

The “Informal Russia India Iran Troika” on Afghanistan

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Those who aspire to analyze Afghanistan as accurately as possible must acknowledge this new dynamic.

[Russia](#), [India](#), and [Iran](#) took a tangible step in the direction of creating a [third pole of influence](#) in the [present bi-multipolar intermediary phase](#) of the [global systemic transition to multipolarity](#) by [forming an informal Troika on Afghanistan](#) following Wednesday’s [Moscow format talks](#) on that country. Representatives from those three, the Central Asian Republics (CARs), China, and Pakistan participated in the meeting, which also saw Qatar, [Saudi Arabia](#), [Turkiye](#), and the [UAE take part as guests](#).

The purpose was to assemble all responsible stakeholders in Afghanistan’s post-war stability in an attempt to pioneer multilateral solutions to its pressing political, security, and socio-economic challenges. While no breakthrough occurred, nor was one expected this early into the process, it nevertheless was a positive development that everyone came together for that reason. This is especially so since each participant is [connected to the SCO](#) either as members, dialogue partners, or aspirants.

Be that as it is, the most important takeaway was the informal Troika that was just established by Russia, India, and Iran. These three don’t intend to compete against China and Pakistan’s influence in Afghanistan in any unfriendly way, but rather endeavor to pragmatically “balance” it by giving that country’s de facto Taliban rulers an alternative to those two. From the perspective of the group’s self-interests, potentially disproportionate dependence on China and Pakistan is disadvantageous.

They fear that the Chinese-Pakistani Strategic Partnership will be leveraged to indirectly influence their policymaking in ways that could result in them feeling pressured to unilaterally concede on what they regard as their objective interests, both ideologically and

nationally. Beijing's powerful economic sway combined with Islamabad's equally powerful intelligence services could gradually erode their political independence, or so they think, whether rightly or wrongly.

With a view towards preemptively averting that scenario, the Taliban earlier decided to make Russia their [partner of choice for geo-economically "balancing" that duopoly](#) in parallel with patching up their historically strained ties with India and Iran. Relations with those last-mentioned two are still characterized by distrust and mutual suspicion, but both have an interest in helping the group diversify from their potentially disproportionate dependence on Pakistan, hence their imperfect rapprochement.

It deserves mentioning that Pakistan and the Taliban are currently locked in a [very dangerous security dilemma](#) connected to the first-mentioned's suspected "[passive facilitation](#)" of US drone strikes in Afghanistan and the second's harboring of the TTP that Islamabad designated as terrorists. The rapid deterioration of bilateral relations has also hampered China's envisaged economically driven engagement with Afghanistan seeing as how Pakistan was supposed to help open the doors for it.

This unexpected outcome increased the attractiveness of the Russian-Indian-Iranian Troika from the Taliban's perspective, which hopes to utilize this emerging framework to tap into those three's collective economic potential for sustainably reconstructing their war-torn country. That's not in any way to suggest that the group thinks they can achieve this goal without help from the Chinese-Pakistani duopoly, but just that they want to preemptively avert disproportionate dependence on those two.

To be sure, this newly created Troika also hopes to indirectly influence the Taliban by gently encouraging it to fulfill its prior promise to form a truly ethno-regionally inclusive government, but that group thinks they can balance between them and the aforementioned duopoly to indefinitely delay doing so. The emerging dynamics of friendly competition between these two groups of responsible stakeholders in that country could result in neither of them feeling comfortable pressuring the Taliban all that much.

After all, their diplomats probably realizing that pushing too hard in that direction risks triggering the Taliban's paranoid fears that they intend to more directly meddle in its policymaking, to which end it could quickly recalibrate its "balancing" act by relying more on their friendly competitors instead. This observation suggests that the group will probably never end up fulfilling its prior promises, whether with respect to governance or socio-cultural rights for minorities and women, which is regrettable.

It also represents a further strategic setback for Pakistan, which seemingly expected to wield the most influence over Afghanistan's post-war situation but has thus far been unable to successfully do so. Instead, Islamabad will have to settle for a "cold peace" with its newfound "frenemies" there, who are actively seeking to play the newly created Troika off against the Chinese-Pakistani duopoly in order to maximize their strategic autonomy in the extremely difficult conditions that they found themselves in.

This leads to the conclusion that Russia, India, and Iran collectively serve to "balance" Chinese and Pakistani influence in post-war Afghanistan, which is a net gain for those three and the Taliban while representing a comparative setback of sorts for the last two as well as minorities and women. The longer that this friendly competitive dynamic remains in play, the longer that the Taliban will delay fulfilling its prior promises while also keeping the

Chinese-Pakistani Strategic Partnership in check.

The Troika will be satisfied with this state of affairs so long as they economically benefit from it and can ensure that the Taliban continues taking action against terrorist groups. They'd of course wish that their well-intended and noble socio-political goals there could be achieved, but they'd be willing to settle for indefinitely delaying their implementation as long as their most direct and immediate interests are met. Those who aspire to analyze Afghanistan as accurately as possible must acknowledge this new dynamic.

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