their affiliations with humanitarian organizations, which are working in post-August 2021' Afghanistan to assist with the humanitarian crisis. Among them, one individual named Dr. Manzoor Ahmed has an affiliation with 'Islamic Relief, Afghanistan', a humanitarian organization. As a country director, he provided practical insights regarding the crisis from his ground experiences. The other three individuals, Mr. Qadeer Ahmed, Ms. Fizza Bangash, and Ms. Anum Rasheed, belong to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Pakistan. They provided their insights regarding the ICRC's role in Afghanistan. In addition to these nine (9) individuals, contact was made with two (2) Afghani nationals to understand the situation from a more community-based viewpoint. The following table provides information regarding the sampling population.

Table 3.1. *List of Respondents*

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Dated</b>
1	Dr. Faisal Javaid	Assistant Professor - FUAAST	April 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2024
2	Dr. Minhas Majeed	Assistant Professor - UOP	April 17, 2024
3	Mr. Qadeer Ahmed	Security Analyst – ICRC	May 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2024
4	Ms. Fizza Bangash	Communication Manager – ICRC	May 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2024
5	Ms. Anum Rasheed	Assistant – ICRC	May 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2024
6	Mr. Hameed Hakimi	Associate Fellow, Chatham House & Atlantic Council	May 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2024
7	Dr. Manzoor Ahmed	Country Director - Islamic Relief	May 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2024
8	Dr. Sajid Khattak	Assistant Professor - NUML	May 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2024
9	Ms. Maryam Mastoor	Research Analyst – IRS	May 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2024
10	Student 1	Afghani National	June 10, 2024
11	Student 2	Afghani National	June 11, 2024

### **3.3 Interviewing the Experts**

Conducting interviews from the experts (contrasting other types of research i.e., group interviews (Bryman, 2012) usually involves the in-depth exploration of experts’ knowledge, experiences, and opinions about a specific topic or theme.

Keeping in mind the limitations of the study, this research involves questioning the experts with well-designed yet semi-structured interviews. In this regard, different sets of questions were designed to carry out the conversation regarding the research questions, however, the main theme of the question revolved around the inspection of international responses to post

August 2021' Afghanistan. In order to conduct those semi-structured interviews, meetings were scheduled through onsite or online mode of communication where several questions were asked regarding the research objectives of this study. Subsequently, to understand the interviewee perspective, one of the questions was designed to ask for their evaluation of immediate international responses (Western, Regional, and Extra-Regional powers) to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Meanwhile the other question had its emphasis on the possibilities of transition in the international responses towards Taliban administered Afghanistan, since their takeover of Afghan' administration in 2021. This discussion eventually highlighted the factors that have influenced the change of international responses towards Taliban administered Afghanistan. Furthermore, another focus of unstructured interviews had its emphasis on understanding the impact of humanitarian crisis in impinging the behaviors of the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to address the situation in Afghanistan. Moreover, these questions asked in the semi-structured interviews stress on evaluating the factors which influence the contrast of engagement between regional and Western powers in Taliban-administered Afghanistan.

### **3.4 Analysis Technique**

Finalizing the data collection process, the research study required the examination of the collected data. In this regard, an analysis coding mechanism has been used to analyze the answers of the experts through themes categorization of experts' responses.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: A THEMATIC ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

The following chapter outlines the findings drawn from the data collection process. As explicated in Chapter 3, regarding the methodological chapter, this research has undertaken the qualitative approach to reveal the answers to the research questions. As elaborated, the objective behind these research questions is to explore the international responses to post-August 2021' Talibanization of Afghanistan. Furthermore, it is salient for this research to explore how the Taliban control of Afghanistan' is impacting the response of the international community, making it imperative for this study to look at the possible evolution of the international community's behavior due to the impact of post-August 2021' deepened humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Exploring the answers to the research questions concerning this study, this research intends to look out for the driving reasons that are impinging the construct of international behaviors. In this regard, this research has gathered data by having semi-structured interviews with 9 experts belonging to the academic and humanitarian fields. Besides, to understand the community perspective on the international community's response to post-August 2021' Afghanistan, this study reached out and was able to collect the prospect of two Afghan nationals studying in Pakistan. Meanwhile, it is imperative for this study to have the collected data analyzed. For this purpose, this study has adopted the analysis coding mechanism to comprehend the experiences of those involved in the data collection process regarding the possible genesis and discern of the phenomenon under discussion (Williams, 2019). This analysis technique provides a way to construct meanings and significance from the research findings through the procedural method of coding the collected data (Larossa, 2005). Furthermore, organizing the codes assists in determining and categorizing the common themes reflected in the code's commonality. This method eventually permits the data to be "grouped, assembled and re-linked" to consolidate the elucidation and meaning of the research findings (Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln, 2019).

In this regard, this research study has adopted an analysis coding mechanism to analyze and

then extract the meanings from the responses of the experts through themes categorization of their responses. Subsequently, after a thorough categorization of codes, this study came across the crystallization of several themes, signifying their linkage to the research questions. Those emerged themes then have been discussed in accordance with the research questions.

The following table denotes the concluded procedure of themes crystallization from the codes, in accordance with the research questions and have been commonly identified from the collected data.

Table 4.1. *Thematic Analysis*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
International Community towards Post August 2021' Afghanistan	*Skepticism *Contemplation *Condemnations *Varied Responses	*Spectrum of Diverse Yet Calculated Responses from International Community
Impact of Talibanization of Afghanistan, on the response of the international community	*Past Experiences *Historical Perceptions *Current Human Rights Violations	*International Sanctions on Taliban Individuals *Consequent Humanitarian Crisis
Impingement of Humanitarian Crisis on the Behaviors of International Community	*Recognition of humanitarian needs *Cautious Engagement *Re-assessing the pattern of their engagement	*Nuanced International Approach *Humanitarian Assistance *Evolving Diplomatic Dynamics

The crystallization of themes while exploring the common codes, showed the trajectory of international responses towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan. The eventual trail of international responses revealed by the collected data exhibits the evolution of the international responses to post-August 2021 Afghanistan. Investigating the evolution of those responses resulted in the identification of 'international responses being transitioned', as another characterized theme, materialized in the collected data.

In this regard, this chapter will provide an analysis of the emerging themes concerning the research questions by evaluating them through the literature review and theoretical framework of this study.

#### **4.1 International Community towards Post August 2021' Afghanistan**

While conducting semi-structured interviews from the sampling population, when a question was asked regarding the behavior of the international community towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan. Most of the respondents had an opinion that the international reaction towards the Talibanization of Afghanistan was not sudden or immediately shaped amid the events of August 2021 but pre-August 2021' interaction with the Taliban shaped the reaction of different states towards the Talibanization of Afghanistan in August 2021.

##### ***4.1.1 Pre-August 2021 Interaction with Taliban shaping the International Community Reaction***

When inquiring about the international community's reaction towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan, Respondent Hameed Hakimi stresses the importance of understanding the background events preceding the Taliban control of the Afghan administration which eventually impacted the way regional and world powers reacted. He emphasized the point of pre-August events impacting the international reaction by stating that:

When the Taliban came to power in August 2021, a couple of things happened beforehand which impacted the way the Western countries, mainly the NATO countries led by the United States reacted and how the region reacted. So, if we take the neighboring countries, mainly Pakistan Iran, and China they were interacting with the Taliban at the senior level for ages and Pakistan was hosting the Taliban leadership, i.e., Mullah Umar in Karachi. So, because of that history, there was a sense of being comfortable with the Taliban, so it didn't feel as scary as it did for Norway, Belgium, or others where the Taliban for long has been dehumanized/deimmunized for so long as terrorists. That's why the reaction was different and ideological to it.

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)



Moreover, while explaining the phenomenon of background events impacting the behavior of the international community, another respondent Dr. Faisal Javaid mentioned the United States' and Pakistan's role in the Taliban control of Afghanistan's administration. Analyzing his remarks, he was of the perspective that even though the situation in Afghanistan escalated with the abruptness of the August 2021 events, both the United States and Pakistan facilitated the consequent Talibanization of Afghanistan in August 2021. To explain the United States' role in escalating the turn of events leading to the Taliban control, he stated that the United States with the Doha agreement agreed to smooth power transfer, however her occupied attention on other fronts and urgency towards Afghanistan pushed the Taliban actions where they took the administration in their control exceedingly and surprisingly. Explaining the situation, he expressed:

The reason why America wanted to withdraw from Afghanistan was because America was distracted on other fronts (South China Sea), and Europe to counter China. All of that was decided and planned with a proper time frame and procedure for how the Ghani government would negotiate with the Taliban on how to transfer powers, however situation escalated as the Taliban took things exceedingly.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

He further explained that the knowingness and familiarity with the Taliban before their control of the Afghan' administration shaped Pakistan's reaction towards the Taliban administration. He observed that:

Initially, Pakistan was with the international community because when the Doha process started, Pakistan was on board, and even indirectly, Pakistan was the one who facilitated and involved Taliban groups. Pakistan was involved as a party that engaged America directly with the Taliban.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

Nonetheless, this concept of pre-August 2021 events impacting the shaping of international community reaction, subsequently explains the constructivist concept that pursues the exploration of the idea of how the past shapes the way actors in an international arena comprehend their current position and thus formulate the policy (Erbas, 2022). In other words, for constructivists, it is the past that matters in international relations and the gestures

and interactions in the historical practice subsequently define and socialize the actors toward certain conceptions of self and other (Guzzini & Leander, 2005). Thus, the idea of past i.e., pre-August 2021' events, impacting the way the international community is reacting towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan conceptualizes constructivism (Nouf, 1989), which extends that international relations are socially constructed and actors in international politics foster their relationships with others and elaborate their understanding of other actors through the media of norms and practices (Ruggie 1998; Hopf 1998).

Meanwhile asking the question about the international responses towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan secured a comprehensive set of opinions from the respondents, and most of the respondents were having an outlook of the situation that the post-August 2021' Afghanistan observed an array of mixed yet diverse reactions from the international community.

#### ***4.1.2 International Community towards Post August 2021' Afghanistan***

Unfolding the international community's behavior towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan, most of the respondents were opinionated that the calculated response was observed by the international community towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan. Nonetheless, that calculated response was not the same for the Western and regional countries, but the reaction was mixed and diverse. When explaining the international response towards the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan, Miss Maryam Mastoor proposed that:

The response to the Taliban taking over is mixed. India and China wish to cultivate economic relations with the Taliban. However, the world in general is reluctant to recognize the Taliban government

(Personal Communication, May 29, 2024)

Another respondent, Dr. Minhas Majeed was more focused on the point of diversified reaction that is being expressed by the regional and western states and to convey her point she commented that:

The rapid ascent of the Taliban in Afghanistan triggered diverse reactions from key international players. The United States faced scrutiny for its troop withdrawal, focusing on evacuating citizens and allies while facing calls for accountability. On the other hand, China expressed worries about regional instability and extremism,

emphasizing the need for a stable Afghanistan to safeguard its economic interests. Russia echoed similar concerns, emphasizing the importance of regional stability and engaging in diplomatic efforts to address security threats. Neighboring states like Pakistan and Iran closely monitored the situation, engaging in diplomatic efforts to manage security risks and protect their interests.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

However, she summed up the situation in words that the international community reacted diversified, nonetheless, it was a very well-calculated response.

In 2021, the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan sparked widespread concern and condemnation globally. The immediate response reflected a mix of apprehension, condemnation of the Taliban's actions, and efforts to mitigate the humanitarian fallout.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Analyzing the findings while scrutinizing the responses, it has been examined that the post-August 2021 situation in Afghanistan sparked a mix of reactions from the international community which explains the essence of inter-subjective reality in international relations. Subsequently, it elucidates the contrast in Western and regional states' behavior regarding post-August 2021' Afghanistan (Faheem & Majeed Khan, 2022), symbolizing the respective state's perceived reality, suggesting their goals, interests, experiences, threats, and identities (Theys, 2017). The eventual situation employs that international relations do not embody an objective and fixed reality, but in fact it is bound to the concept of social construction (Theys, 2017) thus contrasting to each, owing to their ideas, interests, identity, and experiences against others.

#### ***4.1.3 Diverse Yet Calculated Responses from the International Community***

Considering the responses, diverse yet strategic reactions from the international community were not immediately shaped but thoroughly calculated, thus conducting diversified reactions from the international community, representing their experiences and strategic interests. Talking about the diverse reactions, Miss Maryam Mastoor explained the difference in behavior of Western and regional powers towards Afghanistan. She explained that the

regional powers are considering working relations with the Afghan administration due to their geographical realities, in this regard, she commented:

Because one can never alter geographical realities. Therefore, the regional countries are trying to figure out working relations with Afghanistan.

(Personal Communication, May 29, 2024)

Talking about the immediate reaction from the regional states, Dr. Minhas expressed the behaviors of regional states in words:

Regional powers (Pakistan, Iran, China, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Russia) are on the same page regarding the prevalence of peace in Afghanistan and most of those countries had their embassies in Afghanistan from the start. Among them, Pakistan and Tajikistan have some political differences with the Taliban government. But China and Russia being anti-American even were happy that the United States withdrew, and it increased the space for them to flourish. It is evident from the fact that after withdrawal most investment was done by China after that we can see other countries even Russian companies are interested.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Regarding the regional state's behavior, Mr. Hameed Hakimi explained the behavior of regional states towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan and the possible reasons for their attitudes. While conveying the regional state's reaction towards Taliban control of the Afghan administration, he summed up the overall reaction of the regional community, while reasoning the difference of behaviors between western and regional states to the geographical and ideological linkage. In this regard he commented:

So, for all the anxious excitement in Iran and overly zealous excitement in Pakistan and China, kind of like looking from afar thinking that okay we are safe and the border with Afghanistan is inaccessible but at least Americans are out of here. So, the point is countries in the region have different approaches to Taliban, in the sense of security, geographic proximity, and also the fact that the Taliban do not have an alternative to them.

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)

Moreover, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Islamic Relief' country director of Afghanistan while explaining the Western approach towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan commented:

Though the United States does not have any official relations with the Taliban administration, looking at their behavior, in my opinion, signifies the flexibility in their behavior. I mean there is not much enmity between them as shown in the media, of course, it's like they are observing the situation. The whole international scenario today shows that no state is openly recognizing them, and it is because the international community is not in a hurry, they have an ample time.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Looking at the responses, it has been evident that Afghanistan, amid the events of Post August 2021, where the Taliban took control of the Afghan administration after an abrupt withdrawal of the United States and NATO forces, is receiving diverse reactions from the international community. Nonetheless, their behaviors towards Afghanistan have very much controlled reasoning to their respective behaviors. As Miss Maryam Mastoor explicated:

The response to the Taliban taking over is mixed. India and China wish to cultivate economic relations with the Taliban. However, the world in general is reluctant to recognize the Taliban government owing to the worsening situation of civil liberties especially of women in Afghanistan.

(Personal Communication, May 29, 2024)

Nonetheless, the phenomenon of diverse yet calculated response among the international community regarding post-August 2021' Afghanistan exposes the conception of international reality not being universal and fixed for all, in the international system but it is what people make of it through their interactions and experiences (Onuf, 1989). Besides, the above-explained words by Miss Mastoor imply that the issues of human rights and civil liberties under the Taliban administration have an impact on the behaviors of the international community. Considering the question of Taliban impacting the international behaviors, another common theme has been crystalized from the collected data where many of the respondents consider the Taliban way of administration as a reason for impacting the behaviors of the international community towards the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan.

## **4.2 Impact of Taliban Behavior on Shaping the Response of the International Community**

This section of the chapter will examine the second theme which appeared after the scrutinization of responses from the sampling population. However, it is important to mention here that the Taliban's impact on the international community's behavior is not only limited to their way of handling administrative management after their control of power in August 2021 but correspondingly, the world's past experiences with the Taliban during the first Talibanization (1996 to 2001) of Afghanistan emerged as a huge contribution in impacting the behaviors of the international community. While expressing her views on the impact of past experiences with the Taliban, Dr. Minhas Majeed affirmed:

Past experiences with the Taliban influenced it (current reactions) during their rule in the 1990s. Neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran, which has experienced the spillover effects of the Taliban's rule, were cautious. The response was shaped by a desire to prevent a return to the oppressive practices and security threats associated with the Taliban's previous rule.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Nevertheless, analyzing the respondents' perspectives, the world's reaction towards Post August 2021's Afghanistan is not only limited to their past experiences but the Taliban code of conduct regarding state administrative policies has further triggered the difficulties in engendering an environment for official diplomatic relations thus pushing forth the re-imposition of international sanctions deteriorating the situation of humanitarian crisis. Reacting to the scenario, Dr. Sajid Khattak indicated that the limitations of human rights by the Taliban administration became a reason to limit and avoid diplomatic relations with the new administration of the Taliban in 2021. Revealing his perspective he stated:

Human rights have always served as reasons for the West to legitimize their humanitarian interventions. They use it strategically and not genuinely as per needs. So, to some extent, they might exploit it as a reason for engagements.

(Personal Communication, May 25, 2024)

Additionally, to connote this point, Dr. Minhas suggested that:

Though releasing some funds with the deterioration of the humanitarian crisis, the international community (West) is very clear about linking human rights with any kind of support to Afghanistan.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Nonetheless, as revealed earlier in this chapter, the post-August 2021' Afghanistan attracted diverse reactions from the international community, it explains the phenomenon of diverse reasonings of different states for the shaping of their behaviors towards Taliban takeover of Afghanistan vis-à-vis their concerns. In this regard, Dr. Minhas Majeed further suggested that:

Where the international community is adamant about linking the release of funds with human rights in Afghanistan, China, and Russia are somehow skeptical over the issue as the increasing humanitarian crisis will ultimately impact the regional powers so these powers will not give priority to human rights as it will require them to not financially support Afghanistan which can then increase the crisis having a negative impact on regional powers.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

In order to explain the concerns of regional states, Dr. Faisa Javaid elaborated his perspective that:

So, Pakistan and other regional powers will not disconnect from Afghanistan due to Human Rights, but its causes are something else. Pakistan's differences on terrorism, sending back refugees, and limiting transit trade increased the crisis but human rights were not the main issue. China invests in different projects i.e., mining, and does not care about human rights likewise Russia and Central Asian states. America on the other hand is talking about HR, complying with the Doha process.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

As respondents' answers have been expressed with the instances of responses from Dr. Sajid Khattak and Dr. Minhas Majeed, it has been analyzed that though the sanctions on

Afghanistan have their origin in the Taliban control of Afghanistan, in today's scenario it is being used as a diplomatic tactic to exert pressure and express the power. Nonetheless, the subject of international non-recognition for the Taliban government has its genesis in the factuality of human rights violations by the Taliban administration. As agreed in the Doha Accord, the affirmation of inclusive government complying with human rights was one of the main agenda points but non-compliance of the Taliban after controlling the administration eventually concerned the international community thus issuing non-recognition for the Taliban government on an international arena. As analyzed from the collected data, though regional states have a comparatively warm reaction and relation with the Taliban government of Afghanistan, they are also hesitant to provide them with the recognition. Dr. Faisal Javaid explicated the above argumentation by stating that the regional powers are in fact benefiting from the recognition crisis, he commented:

Who limited China, and Russia, to not recognizing them, they can take initiative but want it to be a pressure tool. There is no sign in the near future of international recognition. In this situation, it is a win-win for regional powers, especially for China and Russia, as they are investing in Afghanistan without the disturbance of others coming and are single-handily investing.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

Besides, analyzing the responses, most scholars noted that apart from the regional states, the United States also sees the potential of investing in Afghanistan, but having strained diplomatic relations, it is difficult for United States to invest directly, nonetheless they are having their options open to invest via 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. As elucidating his point Dr Faisal Javaid expressed that:

America on the other hand is talking about HR, complying with the Doha process, though being clever as it will invest in Afghanistan through 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, Qatar, UAE, and friends. As now China is increasingly and heavily working on mining projects in Afghanistan, its causing worries in the capitalist market i.e., the United States, so there is a contemplation that these United States' markets will establish their companies in Turkey and then will invest in Afghanistan as a third party.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)



Regardless of the fact that they regional and Western states are responding differently towards Taliban control of Afghanistan, fact of the subject is that none of the countries has recognized the Taliban government of Afghanistan which signify that the world's predetermined perception about the Taliban ranging from their 1990s experiences (1<sup>st</sup> Talibanization of Afghanistan), i.e., internationalization of terrorism by Taliban as non-state actors, during war on terror, to their current non-compliance with the international law (Rahimi, 2024), has shaped the attitude and behavior of international community towards Taliban' control of Afghanistan. Subsequently, the ideas of socially constructed perceptions of others through interactions and experiences, shared values and understandings of human rights, which have been specified in the relations between Afghanistan and the international community exposes that the diplomatic relationships between states on an international arena are not predetermined but the interactions between them on an international level shape their behaviors accordingly (Brunnée & Toope, 2012). Moreover, the conception that not the material factors (investment, economic power) but universal ideational factors (human rights, global security) do shape the interaction between states thus signifying the basis of cold reaction towards Taliban administered Afghanistan resulting in the non-recognition of Taliban government on an international arena.

#### ***4.2.1 International Sanctions on Taliban Individuals***

Provided that, the issue of international sanction on the Afghan administration has been prevalent due to the Taliban code of conduct thus accelerating and widening the humanitarian crisis. Nonetheless as explained by Hameed Hakimi, it is important to keep in mind that the Taliban as an entire group is not like Hizballah or Hamas, the whole entity has not been sanctioned but its individuals are sanctioned. Thus, the groups are sanctioned because of the sanctioned individuals who happen to be the leadership (Mr. Hameed Hakimi, Personal Communication, 7 May 2024). So, if tomorrow Taliban replace their leaders with non-sanctioned individuals there might be a possibility of improved relations, exhibiting that the international system does not have fixed nature (Weber, 2013; Dormer, 2018).

Nonetheless, the international sanctions coupled with the Taliban's code of conduct further deteriorated the working capacity of IGOs and NGOs, which are working for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, thus worsening the humanitarian crisis. This situation was clarified during the data collection process when data was collected from the representatives of two international organizations i.e., Islamic Relief and International Committee of Red

Cross (ICRC).

#### ***4.2.2 Challenges Encountered by International Organizations in Taliban-Administered Afghanistan***

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Islamic Relief's country director of Afghanistan, explained the challenges faced by the organization amid the events of August 2021. Islamic Relief is a leading non-governmental organization based in the UK working world and wide committed to humanitarian principles and standards (Islamic Relief, 2023). While explaining the working of Islamic Relief in Afghanistan, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed unveiled that the Islamic Relief has been working in Afghanistan since 2000, and in 2004, they established their first office in Kandahar however, Kabul is now the center of Islamic Relief after the inauguration of their country office in Kabul (Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Personal Communication, 15 May 2024). Nonetheless, sudden and abrupt events of August 2021, served as an instantaneous challenge to Islamic Relief. In this regard, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed has expressed the phenomenon of donor fatigue impacting the organization's budget for Afghanistan, he revealed that:

The immediate challenge that Afghanistan under the Taliban administration had to face was to sustain the economy. Consequently, ours (Islamic Relief) donations were impacted by the 35% which shows the donor fatigue.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

To signify the impact of international sanctions on the organization's coordination, he expressed the difficulties regarding the procedure of financial transactions. As the United States, Canada, and the European Union have cold relations with the Taliban administration, and there is a ban on the Taliban, it interrupts the financial transaction as the flow of transactions is not through the governmental institutions. To signify the similarities of difficulties faced by the other international organizations he further commented about the USAID that at first, after the Taliban control of the Afghan' administration, they stopped working in Afghanistan however they resumed their operations later on while focusing only on the humanitarian assistance (Personal Communication, 15 May 2024).

On the other hand, when the question was asked about the impact of international sanctions on the operationalization of International Committee of Red Cross, their communication

director of Pakistan' chapter, Miss Fizza Bangash had a different experience to it regarding ICRC working in Afghanistan. According to her statement:

No, we are not facing such pressures, as our concern is not the human rights issue. As for limitations on funds by the individual donor or donor countries, our donors cannot claim to use this fund in particular areas. We are not like other organizations, like donor-donor organizations, we often raise the funds for particular circumstances or issues i.e., Gaza for now, earthquake or flood disasters in the post-conflict zone of Afghanistan. We allocate the funds yearly for each chapter which cannot be used for other purposes but there is the possibility of an increase in that allocation.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

Nonetheless, international sanctions have not been emerged as the only challenge for international organizations working in Afghanistan but most of the respondents consider the Taliban code of conduct towards international organization as one of the main challenges that is being faced by the international organizations in post August 2021' Afghanistan. As expressed by Miss Fizza Bangash:

The situation for the ICRC in Afghanistan is challenging since the Taliban controls the Afghan administration. Though pre-Talibanization of Afghanistan, we were smoothly running our work but since it became an Islamic emirate there have been several restrictions by the Taliban government which made the working of our missions a challenging task. Nonetheless, we are still working, and the Taliban administration is coordinating and cooperating with us, we are not facing restrictions from the Taliban directly but having challenges due to their governance style, and restrictions on their populations. Since, our mission is to help the vulnerable population in conflictual zones, but the Taliban's restrictions have made it a challenging task i.e., women rights. So, it was a difficult situation for us as the local female doctors were employed in our hospitals and the restrictions made it difficult for us to operate according to the needs.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

Regarding the challenges that are being triggered by the Taliban administered Afghanistan, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed from Islamic Relief stated that:

Unfortunately, you must have an idea about the restrictions that have been placed by the Taliban now, which is indeed a major setback. If talking about the restrictions, then the Taliban' administration has also put restrictions on NGOs as according to them they consider that NGOs will propagate their agenda i.e., western agenda in women. Thus, women are also not allowed for any employment even for NGOs. Regarding that all the NGOs including ours are facing challenges.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Analyzing the responses, it has been assessed that the post-August 2021 Afghan situation which was coupled with the Taliban' return to power was never a smooth trajectory but consequently it was conditioned with the challenging and complex circumstances. Nevertheless, despite the array of diverse challenges, international organizations continued to their humanitarian missions in post August 2021' Afghanistan, bounded by their socially constructed responsibility to protect civilian (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

In the words of Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, though the situation was unexpected for the local population, the international community had an idea and knew about that (Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Personal Communication, 2 May 2024). Nonetheless, eventual situation with the abruptness of events further aggravated the humanitarian crisis, causing death and misery among the Afghan population (Cabot, 2022). Intercepting the research findings, it has been evaluated that humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has been emerged as leading theme where most of the respondents talked about the crisis, its reasoning, and the steps to counter it.

### **4.3 Consequent Humanitarian Crisis in Result of Political Fallout**

As emphasized in the literature, humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon that came across amid the events of August 2021 but being an epicenter of political aspirations and manipulations from the last half century led to its systemic crisis (Ushakova, 2022; Abawe et al., 2022), leading to its significance as Afghanistan being a crisis personified country (Nwakanma and Irokansi, 2020). Nonetheless, as analyzed by the

assessments of respondents, long overdue yet abrupt withdrawal of United states which was coupled with the intensification of sanctions and eventual non-compliance of Taliban administration towards universal international laws, further aggravated the crisis which according to Freshta Abbasi, an Afghan specialist at Human Rights watch, is the world's one of the worst humanitarian crises (Cabot, 2022). To describe the situation of humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, many respondents explicated the current situation that how the crisis in Afghanistan is complex and multifaceted. In the words of Hameed Hakimi, humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is the product of political fallout, engineering the complexity to the crisis. In this regard, he expressed:

In Afghanistan, I think this is the biggest tragedy that the Afghan people are getting the burnt political fallout that the United States engineered. So, with this situation, you have a very complicated crisis in which the international system is designed in a way that would automatically work against the context which Afghanistan has become i.e., illegitimate state collapsing and insurgency group taking over without a handover and the economy automatically getting shut down by the international banking regulation and things like that.

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)

To unveil the crisis situation in Afghanistan, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, who is working directly in Afghanistan as the country director of Islamic relief explicated the Economy-Security situation of Taliban administered Afghanistan that is further contributing to the complexity of the crisis. To provide his in-hand experience he stated:

Exercise done by us, not on an official level, shows that 90% of the population is affected by poverty. Though these figures are not official but having in-hand experience, 90% of the population is in poverty. The situation is the result of no job opportunities whereas the agriculture sector has been suffering due to protracted conflicts and natural disasters.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Though contrary to the economic situation, his assessment suggests that the security situation is getting relatively better as the conflict has been reduced largely. To explain the security situation, he explained further:

When we talk about the security situation, the conflict has been reduced largely. Earlier, we had to hear the blasts every day but now is not that situation as the Taliban are now the ones controlling the system and security situation. Talking about the security situation, though there are some groups/organizations who carry out the attacks i.e., ISK, etc. but most of these attacks are directed towards the Taliban and we do not hear much about the attack on the international community.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Besides, to explain his perspective, he further quoted the Taliban representative, with whom he had conversation with regarding the Taliban stance on the economy-security situation. He stated:

*I had a conversation with the Governor of Bamyan ‘Abdullah Sarhadi’, who said that we are doing two things regarding the current situation. Firstly, we are not targeting our enemies, avoiding enemies which will make our enemies less thus no more enemies, though there are still revenge enemies, etc. but it’s not from the Taliban side. Secondly, we have left the economy to God, he will help us*

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024).

While examining the governor’s responses by keeping in mind the respondents' assessments, it has been evaluated that though the security situation is getting better, as Taliban who were once, one of the main conflictual parties, are now in the position where they are responsible for the security situation thus the improvement in security. However, the responses also imply that Taliban administration’ do not have any concrete policy regarding the economy, pushing forth a health, food, educational, and refugee’ crisis in the country thus deepening the humanitarian crisis. Nonetheless, the ensuing situation of deepened humanitarian crisis, alerted the international community which eventually stirred a humanitarian discussion on an international level by approaching a nuanced approach towards Taliban administered Afghanistan.

Subsequently, the next chapter will analyze the possibility of humanitarian crisis in impacting the international behaviors towards post August 2021' Afghanistan.

## **Chapter 5**

### **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

#### **5.1 Analyzing the Impingement of Humanitarian Crisis on the Behaviors of International Community**

The following chapter emphasizes on the analysis of commonly identified findings that asserts that the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is impinging the international behaviors towards Taliban administered Afghanistan. While evaluating the respondents' perspectives, the impingement of international behaviors due to the deepened humanitarian crisis emerged as a shared theme among most of the respondents.

In respect to that, while there are international concerns regarding holding Taliban accountable for their actions and ensuring their respect for human rights, there is also a recognition of the urgent need to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people (Owden, Hakimi, & Ramalingam, 2022). This has led to some countries and organizations cautiously engaging with the Taliban to facilitate the delivery of aid and ensure access to essential services for the Afghan population. While emphasizing the situation, Dr. Minhas Majeed concluded that:

The consequent humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has indeed influenced the transition of international behaviors. The severity of the crisis, characterized by food shortages, economic instability, and the risk of a collapse in healthcare and education systems, has compelled many countries and international organizations to reassess their approach towards engaging with the Taliban-led administration. Overall, the humanitarian crisis has prompted a more nuanced approach to international behaviors towards Afghanistan, balancing the imperative of upholding human rights with addressing immediate humanitarian needs.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)



When asked about the possibility of humanitarian crisis impinging the international community' approach towards Taliban administered Afghanistan. Hameed Hakimi revealed that:

Basically, the biggest donor to humanitarian appeal in Afghanistan is still the United States and nobody else, so the Americans still give the largest amount of money from all of the countries. And Taliban are very open about it, as there a statement by Mowlawli Mutaqi, foreign minister of the Taliban government, he literally said, world by world, "[Our relations with the U.S.] depend on America's policy and responses. We have announced over and over again, and have told them directly at the negotiations table, that we want good relations with America and the rest of the countries of the world".

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)

This statement by Mr. Hameed Hakimi unveils the dichotomy between the international sanctions and humanitarian appeal. Despite the dwindling of funding since August 2021, United States remained the largest donor to Afghanistan' amid the humanitarian crisis (SIGAR, 2024). The consequent dichotomy in assisting the crisis appeal is the eventual result of the concerns that alerted the regional and western countries regarding international stability. In context to that, Dr. Faisal Javaid expressed the European concerns regarding humanitarian crisis that the Europe sees the crisis, in a sense that how they can manage the situation so that it does not affect Europe, as deepening crisis means more refugees thus peace in Afghanistan is beneficial for them, and increased peace for them means increasing investment and decreasing crisis thus diminution in the refugee burden for Europe.

Subsequently to cater the crisis, many international organizations are working in Afghanistan to address the humanitarian needs, despite the fact that they are facing difficulties, consequent to the events of August 2021. In this regard, data was collected from two international organizations i.e., International Committee of red Cross and Islamic Relief working currently in Afghanistan to assist the humanitarian appeal.

### ***5.1.1 Focus of Work for Islamic Relief in Afghanistan***

Islamic Relief, UK based non-governmental organization is working in Afghanistan for nearly 23 years now (Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2024). According to Dr. Manzoor Ahmed,

country director for Afghanistan chapter, Islamic Relief’ usual budget for Afghanistan is approx. 4-5 million UK Pounds which is usually allocated for long-term development work and humanitarian assistance. However, after the Taliban control of Afghan administration, which was coupled with the humanitarian crisis, there has been a large jump in the budget, as for 2022, it was approx. 33 million GBP. As the institutional building is the responsibility of government, Islamic Relief helps with the sustainable livelihood (Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Personal Communication, 15 May 2024). Regarding that, Islamic Relief assist in improving the community infrastructure by hiring local labor by providing them cash for work. To explain the cash for work project, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed expressed:

Through the cash for work, apart from the permanent employment that we provide through our offices, we are assisting the locals by supporting them economically through cash for work

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Nonetheless, their overall work centers around emergency and sustainability. In 2022 Islamic relief helped 1.5 million people and in 2023 the figure centered around 1.3 million people. To assist the youth in this poverty crisis, Islamic Relief has a “Youth Development Program (YDP)”. Under this program, Islamic Relief hire approx. 14 internees yearly to train them and provide them with professional experience (Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Personal Communication, 15 May 2024).

### ***5.1.2 Islamic Relief’ Triple-Nexus Approach***

To explain the Islamic relief’ focus of interest, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed described the “Triple Nexus Approach” agendized by the Islamic Relief in Afghanistan. Regarding the triple nexus approach, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed explained that the Islamic Relief’s main focus of interest in Afghanistan is centered around three areas focusing the humanitarian needs i.e., **1<sup>st</sup>** Food security and sustainability, **2<sup>nd</sup>** Rehabilitation, development’ and peacebuilding and **3<sup>rd</sup>** Health Services. Describing the assistance regarding food security and sustainability, he summarized that the Islamic Relief assist the agriculture sector by assisting farmers, and supporting water canals and irrigation demands, which help to preserve water. In this regard, they also provide agriculture training, and they have built several 5-6 km long water canals throughout Afghanistan thus assisting in countering the food insecurity (Dr. Manzoor

Ahmed, Personal Communication, 15 May 2024). Moreover, another area of service is centered around the Rehabilitation, development' and peacebuilding, while explaining this, he specified:

It's not really peacebuilding but what we mean from the peacebuilding is the 'social cohesion at local level' where we bring together the different groups and ethnicities to work together which brings out and improves the cohesion at local level which eventually helps to progress peace among different groups.

(Personal Communication, May 15, 2024)

Under the development program, Islamic Relief also assist in the educational area. Through their education program, Islamic Relief help orphans to get an education regardless the gender. Apart from that, another area of service for Islamic Relief is "Health Services". Where their focus is centered around the emergencies, in this regard, Islamic relief have several functional mobile ambulances, and 40 different clinics all around Afghanistan. Considering the long-term health projects, currently Islamic relief have 15 long-term hospitals to provide health services (Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Personal Communication, 15 May 2024).

The above-described and reported elucidation by Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, explains that despite the challenges faced by the organization due to the international sanctions and Taliban code of conduct, the organization continued working for humanitarian needs amid the crisis, considering its socially constructed responsibility of protecting the civilians through the shared ideas and values of international system (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

### ***5.1.3 ICRC Current Role in Afghanistan***

ICRC, an International Committee of Red cross, is a humanitarian organization that works to help the needy of societies who are the victims of armed conflict and other violence. After years of aiding the victims of the Afghan conflict in Pakistan, the ICRC established its chapter in Afghanistan in 1987 (ICRC Annual Report 2021). In order to explain their focused area, a respondent from the organization, Mr. Qadeer Ahmed, security analyst, ICRC Pakistan, revealed that the focus of ICRC as an organization revolves around two main points i.e., Protection and Prevention, thus the assistance that ICRC provides is in concerning to these points. He re-emphasized the point of ICRC being a humanitarian organization by

expressing that:

The first thing to understand for anyone researching is that ICRC is not a developmental organization but it's a humanitarian organization that works to help the needy of societies who are the victims of armed conflict and other violence.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

While explaining the current working situation of ICRC in Afghanistan, Miss Anum Rasheed was of suggestion that ICRC role in Afghanistan is minimized now because of the several reasons to it. While explaining the reasons to it, she suggested that there has been a transition to the Afghan situation, she further explicated:

Today Afghanistan is not in an active IAC (International Armed Conflict) Or NIAC (Non-International Armed Conflict), as according to the Geneva Convention, the ICRC mandate is the compliance of IHL which is to work in the conflict zone and since Afghanistan is neither an IAC nor IAC, thus the minimization of our work as now the situation is different of what it was when there was an active conflict.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

Besides, explaining the other reason for minimized role for ICRC, she opined that the ICRC is currently more engaged in Gaza and before that, it was the Russia-Ukraine war that encompassed the more time and resources of ICRC. On the contrary, Mr. Qadeer Ahmed, emphasized that there is no transition in the ICRC's role towards Afghanistan, but it is working as needed. In the case of other conflict zones i.e., Gaza or Ukraine, ICRC have its own missions for those conflicts but when talking about the Asian chapter, Afghanistan is still the main focus of ICRC and is working in a post conflict zone. While explaining the current mission and focus of ICRC, Miss Fizza Bangash asserted that:

Since the Islamic emirates, our main mission in Afghanistan has been medical care, we are trying to cater to the health needs, we have hospitals that provide the medical facilities, moreover, we have physical rehabilitation centers that are helping people with amputated limbs, these rehabilitation centers are the important part of our missions.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

While talking about the challenges that are being faced by the ICRC due to the Taliban's governance style, she emphasized that the Taliban are not creating hurdles for ICRC directly, as the areas which were safe for ICRC to operate pre-August 2021' are still safe for the organization in the post-August 2021 circumstances, and since there is coordination with the Taliban, so chance of any logistical hurdle has not been faced by the organization regarding that phenomenon (Mr. Fizza Bangash, Personal Communication, 2 May 2024). Nonetheless, she elucidated that the restrictions on populations i.e., restrictions for women, affects indirectly to the working of ICRC, she further expressed that:

These restrictions on population cause a big challenge for ICRC in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, we try our best to cater to the situation when the need for maternity health arises in an area. We try our best to employ our team according to the needs of the area.

(Personal Communication, May 2, 2024)

Subsequently, the responses from the Islamic Relief and International Committee of Red Cross suggested that despite the challenges that the international organizations have to face in post conflict zone of Afghanistan, these organization do understand and acknowledge the humanitarian needs thus are continuing their humanitarian missions in order to assist in the humanitarian appeal. Moreover, the eventual situation with continued humanitarian assistance from the international organizations and stirring of humanitarian discussions on an international arena (Owden, Hakimi, & Ramalingam, 2022), signify the transition of ideational discourse (Kratochwil, 1991) and perspectives amid the deepening of crisis in post-August 2021' Afghanistan.

## **5.2 Transitioning of International Behaviors**

Analyzing the responses, a common theme of transition in the international behaviors has been crystalized linking the discussion with the theoretical framework this study has approached. Regarding the transition in behaviors, most of the respondents assessed that since August 2021 till now (2024), the international approach towards Afghanistan has been transitioned from condemnation and skepticism to growing diplomatic engagements. In this regard, Dr. Minhas Majeed assessed that:

Initially, there was significant international condemnation and skepticism about the

Taliban's ability to govern inclusively and respect human rights. Many countries froze assets and suspended aid to Afghanistan, while others evacuated their diplomatic staff and citizens. However, over time, there has been some diplomatic engagement with the Taliban, particularly to address humanitarian concerns and ensure safe passage for those seeking to leave the country. Some countries have also expressed a willingness to provide humanitarian aid directly to the Afghan people while maintaining pressure on the Taliban to uphold their commitments regarding human rights

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Moreover, to explain the phenomenon of transitioning, Dr. Sajid Khattak reaffirmed the point of transitioning in international community behavior towards Afghanistan by stating that:

With every passing year, the internal stability in Afghanistan and China growing diplomatic engagements with Taliban is pushing the overall international community to have more engagements with Taliban.

(Personal Communication, May 25, 2024)

Nonetheless, to explain the phenomenon of transition in international community behavior, Mr. Hameed Hakimi opined that the international response towards Afghanistan has of course experienced a transition in behaviors however, he linked transition with the interest-driven approaches. Describing his point, Mr. Hameed Hakimi evaluated that:

Iran, Russia, and China at one point had a convergence of interest with the United States against Afghanistan and the Taliban. As if you look at Russia in 2003 when Putin was still in power, they had the Taliban on their list of terrorist entities and groups. And now, very recently, they put them out of that list. I think the interest right now is to keep Afghanistan the way it is so that it does not explode. Taliban are not the best but not as bad as ISKP and other groups. And also, interestingly all the groups that the Chinese, Russians, and Central Asian do not like, happen to be the group that Taliban are fighting so it's kind of convergence of interest.

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)

While explaining the international community's behavior towards Afghanistan, he further

exemplified the Pakistan situation that though Pakistan is having concerns regarding Taliban administration but still security establishment would not see Taliban as an existential threat as there are many interests' convergence here in Pakistan (Mr. Hameed Hakimi, Personal Communication, 25 May 2024). Besides, Pakistan' constructivist ideas about India shaped her geopolitical interest that Pakistan would rather prefer Taliban administration in Afghanistan, who do not have good relations with India than the government before who had good relations.

Analyzing the above statement by Mr. Hameed Hakimi, it has been assessed by the study that the suggests the possibility of transition in international relations which explains the constructivist (Onuf, 1989) idea that "International relations are not fixed but are being continually constructed" (Weber, 2013; Dormer, 2018). Besides, the assessment regarding how Russia shaped and reshaped its interaction with Taliban, owing to their interest driven approach explains how their interest, thinking and interaction with Taliban constantly shaped and at times reshaped their policies regarding Afghanistan on an international level (Chernoff, 2007). Meanwhile, while explaining the phenomenon of transition in international behavior, Dr. Minhas Majeed explained that there are several factors in international relations that shape the behaviors of states towards other states, and it depends on the lenses we are looking through while carrying out the international relations. While explaining the phenomenon through the constructivist approach, she further revealed that:

Indeed, the transition of international behaviors, particularly concerning post-August 2021 Afghanistan, can be explained through various theoretical perspectives in international relations. Constructivist theory focuses on ideas, norms, and experiences as drivers of international behaviors. Countries' perceptions of the Taliban, shaped by their historical interactions and cultural norms, can influence their stance towards the new administration. International actors may prioritize protecting Afghan civilians and promoting democratic principles due to global human rights and humanitarianism norms.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

This explanation by Dr. Minhas Majeed denotes that the already built ideas of international community regarding the perceptions and experiences with Taliban eventually shaped their response to the Afghan situation (Alina, 2021; Jami 2022; Mirzayi 2023). This interpretation accounts for the constructivist approach that the interests and identities of the international

actors are socially constructed (Ruggie, 1998). Nonetheless, Dr. Minhas' statement about international actors prioritizing the democratic principles of global human rights and humanitarian norms reveal the Wendt's (1992) assertion of international relations that the states identities are not fixed but their shared values of humanitarianism transitioned their ideational discourse from terrorism to humanitarian assistance. Besides, it illuminates the constructivist idea of ideational factors that explains that the international reality is neither permanent nor fixed, but rather is bound to change through the concept of social construction (Theys, 2017).

### **5.3 Future Prospects for Taliban' Administered Afghanistan**

Comprehending the research discussion, the study's analysis asserts that the international community' behavior towards post-Talibanization of Afghanistan is neither fixed nor static but it is in the trajectory of evolving. Though not being internationally recognized, Taliban government in Afghanistan is enticing increasing diplomatic relations each year. Owing to the current situation of growing diplomatic relations, Dr. Sajid Khattak assessed the improvements regarding current situation in the near future however he conditioned the improvements in international relations of Afghanistan to the Taliban non-involvement in the regional and extra regional conflicts (Dr. Sajid Khattak, Personal Communications, 25 May 2024). Consequently, the conditionalities regarding the behavior of actors involved eventually asserts the shadow of uncertain future in Afghanistan. Contemplating to the uncertain future, Dr. Minhas Majeed subjugated the Afghan future to the Taliban compliance of international human rights law. Subsequent to the subject under discussion, she asserted that:

The future of Afghanistan under the Taliban administration is uncertain and subject to various factors. While the Taliban have promised a more inclusive government and respect for human rights, their record and ideological stance raise concerns about their commitment to these assurances. The possibility of international recognition and cooperation depends on the Taliban's actions and willingness to meet certain conditions set by the international community.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Owing to her assessment, she explicated the factors that can prompt or impinge the



international recognition for the Taliban administration. According to Dr. Minhas Majeed's assessment, the followingly explained, several critical factors can significantly influence international recognition and cooperation towards the Taliban administration of Afghanistan. To describe the factors, she explained that:

1<sup>st</sup>, The Taliban would need to demonstrate adherence to international norms and standards, 2<sup>nd</sup>, Forming an inclusive government that represents the diversity of Afghan society, including women and minorities, 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Taliban must prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist organizations, as it did in the past, 4<sup>th</sup>, Afghanistan's economic stability and development are vital for its long-term viability and integration into the international community. The Taliban would need to prioritize economic reforms, investment in infrastructure, and poverty alleviation efforts to address the country's pressing humanitarian and developmental needs. 5<sup>th</sup>. Regional actors, such as neighboring countries and major powers like China, Russia, and India, have a significant role in shaping Afghanistan's future. Engaging with these stakeholders and addressing their concerns could facilitate international recognition and cooperation.

(Personal Communication, April 17, 2024)

Besides, Dr. Faisal Javaid contended regarding the prospects of international recognition, owing to the Taliban's compliance with the Doha agreement, where he argued that:

The crisis can be controlled if the Taliban implements the Doha process, the main document, but Afghanistan is not listening to anyone, not including other groups in government, and thus regional powers who were talking in a lighter tone can eventually change their tone.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

Furthermore, to opine his assessment regarding the prospects for the Afghan future, Mr. Hameed Hakimi gave his opinion by suggesting that:

I do not think that they (Taliban's administered Afghanistan) are getting international recognition because a lot of these international recognitions are blocked, not by the United States but the world works in a way that even Pakistan with all of its friendship

with China, will not go against the American foreign policy, it does not want to be seen as going against the foreign policy of United States, it is not because they are enslaved by the United States but purely because nobody wants to take the risk. So, the whole idea is, the internationals along with United States needs to warm up to the Taliban, to formally flourish the relations. Though 13-15 formal functional embassies are there and yeah, that's all great but that doesn't mean political recognition.

(Personal Communication, May 7, 2024)

Nonetheless, contradicting Mr. Hameed Hakimi's assessments, Dr. Faisal Javaid examined an alternative situation of regional states benefiting from the recognition crisis of Afghanistan, regarding that he expressed:

From now on one is urging IR, as regional powers are investing by bypassing these formalities while using IR as a tool to put them under their pressure. Besides, there is no sign that Afghanistan will be able to satisfy the Int community regarding HR. And there is no country that will defend or work as an Afghan attorney on the international level.

(Personal Communication, April 2, 2024)

Consequently, analyzing the response, it has been assessed that though the Taliban recognition on an international level is a long trajectory to cross, nonetheless, there is a possibility for international recognition however that possibility is being subjugated to the Taliban compliance of the international rules and laws. Thus, the future of Afghanistan under the Taliban administration hinges on their ability to address the concerns of the international community, implement inclusive governance, and ensure stability and security within the country. While the path to international recognition and cooperation may be challenging, it remains a possibility if the Taliban demonstrate a genuine commitment to positive change and cooperation with the global community.

## CONCLUSION

This research study aimed at exploring the responses of the international community towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan while looking at the possible inducements, impacting the international community's attitudes and shaping their behavior in formulating the policies towards Taliban administered post-August 2021 Afghanistan. Considering the circumstances and turn of events after the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, this study investigated the ways the Taliban control of Afghanistan impacted the behaviors of the international community. In this regard, to investigate the international responses and the evolution of their attitudes since August 2021', this study employs an in-depth analysis of the constructivist approach to comprehend the articulation of international policies towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan. Concerning that, this research collected data from eleven individuals, based on their hands-on experiences and linkages to the post-August 2021 Afghanistan community, academia, and humanitarian associations.

While analyzing the collected data, it has been inspected that post-August 2021' Afghanistan is attracting a spectrum of responses from the international community. The diverse range of the international community's attitudes towards post-August 2021 Afghanistan has not been an out-of-nothing occurrence. Nonetheless, the experiences of the past and their pre-August 2021 interactions with the Taliban eventually shaped the international community's reaction towards the Taliban control of Afghanistan. Subsequently, the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan in August 2021 ignited an extensive concern and skepticism, among the international community, about whether to recognize the de-facto authority of Taliban or to isolate them. Examining how quickly the Taliban took control over the country by bypassing the Doha agreement, alerted the international community for global security. The uncertain situation resulted in a universal outcome of non-recognition from the international community towards the Taliban administration. However, while the international community called for global condemnations of the consequent turn of events, it has been observed that a diverse set of reactions were practiced by the Western and regional states towards the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan. The subsequent diverse reactions infer that the United States led Western states reacted coldly towards the Talibanization of Afghanistan, through the immediate re-intensification of sanctions on the Taliban while China-led regional states

reacted cautiously towards the de-facto Taliban by welcoming the Taliban control of Afghanistan though not recognizing them by siding with the universal non-recognition of Taliban on an international arena.

Investigating the diverse set of reactions from the international community suggests that the identity perception of key players against each other which was formed through their interaction and past experiences, eventually shaped their behavior towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan. In the case of the regional states, they acted warmly to the Taliban administration while looking at the situation through a lens where they preferred the Taliban administration in Afghanistan over the United States' sponsored government. Likewise, their identity perception about the United States as a strategic competitor shaped their behavior towards Talibanization of Afghanistan where China-led regional states saw an opportunity to fill the strategic gap left out by the United States withdrawal by steering cautious diplomatic relations with the Taliban administration. Looking at these sets of diverse reactions by the Western and regional states towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan implicates the importance of already built ideas, identity, and socially constructed perceptions of the actors involved. It explains that the socially constructed identities of the actors involved eventually constructed their foreign policy goals and interests, subsequently shaping the behavior of the international community towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan.

Moreover, investigating the international responses unveils that the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan has been an ultimate factor in shaping the behaviors of the international community towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan. Past experiences and interactions with the Taliban which signify the shared understanding of the Taliban identity as a terrorist organization eventually impinged the international community to act cautiously towards the Taliban de-facto administration through their isolation and re-intensification of the imposed sanctions on the Taliban. Nonetheless, the eventual administrative management by the Taliban government seized the complaints regarding the human rights violations which prompted the international community to demand the Taliban's compliance with the human rights laws. These human rights violations, mainly against women's rights posed a challenge to the Afghan humanitarian crisis as several humanitarian organizations working in Afghanistan suspended their operations in protest to the challenges and restrictions on their women staff (Preskey & Sadid, 2022).

The subsequent situation coupled with the international sanctions and Taliban violation of human rights further expanded the humanitarian crisis in the country. The surge and extension of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan alerted the international community regarding global security. The eventual situation stirred a humanitarian discussion on an international arena augmenting the need for approaching a nuanced approach towards Taliban-administered Afghanistan. While considering the humanitarian needs, several United Nations meetings were held to examine the humanitarian situation of Afghanistan, and subsequent to these meetings the mandate of the United Nations assistance mission was granted an additional extension to assist Afghanistan's waning situation (Owden, Hakimi, & Ramalingam, 2022). Moreover, the deteriorating humanitarian circumstances impinged the humanitarian organizations, who suspended their work in protest of Taliban policies, to resume their controlled operations in Afghanistan (Dawi, 2023). The change in the international community's behavior amid the humanitarian crisis explains the phenomenon of transition in international behaviors from counterterrorism to humanitarian assistance. Consequently, the transition in international behaviors from skepticism and condemnations to the nuanced diplomatic engagements with the Taliban administration unveils the constructivist idea regarding foreign relations that international relations are neither permanent nor fixed but are continually being socially constructed through the social norms, interactions and discourse (Theys, 2018).

Concluding the findings regarding research questions illuminates the prospects for the Afghan future. Investigating the international community behavior vis-à-vis post-August 2021' Afghanistan evaluates the pattern of their engagement towards Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Assessing the pattern of their engagement unveils the evolution of international community behavior towards post-August 2021' Afghanistan owing to the circumstantial dynamics. Taliban administration's growing diplomatic relations each year indicate the possibility of improvement regarding the diplomatic crisis of the Taliban administration. However, this study clauses the improved diplomatic relations with the conditionalities regarding the behavior of the actors involved. Consequently, it identifies that the international recognition of Taliban-administered Afghanistan is a long trajectory to cross. Looking at the current global scenario of the year 2024, where the international community is distracted on different fronts i.e., Gaza and Ukraine, and Afghanistan is rapidly becoming a back-burner issue for the international community where they are not in a hurry to recognize the Taliban de-facto authority. However, constructivism (Onuf, 1989), explains

the concept of international relations being neither conferred nor fixed, elucidating that the international community's response towards Taliban-administered Afghanistan, is neither innate nor fixed but socially constructed through shared norms, interactions, and discourse. Consequently, constructivism makes it a possibility for the Taliban-administered Afghanistan to gain international cooperation and recognition, however owing to the international norms and values of human rights. Unless and until then, it illuminates the shadow of an uncertain future in Afghanistan.

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