

9/11 and the Changing Geopolitics of Afghanistan

Concept Note

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, marked a decisive turning point in the geopolitics of Afghanistan and reshaped the strategic landscape of South Asia. The subsequent U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan, the overthrow of the Taliban government, and nearly two decades of international military and political engagement fundamentally altered Afghanistan's domestic politics and its relationships with regional and global powers.

Twenty-five years after 9/11, Afghanistan once again occupies a changing geopolitical position. The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 brought an end to the U.S.-led military presence and opened a new phase in Afghanistan's relations with its neighbours and the wider international community. At the same time, regional powers have increasingly sought to engage with Kabul, driven by concerns over security, trade, connectivity, migration, and the broader strategic balance in the region.

The geopolitical environment surrounding Afghanistan today is considerably different from that which followed 9/11. The United States and its Western allies no longer maintain a military presence in the country, while countries such as China, Russia, India, and Pakistan have developed their own approaches toward the Taliban-led government. Questions surrounding terrorism, particularly the presence and activities of groups operating from Afghan territory, remain central to regional security calculations. For Pakistan, these developments carry particular significance given its security concerns, border dynamics, and long-standing political and economic engagement with Afghanistan.

Against this backdrop, South Asia Times (SAT) is convening an **X Space session on “9/11 and the Changing Geopolitics of Afghanistan”** to reflect on the geopolitical transformations that have taken place since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and to examine what Afghanistan's evolving strategic environment means for the region.

Objectives

The X Space session seeks to:

- Examine how 9/11 transformed the geopolitical and security landscape of Afghanistan and the wider region.
- Reflect on the major geopolitical shifts in Afghanistan since the U.S. intervention in 2001 and the Taliban's return to power in 2021.
- Assess the changing roles and interests of major regional and global actors, including China, Russia, Pakistan, India, and the United States,

- Examine Pakistan's strategic interests and policy challenges in the post-2021 Afghan environment.
- Generate informed perspectives on the future trajectory of Afghanistan's regional and international relations.

Expected Outcomes

The X Space is expected to facilitate an informed and accessible policy dialogue on the lasting geopolitical consequences of 9/11 and the transformations that have taken place in Afghanistan over the past twenty-five years. The discussion will help identify key shifts in regional power dynamics, assess emerging challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan and its neighbours, and generate policy-relevant perspectives on Pakistan's engagement with an increasingly complex Afghan geopolitical landscape.