

**Article Type: Research paper**

A Narrative Analysis of the Transformation of Iran's Foreign Policy Towards the Taliban

Bahareh Davoodi¹, *Yusof Qorashi²

1. M.A in Regional Studies, School of Law and Political Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

2. Associate Professor of International Relations, School of Law and Political Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

Article Info.**Received:** 10/05/2025**Accepted:** 31/01/2026**Available Online:** 28/6/2026

Extended Abstract

A review of events in Afghanistan in the late twentieth century brings attention to a racial group known as the Taliban. This entity emerged in the early 1990s, drawing largely from former members of the Afghan mujahideen, a coalition of Islamic guerilla fighters who had resisted the Soviet occupation. The Taliban rapidly gained popular support by promising to establish stability and restore the rule of law following four years of internal conflict among rival factions from 1992 to 1996.

However, the Taliban's policies and actions—including the brutal persecution of Shiites and the violent treatment of the Hazara community—led to rising tensions with neighboring Iran. These tensions escalated in the late 1990s, culminating in the 1998 attack in which the Taliban killed Iranian diplomatic personnel and an Iranian

Yusof Qorashi, Ph.D.**Address:** Associate Professor of International Relations, School of Law and Political Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.**E-mail:** Qorashi@shirazu.ac.ir**How to Site:**

Davoudi, Bahareh and Qorashi, Yousef. (2025). Explanation of the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in China's global approach. *Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World* 7(4), 29-33.



Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights.

Published by Iranian Association of Geopolitics. This article is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

journalist at the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif. This incident positioned the Taliban as a direct adversary of Iran and raised serious concerns among Iranian officials about the possibility of military confrontation.

The September 11, 2001 attacks prompted the United States to launch military action against the Taliban, which in turn brought Iran closer to the U.S. position. The two countries cooperated in efforts to overthrow the Taliban regime. Following the conflict, Iran played an active role in supporting the establishment of a U.S.-backed government and transitional administration in Afghanistan, reflecting a temporary convergence of interests with the United States.

Despite this cooperation, the relationship between Iran and the Taliban shifted significantly in the years that followed. Signs of a potential rapprochement began to emerge. U.S. officials alleged that Iran continued to support certain Taliban members even while cooperating with the United States to dismantle the group—an allegation that Iranian officials strongly denied. Western media had reported on the evolving relationship between Iran and the Taliban for several years, but the issue gained broader international attention in 2015.

Since then, Iran has increasingly made its contacts with the Taliban public, framing its outreach as an effort to manage regional security concerns and reconcile competing interests. In December 2016, Afghan security officials reported strengthening ties between Iran and the Taliban. The Iranian embassy in Afghanistan later confirmed these contacts, stating that their purpose was to enhance information exchange and intelligence coordination.

When the Taliban regained power in September 2021, Iran adjusted its policies to accommodate the new political reality. It expanded its engagement with the Taliban and initiated diplomatic discussions with officials of the interim government. This shift marked a formal acknowledgment of Iran's evolving approach toward the Taliban.

This article explores the transformation of Iran's foreign policy narrative from confrontation and hostility to cautious engagement and pragmatic cooperation over the two decades from 2001 to 2021. It begins by introducing narrative research as a theoretical and methodological framework, outlines the key elements of narrative analysis, and then examines the case of Iran and the Taliban within this framework.

A narrative methodology has been employed to analyze the evolution of Iran's narrative regarding the Taliban. This method makes it possible to examine how Iranian officials construct, frame, and adapt their storytelling strategies over time in response to shifting regional and international dynamics. By focusing on official statements, speeches, and policy documents, the study identifies patterns in meaning-making and representation. These narratives are analyzed as reflections of broader themes within Iran's foreign policy orientation and strategic priorities. Specifically, the research considers three essential elements: environment, characterization, and emplotment, to understand how threats, allies, and actions are discursively constructed.

The findings indicate a significant shift in the narratives expressed by Iranian officials toward the Taliban over the past 25 years. During the first period of Taliban rule (the First Islamic Emirate, 1996–2001), Iran's foreign policy toward the Taliban was framed within a confrontational narrative due to deep ideological differences. In this context, Iran even provided crucial assistance to the United States during the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. However, following the fall of the Taliban, a gradual transformation in Iran's narrative toward the group began. By the time of the Taliban's re-emergence in 2021, Iran's narrative had evolved to emphasize interaction and cautious engagement, reflecting a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy.

The changing narratives reveal how Iran has adapted its foreign policy to shifting power dynamics in Afghanistan and the broader geopolitical context. Regarding the environment element, the narrative of Iran's foreign policy after the fall of the Taliban reflected an effort to distance itself from its earlier confrontational stance. Despite the elimination of its proximate enemy (the Taliban), a more distant adversary—the United States—had established a significant presence in Iran's immediate neighborhood.

By shifting from a confrontational posture to a more interactive approach, Iranian leaders and political elites—including Imam Khomeini, Ayatollah Khamenei, the IRGC, and prominent military commanders—demonstrated an ability to recalibrate their narratives in pursuit of strategic objectives, while simultaneously taking into account domestic constraints within Afghanistan and mounting international pressures, particularly from the United States.

With regard to emplotment, it is worth noting the official assessment of the Iranian government at the time, which maintained that engagement with the Taliban had achieved its intended objectives. According to this view, Iran's national interests were better served by the ongoing tensions between the Afghan government and the United States. In contrast, a competing perspective—here referred to as the “narrative of failure”—argues that the Taliban continues to be regarded as an adversary of Iran, as it has never abandoned its confrontational ideological and strategic posture toward the country.

This article has examined the evolution of Iran's foreign policy narrative toward the Taliban from the first Islamic Emirate (1996–2001) to the second (since 2021), highlighting the interplay between ideology, security concerns, and geopolitical pragmatism. In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, Iran's regional outlook was deeply influenced by Imam Khomeini's revolutionary principles, including support for oppressed Muslims, an emphasis on Shiite solidarity, and a populist framing of resistance movements. During the 1990s, Tehran initially viewed developments in Afghanistan through this ideological lens, particularly in relation to the Hazara community and broader Shiite networks.

However, the killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 during the first Taliban regime dramatically altered this perception. The incident intensified mistrust and generated a dual discourse within Iran's political elite: reformists tended to advocate cautious engagement and regional diplomacy, while conservative and fundamentalist factions emphasized deterrence and confrontation.

After the Taliban's overthrow in 2001, and especially in response to the expanding U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, Iran's narrative gradually shifted once again to friendship with the Taliban. Viewing the United States as the primary strategic threat, Tehran recalibrated its narrative and adopted a more pragmatic posture toward the Taliban. This recalibration was shaped significantly by the strategic outlook of the Quds Force and the regional diplomacy associated with Qasem Soleimani.

Key words: Iran, Afghanistan, Taliban, Narrative Analysis, Foreign Policy.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.