

4
2023

Afghanistan Monitor

October 2023

FRIEDRICH
EBERT 
STIFTUNG
FES Pakistan

Afghanistan Monitor

October 2023

Contents

Introduction 1

Political Situation 3

Ongoing Projects under the De Facto Authorities 9

Humanitarian Situation 12

Human Rights and Women’s Rights..... 18

Economic Situation 24

Foreign Policy..... 29

Security Situation 36

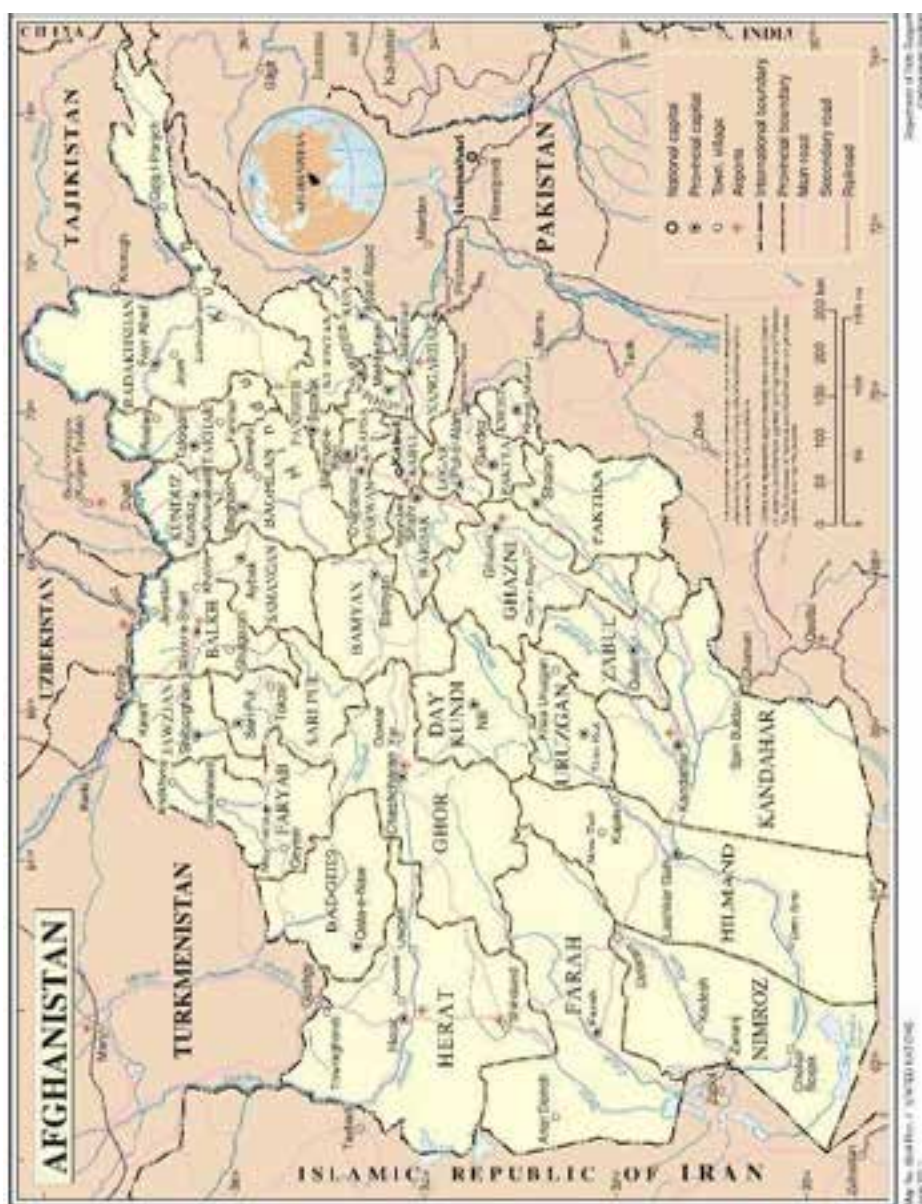
Opinion Corner..... 40

 Afghan People Need Action..... 40

 Taliban Rule in Afghanistan: Two Years On – A Pakistani Perspective ... 43

Endnotes 48

Illustration Credits..... 62



Acronyms

AFJC	Afghanistan Journalists Center
AFN	Afghani (national currency)
CRRC	China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ETIM	Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
FAMPTC	China Afghan Mining Processing and Trading Company
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
IED	Improvised Explosive Devices
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MHNTs	Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
SWA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	UN Security Council
VWO	Voice of Women Organization
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Introduction

The Afghanistan Monitor is a regular publication from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan that covers the political, economic, security, and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. Each issue features experts' analysis of the country's latest development. The fourth issue, while summarizing the two years of the Taliban's rule, will also focus on events since April 2023.

August 15, 2023, marked two years since the Taliban regime assumed power. Initially, there was a lack of clarity regarding the Taliban's policies as well as significant concerns about the future of Afghanistan, particularly the group's approach towards domestic issues such as governance, political freedom, human and women's rights, counter-terrorism measures, as well as matters pertaining to regional peace and stability. However, the past two years have provided significant insights into the Taliban's governing approach, which can be characterized as a blend of authoritarian policies and selective pragmatism.

In their diplomatic posture, the Taliban are now striving to integrate into the international community, which is a stark departure from their stint in power during the late 1990s politics when they were essentially perceived as outliers in the realm of modern

politics. Despite reports of differences and divisions within the group over domestic policy matters, the Taliban continue to exhibit strict adherence to the group's ideology and respect for their supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada.

Today, the group has seemingly solidified its position as the de facto political authority in Afghanistan, even if not formally recognized as the de jure governing body by the international community. However, the group has yet to achieve political and social cohesion and formulate a model of governance to accommodate all the different ethnic and political groups in Afghanistan. The Taliban's commitments regarding inclusivity and adequate representation of ethnic minorities have not been fully realized or fulfilled. While the Taliban have included token figures from other ethnic backgrounds including Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, there are legitimate concerns about the level of inclusivity within the Taliban's governance and decision-making structures. Ethnic minorities have expressed apprehension about their representation and involvement in the government.

Since assuming power, the Taliban claim improvement in some areas, and some of it has been acknowledged by international organizations and members of the international community:

The rate of violence has dropped sharply. Afghanistan now faces less armed violence than it has in many years, though this is primarily because the group responsible for the most violence in the past years now sits at the helm of affairs in Afghanistan. As a result, the war that plagued the country since 2001, appears to have scaled down into a fragile peace. Additionally, the Taliban claim to have stabilized Afghanistan's economy by generating a steady stream of revenue through taxes, customs, and trade. This led to modest economic progress in conjunction with a decrease in corruption.

However, the continued violation of women's rights on the part of the Taliban which disregards and neglects basic yet fundamental human rights, despite repeated pledges to act otherwise, is casting a dark shadow over the group's claimed achievements. Since the seizing of power, the Taliban have issued over 70 decrees restricting girls' and women's rights, including banning their education, employment, movement, and participation in public life. Increasing restrictions are not only limiting women's legitimate rights but are also hampering the international community's willingness to engage with the group and impinging upon the functioning of the non-governmental organizations and the UN agencies that seek to help mitigate the grave humanitarian crisis in the country.

For the past two decades or so, Afghanistan has faced daunting humanitarian challenges arising from prolonged conflict, economic collapse, internal displacement, rampant poverty, food scarcity, and limited access to healthcare. Additionally, the situation has been exacerbated by natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly escalating the levels of humanitarian need across the country. As a consequence, Afghanistan continues to be one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, with approximately two-thirds of its population experiencing food insecurity. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Afghanistan is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with the risk of systemic collapse and human catastrophe.

Although in the past humanitarian needs were driven predominantly by conflict, in 2023, the key drivers have been drought, climate change, protection threats (particularly for women and girls), and the economic crisis. While the loss of international aid and financial assistance prompted the initial crisis, the situation has significantly deteriorated due to the Taliban's increasingly oppressive policies on Afghan women, particularly the banning of women from working for UN and non-governmental organizations.

Despite some improvements of the security situation within the country, the mounting threat posed by transnational terrorist groups namely the Daesh regional affiliate Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which is also known under name of Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), continue to gravely threaten the stability of Afghanistan and the wider region. Since the Taliban took over, ISKP has been responsible for more than 1,700 casualties.

While the presence of these groups creates challenges for the Taliban, Afghanistan's immediate neighbors are equally troubled by the threats emanating from such entities. Despite the Taliban's assurances that they will prevent Afghan soil from becoming a safe haven for international terrorist organizations, the surge in attacks by these groups against neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, has cast further doubts on the group's commitment to addressing such threats.

In summary, two years after seizing power, the Taliban are still in the process of transition - from an insurgency to an administration. The group's aspirations to gain international recognition as the legitimate representatives of Afghanistan continue to be undermined by their unwillingness

to uphold commitments made pertaining to inclusivity, human and women's rights, and ensuring that international norms and standards as well as counter-terrorism assurances are met. There continues to be an immense disparity between the Taliban's declared policies and their actual conduct in terms of implementation. The Taliban's increasing reluctance to deliver on their pledges and increasing bans on women's involvement in society has led to skepticism among those nations and organizations that are cautiously engaging with the group. Moreover, if the Taliban continue to follow this negative trajectory, it will only further hinder the group's access to diplomatic support and humanitarian assistance.

Political Situation

Since August 2021, the Taliban have functioned as a de facto government governing as an authoritative entity whose policies are highly influenced by their limited interpretation of Sharia law. Initially, there was ambiguity about the style of governance the group would implement or execute, but the current interim setup exhibits similarities to the governance system employed by the Taliban during their previous rule in the 1990s. The presence of a supreme leader and a prime minister, along with the addition of deputy prime minister

posts, echoes the hierarchical structure that was prevalent during the Taliban's previous rule. However, they have continued to operate under the ministries established by the previous government, and have not made significant changes in terms of abolishing any ministry, with the exception of dissolving the Electoral Commission¹ and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has been replaced by the Ministry of Vice and Virtue – serving as a blow to the rights of women.

The Taliban suspended the previous Afghan constitution of 2004, which served as the governing framework for Afghanistan prior to their takeover. As of now, the Taliban have not announced or implemented a new constitution to replace it. The absence of a constitution raises questions about the future governance structure and legal framework in Afghanistan. It is uncertain when or if the Taliban will introduce a new constitution, and until a new constitution is established, the governance practices and policies of the Taliban will likely be based on their interpretation of Islamic law and their own ideological principles.

The group has reiterated its desire to legislate and implement a Sharia-led system across the country. This was re-emphasized by the group's Supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, in his Eid-ul-Adha sermon in June 2023 where he said

that the Taliban's objective of 20 years of war in Afghanistan was to introduce an "Islamic system and Islamic decrees" in the country.² Likewise, he added that if any of his decisions are against Islamic laws, then the masses should not follow him.³

When the Taliban took over, they spoke of an inclusive, accountable, and responsible government⁴ that represents all the people of Afghanistan.⁵ However, the group has yet to hold a national dialogue with all the different ethnic factions and political groups within the country and form a representative government. So far, the Taliban interim setup has given eight new positions within its cabinet to members from the Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara ethnic communities.⁶ While the inclusion of some members from Afghanistan's diverse ethnic factions may provide a veneer of inclusivity, the Taliban's cabinet remains exclusively male and overwhelmingly dominated by Pashtuns.

Name	Appointment	Ethnicity
Qari Din Muhammad Hanif	Acting Minister of Economy	Uzbek
Qari Fasiuddin	Chief of the General Staff	Tajik
Noorullah Noori	Minister of Border and Tribal Affairs	Tajik
Haji Nooruddin Azizi	Acting Minister of Industry	Tajik
Haji Mohammad Azim	Second Deputy Minister of Commerce	Uzbek
Sultanzada		
Haji Ghulam Ghaus	Acting Deputy Minister of Disaster Management	Hazara
Abdul Hamid Khorasani	Former district governor of Ahmedabad, Paktia	Tajik
Sheikh Madar Ali Karimi Bamiani	Deputy Minister of Urban Development	Hazara
Abdul Latif Nazari	Deputy Minister of Economy	Hazara

Taliban Interim setup new cabinet positions for ethnic minorities

Since assuming power, the Taliban have focused on governance, institutional changes, remodeling, and building state institutions, including security institutions.

While many Afghans fled the country, including those who worked for the previous government, the group offered full amnesty to Afghans who fought against them, or who worked for the US and the Western-backed government.⁷ In March 2022, the group set up the Commission for the Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures, also known as the Commission of Liaison and Repatriation of Afghan Personalities, to convince Afghans (ordinary as well as those who served in the previous government) to return to the country.

It is worth noting that while most ministries are headed by a Taliban representative, the group has retained individuals from the former Afghan bureaucracy, comprising lower and middle-ranking public servants in their interim setup.⁸ The exceptions are the Ministry of Education, which has mostly been restaffed by members of the Taliban, followed by the judiciary and the security sector. According to the Taliban, more than 500,000 members of the previous administration have been retained,⁹ and around 513 former ministers, governors, and deputy governors have returned to the country.¹⁰ This decision to retain some aspects of the previous government's structure and personnel primarily stems from the group's lack of expertise and manpower as well as to maintain some form of continuity and ensure

the functioning of the government and ministries.

Among institutional changes, the group dismissed the former judicial system of the country including the judiciary and Afghanistan's independent bar association¹¹, appointing individuals mostly from within the Taliban and from the Hanafi school of thought to the position of judges.¹² The Hanafi school of thought is one of the four Sunni Islamic legal schools of jurisprudence that had a role in the earlier codification of Islamic doctrine.¹³

Other institutional changes include remodeling and restructuring key institutions such as the police and armed forces, re-establishing institutions and commissions such as the National Procurement Commission, reshuffling the cabinet, and establishing new districts across the country (a total of 419 districts exist at present), thus allowing the group to exercise control over various aspects of governance and shape policies aligned with their objectives.

In spite of shortcomings in the Taliban's governance structure, the lack of ethnic representation, and the high dependence on international humanitarian assistance, the Taliban-ruled so-called "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (IEA) has been able to establish some degree of centralized authority in governance across Afghanistan, providing the

people with some semblance of basic facilities and economic stability.

Even in the absence of formal recognition by the international community, the current governance system established by the Taliban appears to have become a more permanent arrangement. In this setup the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada maintains a firm hold on the group, exerting supreme control and influence over the group's governance and decision-making processes. Akhundzada holds the power to make key appointments within the Taliban's administration, shape policy decisions, and steer the functioning of the Taliban's government. His authority ensures centralized leadership that allows him to exercise control over the group and its operations in return. To oversee the functioning of the group's provincial administrative matters, so-called Ulema Councils have been established in every province of the country to interact with different ethnic and religious minorities.¹⁴

The cabinet formed by the Taliban in September 2021 remained intact until recently, when in May 2023, Mullah Abdul Kabir replaced Mullah Mohammad Akhund as the interim prime minister. According to the group, Akhund is under treatment and needs rest. Kabir served as a political deputy to Akhund before his elevation.

The following chart shows the newly-made appointments as of May 23, 2023, by the Taliban:¹⁵

Name	New Appointment	Previous Appointment
Mullah Abdul Kabir	Interim Prime Minister	Deputy Prime Minister
Mawlawi Ahmad Taha	Deputy of the Ministry of Borders & Tribal Affairs	Governor of Kunar
Mohammad Mohsen Hashimi	Head of the Supreme Audit Office	Governor of Panjshir
Mullah Rahmatullah Mohammad	Commander of 209 Al-Fath Corps	Commander of 203 Mansoori Corps
Nasrullah Mati	Commander of 207 Al-Farooq Corps	Commander of 209 Al-Fath Corps
Qari Ismail Rasakh	Commander of 203 Mansoori Corps	Governor of Jawzjan
Qari Mohammad Ayub Khalid	Governor of Kunar province	Commander of 207 Al-Farooq Corps
Sheikh Bashir Ahmad Haqqani	Governor of Nuristan Province	Deputy governor of Maidan Wardak
Qari Gul Haidar Shafiq	Governor of Jawzjan Province	Deputy governor of Ghazni
Abdul Rahman Haqqani	Governor of Baghlan province	Deputy of the Ministry of Borders & Tribal Affairs

Name	New Appointment	Previous Appointment
Mawlaw Samiullah Hizbullah	Police chief of Kandahar province	Governor of Baghlan
Hafiz Mohammad Agha Hakeem	Governor of Panjshir	Governor of Nuristan Province
Mullah Ali Hanifi	Governor of Kandahar province	Deputy of strategic intelligence in the Ministry of Defense ¹⁶
Qari Ahmadullah Badr	Police chief of Panjshir province	Police chief of Samangan province ¹⁷

According to the Taliban’s claims, recent appointments have been based on merit rather than personal connections. During the Eid-ul-Fitr sermon in April 2023, Akhunzada directed the Taliban to “strictly avoid all kinds of discrimination [and] do not offer jobs to your relatives.”¹⁸ Furthermore, he has taken action by dismissing relatives of Taliban officials who were appointed in state institutions.¹⁹

Unlike in the past, the Taliban seem to have adopted relatively non-violent tactics after their takeover, asking their fighters to avoid conflict. As a result, the group has faced limited resistance in most parts of the country, with the exception of the north where the National Resistance Front, headed by the exiled Ahmed

Masood, has been posing a low-level armed resistance in Panjshir.²⁰ In December 2022, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan stated, "there is no significant visible political opposition to the Taliban inside Afghanistan," and exiled officials associated with the former government "are fragmented and their statements have decreasing resonance for the population inside Afghanistan."²¹

Thus, the group has been comparatively successful in maintaining relative peace and stability across the country as was seen throughout the three days of Eid in June 2023. According to the Taliban's Interior Ministry, during this period, no security incident occurred throughout the country.²²

Since the Taliban's return to power, the group has largely remained united. However, over time, some internal divisions have risen and continue to persist with a rare public display of internal tensions notably related to girls' education and the prohibition of women from working in NGOs.²³ Prominent members of the group have openly spoken against the top leadership's decisions regarding matters related to women as well as voicing concerns regarding policy issues, such as the "monopolization of power" (without directly naming Haibatullah Akhundzada) and the need to listen to the "legitimate

demands of the people" to avoid "defaming the group."²⁴

These differences underscore the complexities within the organization and the possible room for change. While prominent members expressed their opposition regarding individual policy matters, at the same time they have spoken about the sanctity of obeying the supreme leader and the unity of the group.²⁵

The Taliban have also been engaging with ethnic and religious minorities including the Hindu and Sikh as well as the Shia community through regular meetings in different parts of the country. Although during their previous rule, the Taliban's policy towards the Shia was one of oppression, since coming into power in August 2021, they have made a conscious effort to avoid creating a sectarian divide.

This is evident from the fact that the Taliban have allowed the Shia to conduct Muharram processions since August 2021 and did provide robust security across Afghanistan for the Ashura processions.²⁶ Moreover, Taliban officials in 2021, visited the Dasht-e-Barchi Hazara-dominated neighborhood of Kabul and attended a Muharram gathering. It is, however, reported that in some parts of the country, Muharram processions took place with certain restrictions, such as prohibitions on displaying

decorative flags and symbols in public spaces. The Council of Shiite Scholars of Afghanistan, on July 26, 2023, published a declaration calling on mourners to scale back their activities during Muharram, due to security reasons.²⁷

In January 2023, the Taliban's Administrative Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Salam Hanafi, met with a delegation of prominent Shiite scholars and leaders from Bamyan and Sar-e-Pul,²⁸ headed by Muhammad Hassan Sharifi Bakhab, a prominent Shia cleric and former member of the Afghan parliament, who reportedly asked the Taliban to pay special attention to the needs of the Shia community as well as the implementation of development projects in Shia-dominated areas.

The Taliban, in collaboration with the UN, have started building permanent homes for cave-dwelling Shiite Hazara minorities in Bamyan.²⁹ The sites are part of the Bamiyan UNESCO World Heritage which is being damaged by makeshift extensions and installation of new doors or windows by the cave dwellers.³⁰ However, the Taliban have not mentioned any details about the number of homes to be built and families to be accommodated in them.

Ongoing Projects under the De Facto Authorities

Since assuming power, the Taliban have focused on exploring avenues to attract and generate economic and infrastructure development through domestic and foreign investment.³¹

In a bid to attract foreign investors, in February 2023, the Taliban established a consortium of companies with Afghan traders in Pakistan, Iran, and Russia, to create investment plans in the fields of power, mining, and infrastructure. Other areas where the group has sought foreign investment include agriculture, water, minerals, mining, health, and education. The group has also been actively pursuing cooperation with a host of countries (China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, the UAE, Qatar, India, and Japan)³² in the fields of connectivity, trade, infrastructure, education, defense, vocational training, and healthcare.

Infrastructure

On May 9, 2023, Abdul Latif Mansoor, the Taliban's Minister of Energy and Water, signed a cooperation agreement with the Turkish 77 Construction Company, for investing in a 200 megawatts

wind power generation project in Herat.³³ On the same day, the first trial freight train from Iran reached Herat via the Khaf-Herat railroad. The shipment constituted 17 wagons that transferred about 650 tons of rail equipment (locomotive parts, tracks, switches, and signaling equipment) to build railway infrastructure in Afghanistan. Taliban officials said that the trial train would soon begin transporting commercial goods. Work on the link began in 2007 and the 140 km Khaf-Rozanak section opened in December 2020 along with a free trade and customs processing zone located on the border.³⁴

On May 20, work officially began on the construction of the Bakshabad Dam, estimated at a cost of 430 million USD, in the province of Farah. The dam is being constructed by a local Afghan construction company, which claims to receive technical assistance from international firms.³⁵ According to officials, the dam will be able to reserve 1,360 million cubic meters of water and generate 27 megawatts of power. As a result, 100,000 hectares of agricultural land will be irrigated.

To meet the country's energy needs, in January 2023, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, the Taliban's electricity authority, announced extensions of electricity import contracts for 2023 with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,³⁶ and Tajikistan.³⁷

Apart from focusing on foreign investment, the Taliban have embarked on infrastructure projects revolving around constructing and repairing roads, highways, bridges, and canals in the capital and throughout the country.³⁸

In particular, the group has been focusing on the development of the Qosh Tepa Canal project on the Amu River in Balkh. According to the Taliban, over 100 kilometers of canal have been constructed – the canal would be 275 kilometers long,³⁹ irrigate 550 hectares of land, and transmit 650 cubic meters of water per second.⁴⁰ The Taliban claim that this is the first major project in which the technical work was done by Afghan engineers.

On July 18, 2023, in a major breakthrough, the protocol for the construction of a railway between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, the Termez-Logar-Karachi Railway, was officially signed in Islamabad between representatives from the three countries. As a result, the process of planning, resource allocation, and project implementation, has begun.⁴¹ The project is estimated to be completed by the end of 2027 and trains would be able to carry goods up to 15 million tons yearly by 2030.⁴²

In July 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, inaugurated

the reconstruction project of the Salang highway, which serves as a crucial link connecting nine northern provinces of Afghanistan and four major commercial ports to Kabul.⁴³ The Salang project is the second largest national and economic undertaking after the Qosh Tepa Canal project.⁴⁴

Moreover, the Taliban are in discussions with a Chinese locomotive Company, CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotives, for the reintroduction of Chinese electric trolley buses in Kabul. Preliminary talks took place on May 11, between the head of the Afghan embassy in China and senior officials of CRRC.⁴⁵

Mining

To promote mining within the country, the Taliban's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum claims that it has granted 108 contracts through open bidding, to indigenous companies to extract various mines in 16 provinces resulting in the creation of 7,000 jobs.⁴⁶

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum also conducted the first test extraction of oil from the Qashqari oil field in the Sar-e-Pul province. According to the Ministry, 100 tons of oil will be extracted daily from the Qashqari oil wells in the near future. Earlier, there were ten wells in the Sar-e-Pul Qashqari oil area, of which five are active. Furthermore, the Fan China Afghan Mining Processing and

Trading Company (FAMPTC)⁴⁷ has started drilling fourteen new wells: two in Aq Darya and twelve in the Qashqari area.⁴⁸

Military

Other than infrastructure building and attracting foreign investments, the Taliban have focused on building the security apparatus of the country, particularly its 200,000-strong army by trying to make it into a professional and dedicated force.⁴⁹ Mohammad Yaqoob, the acting Minister of National Defense, has reiterated that the group aims to have "an organized, professional and independent army." He made these remarks during a visit to the 207 Al-Farooq Army Corps.⁵⁰ On July 27, 2023, around 175 cadets often referred to as "Mujahideen" of the regular Afghan army graduated from Hazrat Abu Ubaidah bin Jarrah National Defense University.⁵¹

According to the Taliban's Army Chief, Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat, the group aims to "create a national military and increase its force by a third with the aspiration to build anti-aircraft missile capacity inside Afghanistan."⁵² In a rare interview with foreign media in April 2023, the Army Chief said that Defense was a high priority of the group, adding that it received the largest share of funds compared to other ministries.⁵³ The new Afghan army will be called the "Islamic Army."⁵⁴

Apart from domestic capacity building, the group has encouraged maintaining existing mechanisms of cooperation in the field of military training. In this aspect, the Taliban's Defense Minister Mullah Yaqub has expressed his willingness to send Afghan army personnel to India for military training. Among the regional countries, Afghanistan has been a primary beneficiary of India's military training programs. According to the Ministry of National Defense, scores of students have returned after completing their training programs in India.⁵⁵

The group is also focusing on increasing the capacity of the forces, particularly the Afghan Air Force, which has a limited number of Taliban fighters, while the majority of soldiers are ex-professionals from the previous government. Under the Taliban's amnesty program, more than 40 former Afghan military pilots, technicians, and ground crews were reconciled and joined the Taliban's Defense Ministry.⁵⁶ The Taliban are believed to have inherited more than 100 aircraft, though most of them are inoperable.⁵⁷ The group also claims to have repaired military vehicles, helicopters, and planes,⁵⁸ these include the repair of some 70 helicopters and military planes,⁵⁹ including the repair of Russian Mi17 and Mi35 aircraft, which were "demilitarized" by the US forces.⁶⁰

Humanitarian Situation

With a population of 43 million, Afghanistan endures one of the world's most significant and severe humanitarian crises. Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has suffered from innumerable challenges stemming from a combination of conflict, economic instability, internal displacement, widespread poverty, food shortages, and lack of access to healthcare. Moreover, additional challenges such as natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, have drastically increased levels of humanitarian need throughout Afghanistan. According to the UN, for the year 2023, 28.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance, a 16 percent increase compared to the 24.4 million in 2022, and a 54 percent increase from the 18.4 million in 2021.⁶¹ Additionally, for the year 2023, 4.62 billion USD are needed to assist the masses and fend off hunger, disease, and death.⁶² An estimated 95 percent of Afghans are not getting enough to eat, with that figure rising to nearly 100 percent in female-headed households.⁶³

According to a report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) from April 2023 around 17.2 million Afghans (40 percent of the population) are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, this includes nearly 3.4 million people (around 8 percent of the

population) experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity.⁶⁴ Similarly, another IPC analysis projected that 875,224 children will suffer or are likely suffering from Severe Acute

Malnutrition, nearly 2,347,802 are suffering from Moderate Acute Malnutrition, and about 804,365 pregnant and lactating women are suffering from acute malnutrition.⁶⁵



Source: IPC Afghanistan Projection Nov 2022 - April 2023⁶⁶

Key for Map

IPC Acute malnutrition Classification

	Phase1 Acceptable		Phase1 Acceptable - MUAC
	Phase2 Alert		Phase2 Alert - MUAC
	Phase3 Serious		Phase3 Serious - MUAC
	Phase4 Critical		Phase4 Critical - MUAC
	Phase5 Very Critical		Phase5 Very Critical - MUAC
	Area with inadequate evidence		
	Area not analyzed		

Map Symbols

- Urban settlement classification
- IDPs/other settlements classification

Evidence Level

- * Acceptable
- ** Medium
- *** High
- Scarce evidence due to limited or no humanitarian access

Projected changes within phases

- Likely to improve
- Likely to stay the same
- Likely to deteriorate

The UN Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ramiz Alakbarov, has warned that Afghanistan is at "a tipping point and that the urgent priority right now is to maintain the humanitarian response in the current operating environment to the best extent possible, avert famine, prevent disease outbreaks and avoid excess mortality." He further said that the situation would continue to deteriorate unless the humanitarian space improves and donors urgently step up to enable aid agencies to maintain their operations.⁶⁷

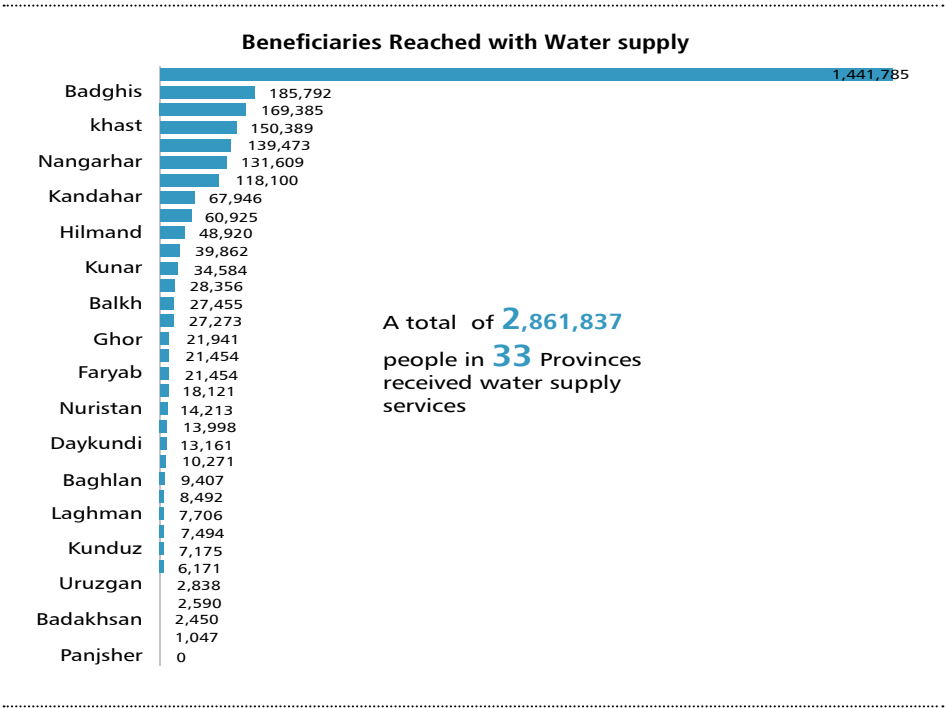
But as of June 2023, only nine percent of the 4.6 billion USD required for Afghanistan's initial Humanitarian Response Plan had been received.⁶⁸ In response to the Taliban's ban on women aid workers in the country, the UN and other aid agencies have revised the budget for the Afghanistan aid plan down from 4.6 billion USD to 3.2 billion USD for this year.⁶⁹ Similarly, for the current year, the World Food Programme is in need of an additional 2.2 billion USD to run its support mission. However, the lack of funding has resulted in a net shortfall of 918 million USD that is required to sustain operations from June till November 2023.⁷⁰ The limited funds have also caused 25 Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams in four provinces (Nuristan, Kunar, Laghman, and Nangarhar) to cease operations. As a result, more than 100,000 people will be denied basic health and nutrition care services.

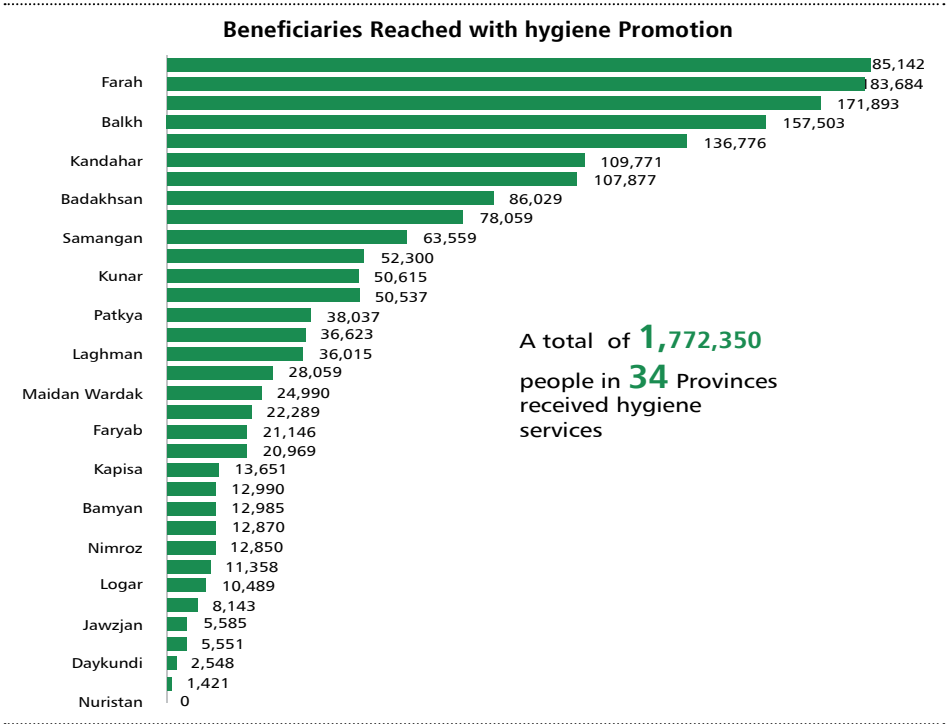
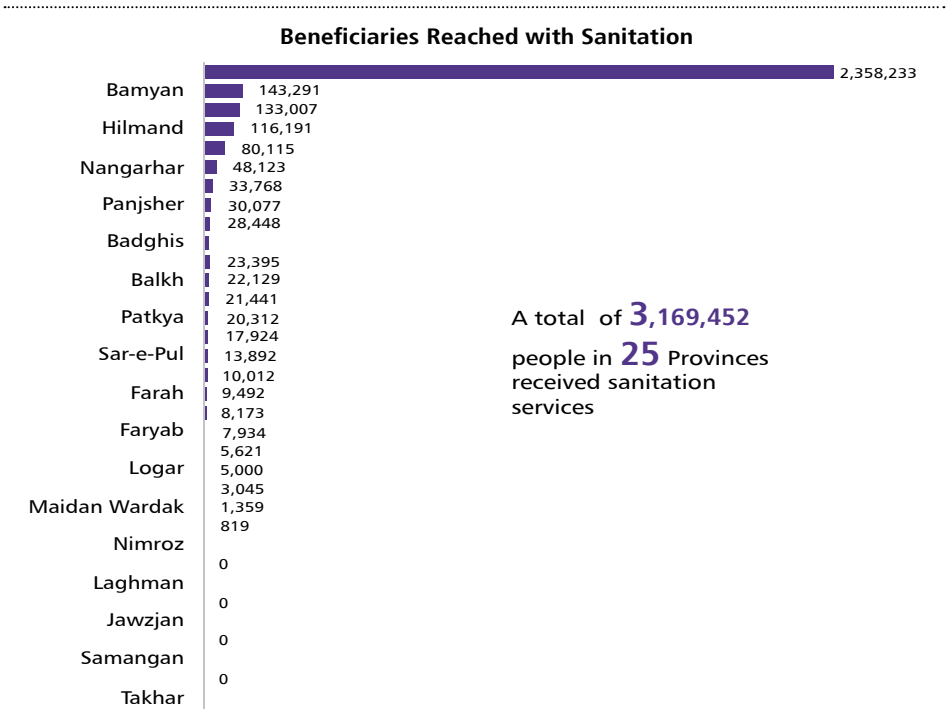
While international organizations and aid agencies have continued to operate within the country, the Taliban suspended all activities of Swedish organizations in the country, such as the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SWA), in response to recent incidents of public burnings of the Quran in Sweden. The SWA, a non-governmental aid group, provides education and medical facilities to thousands of people across the country. It is still unclear whether the aid organization would be allowed to resume operations.⁷¹

Similarly, to address the current challenges facing Afghanistan, on March 16, 2023, the United Nations Security Council asked UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to conduct an independent assessment and develop recommendations to address the current challenges facing Afghanistan. As a result, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye as well as the former Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the UN, was appointed as the Special Coordinator, Independent Assessment mandated by Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023). Sinirlioğlu will lead the independent assessment with a view to providing recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach to address the current challenges faced by Afghanistan and present its findings by mid-November.⁷²

On July 3, 2023, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) announced its Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the period 2023-2025, outlining the UN's approach to addressing basic human needs of women and girls, children and youth, internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees, ethnic and religious minorities. The framework aims at charting out necessary humanitarian needs under “three complementary and mutually reinforcing joint priorities”, i.e., sustained essential services; economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods; and social cohesion, inclusion, gender equality, human rights, and the rule of law.⁷³

Moreover, as part of receiving humanitarian assistance from the UN, almost 6.2 million Afghans were able to receive at least one WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) service from the UN's Children's Fund; whereas only 3.1 million people were able to get a comprehensive package. In total, 2,861,837 people in 33 provinces received water supply services; 3,169,452 people in 25 provinces received sanitation services, and 1,772,350 people in 34 provinces were able to receive hygiene services.⁷⁴



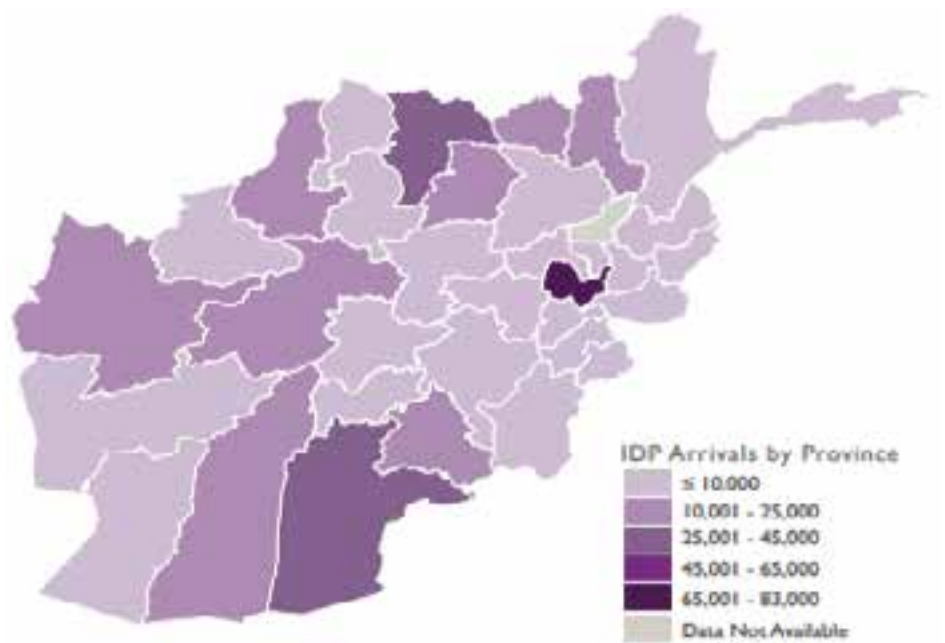


Since the Taliban took over, large-scale conflict and the number of associated annual external displacements have been reduced, from 723,000 in 2021 to 32,000 in 2022. In 2022, there were 35,000 internal displacements caused by conflict and violence -- a 95 percent decrease from 2021 -- and 12.5 million internal displacements due to disasters. Moreover, the reduction in violence has led to a significant increase in the return of displaced people. More than 4.6 million people returned between January 2021 and April 2022, nearly half the total figure recorded since 2012.⁷⁶

According to UNHCR, there are currently 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees across the world. Of

these total refugees, nearly 2.2 million are residing in Pakistan (55 percent) and Iran (44 percent) alone.⁷⁷ The male refugees residing in Pakistan and Iran make up nearly 51 percent of the total refugee population in the two countries. Furthermore, nearly 3.5 million Afghans are internally displaced due to armed conflict.⁷⁸

The UN Refugee Commission in Afghanistan appealed for 216 million USD as total funding for the year 2023; however, up until April of this year, the Commission was only able to receive 59 million USD (28 percent) - a total gap of 157 million USD (72 percent).⁷⁹ Similarly, UNICEF called for an urgent 1.45 billion USD to meet the humanitarian needs of 19 million Afghans in 2023.⁸⁰



Internally Displaced People in 2022⁸¹

International donors are providing humanitarian assistance to deal with the current situation in Afghanistan. The US continues to be the biggest donor to Afghanistan. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's report from January 2023, since August 2021, the US has provided aid worth more than 2 billion USD to the country.⁸² Moreover, over the past 20 years, the US has spent 145 billion USD trying to rebuild Afghanistan, and on its security forces, civilian government institutions, economy, and civil society.⁸³

The Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan stated that Afghanistan is the fourth most at-risk country for humanitarian crises and disasters, and therefore, the EU is committed to supporting the Afghan people.⁸⁴ As of July 2023, the EU has pledged about 1 billion EUR to support the Afghan population: 489 million EUR to extend humanitarian aid, 400 million EUR to meet basic necessities, and 17.7 million EUR to respond to any crisis.⁸⁵ Additionally, on July 20, 2023, the EU allocated 7.6 million EUR to a project managed by Afghanaid (a British humanitarian and development organization, that has been working in Afghanistan for over forty years) aimed at addressing the humanitarian situation through support to farmers and their needs, the improvement of food production, and the restoration of unirrigated land in the provinces of

Badakhshan, Daykundi, Ghor, Jawzjan, Samangan, and Takhar.⁸⁶

Similarly, Japan is funding the UN Refugee Agency in Afghanistan for building educational institutions, medical facilities, and shelter homes in the country.⁸⁷ Subsequently, Germany is also contributing to alleviating the severe humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. In 2022, Germany provided 527 million EUR to Afghanistan for humanitarian aid, structural transitional aid, and other basic supplies.⁸⁸ The German Academic Exchange Service launched a scholarship program for female students who have fled Taliban repression to Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, or Pakistan. The program is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Development Cooperation with around seven million EUR.⁸⁹

Human Rights and Women's Rights

Girls and women's education

When the Taliban came into power just over two years ago, the group's spokesperson, Zabiullah Mujahid, in his first-ever public appearance at a news conference promised that the group would honor and respect women's rights within its understanding of the norms of

Islamic law, saying the group would allow women access to education and take part in public life. He called for women to return to work.⁹⁰ Moreover, he encouraged women to join the government. However, within a short period, the Taliban began to backtrack on promises made regarding women's rights.

Initially, the Taliban allowed girls up to grade six to return to school while at the same time banning girls above the sixth grade from going to school. Although on March 23, 2022, the education ministry reopened high schools for both girls and boys, the decision was short-lived and was revoked hours later, thus denying female students above the sixth grade the right to education.⁹¹ In March 2023, schools up to grade six reopened for the new academic year, but the ban on high school education continues. The only source of education that has been available to females of all ages has been Madrassas or Islamic schools.⁹²

Since then, despite repeated pledges and assurances of upholding women's rights, the group has continued to disregard the role of women and girls, imposing restrictions, including banning their education as well as limiting employment, movement, and participation in public life.

Moreover, on May 3, 2023, the Taliban's Minister of Public Health banned female medical students

from taking the "Exit Supplementary Exam" and prevented them from pursuing higher medical studies.⁹³ However, on May 9, in Balkh province, females were allowed to sit entry exams for various medical-related vocational courses that were designed to meet the requirements of female medical staff, for which 350 females qualified.⁹⁴ Such instances clearly show division within the group over the issue of women's education as well as clear contradictions in their policies -- those that are declared but not implemented. In his Eid message, in April 2023, the Taliban's supreme leader stated the group's intention to "extend education and training to the whole country and provide good training to all children." However, the message, like previous ones, had no specific mention of women's education.⁹⁵

Right to work and freedom of movement

Although aid organizations continue to provide assistance to millions of people, the Taliban's restrictions obstruct the international community's response to the grave humanitarian crisis, reduce humanitarian operational space, and create additional protection risks for females, particularly the 11.6 million females in need of humanitarian assistance.⁹⁶

Apart from banning female education, the Taliban have continued to deny women their most basic human rights, including their right to free movement and the right to work. In December 2022, the Taliban banned Afghan women from working with domestic and international aid organizations, and in April 2023, the group banned Afghan women from working for UN agencies. According to the UN, about 400 Afghan women are staff members.⁹⁷

The Taliban have continued to ban women from freedom of movement and going to public places on their own without a mahram -- a male family member with whom marriage would be considered permanently unlawful, e.g., father, brother, son, grandson. In April 2023, the Taliban banned women from going into restaurants with gardens and green spaces in Herat.⁹⁸ However, later on, the authorities allowed women to go to restaurants with certain restrictions, i.e., a woman must be accompanied by a male mahram.⁹⁹ On May 1, two Afghan women, working for an International NGO, were arrested on the charges of traveling without a mahram.¹⁰⁰ It is unknown if the women have been released.

According to a UN Report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan for the period from May until June 2023, the Taliban's Department for the Propagation of Virtue and

the Prevention of Vice in Kandahar banned women from visiting gravesites, cemeteries, and shrines. Similarly, on June 18, the Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in Herat, issued a 13-point decree to beauty salons in the province, consisting of mandatory requirements for all salons to follow,¹⁰¹ such as women must perform ablution before the application of makeup, strict observance of hijab, and adherence to prayer times. The decree also forbids men from entering beauty salons and prohibits taking photos and videos.¹⁰² Later on, the Taliban issued a decree to close hair and beauty salons nationwide.¹⁰³

The measures caused an uproar among women's and human rights activists across the world and by negatively impacting employment and business opportunities for women it contributed to the country's deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, the decree underlines the suppression that Afghan women are facing through the Taliban's oppressive policies. The decree even led to a rare public protest of women against the Taliban.¹⁰⁴ However, the Taliban did not change their position on the decree.

According to a recent report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on the human rights situation, the Taliban have been violating the rights of women and

girls by preventing them from working in public offices, moving freely, and receiving education.¹⁰⁵ The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, said that the treatment of Afghan women and girls by the Taliban could amount to “gender apartheid” as their rights continue to be undermined by the governing authorities.¹⁰⁶ Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists highlighted in a report how the Taliban’s crackdown on Afghan women’s rights, coupled with “imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment,” could constitute gender persecution under the International Criminal Court.¹⁰⁷

In July 2023, the European Council imposed restrictive measures against three members of the Taliban because of their involvement in grave human rights abuses and violations in Afghanistan. These include the Taliban Minister of Education Habibullah Agha, Justice Abdul-Hakim Sharei, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Abdul Hakim Haqqani, because of their role in depriving Afghan girls and women of their right to education, access to justice, and equal treatment between men and women.¹⁰⁸

Despite the international criticism the Taliban’s Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of

Vice continues to enforce existing instructions and issue new directives, the majority of which interfere with the fundamental freedoms and daily lives of women and girls. So far, it has issued over 70 decrees restricting women’s rights.

Additionally, Afghan women are bearing the brunt of the high levels of unemployment in the country. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, more than 700,000 people have lost their jobs since the Taliban came to power, with 90 percent of the working people earning less than 1.90 USD a day.¹⁰⁹ The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that Afghan women were by far the most affected by this development; moreover, according to the ILO, female employment is estimated to have been 25 percent lower in the fourth quarter of 2022 than in the second quarter of 2021. According to the assessment, restrictions on women’s participation in the labor market have contributed to the decline, but home-based self-employment has become the predominant form of women’s participation in the labor market, which has prevented the figure from falling further.¹¹⁰

In a recent World Bank report on women’s business out of 27 low-income economies examined, Afghanistan was placed among 11

economies with the lowest scores.¹¹¹ The report further highlighted the importance of legal equality for Afghan women and reforms in the areas of salaries, marriage, business, and property. According to the report, the regime change in the country has negatively affected both the economy and the welfare of the Afghan people, in particular, women and girls, as nearly half of the women in salaried work have lost their employment. Moreover, guidelines and decrees issued by the Taliban have also limited women's ability to get a job.¹¹²

Corporal punishment

Since August 15, 2021, the Taliban have implemented corporal punishment and the death penalty in cases related to adultery, false accusations of adultery, theft, banditry, alcohol consumption, apostasy, and sedition. The first reported case of corporal punishment by UNAMA took place on October 20, 2021, in Kapisa, where a woman and a man convicted of adultery by the Taliban District Court were publicly lashed 100 times each. Since then, corporal punishments have been taking place, however, there is no comprehensive data available on the number of corporal punishments carried out by the Taliban, apart from those the group declares itself.¹¹³

In November 2022, the Taliban Supreme Court claimed that 19 individuals, including nine women, had been lashed in Takhar for adultery, theft, and running away from home.¹¹⁴ On May 21, 2023, the Taliban Court of Appeal lashed a woman 39 times for being convicted of adultery in Parwan province.¹¹⁵ In a similar case, on May 24, six men were publicly lashed 39 times each, in Kandahar city.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in June, the Supreme Court announced a Qisas punishment (the death penalty) for a 35-year-old man.¹¹⁷

Repressions against civil society

In Herat province, on April 7, 2023, the Taliban's Ministry of Economy informed the Voice of Women Organization, a women-led NGO that aims to restore the status of women in Afghan communities by advocating for women's rights, legal, social security, and women's capacity, of closing the organization. Subsequently, the ministry seized the assets of the organization in all 14 provinces where it was operating. However, in late April, both the ministry and the organization reached an agreement whereby the organization was allowed to resume work after changing its name to Vulnerable Welfare Organization and appointing some male directors.¹¹⁸

Moreover, Matiullah Wesa, founder and president of Pen Path, a local nongovernmental organization that launched a door-to-door campaign to promote girls' education, was arrested on March 27, 2023. He continues to be under the Taliban's detention. Wesa was working on the building and reopening of schools, mainly for female students.¹¹⁹ UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett demanded the immediate and unconditional release of Wesa, stating that his detention without charges, is arbitrary and unjustified.¹²⁰

Repression against journalists

The Taliban have continued to impose restrictions on the press as media outlets and Afghan journalists are regularly facing violence, detention, and censorship. International organizations continue to express serious concerns regarding the safety of Afghan journalists and the future of Afghanistan's media, as journalists continue to work in a climate of intimidation and fear amid increased restrictions. Since August 2021, large numbers of media outlets have closed, and many media professionals have either lost their jobs or fled the country. According to UNAMA, arbitrary arrests and detentions, ill-treatment, and threats have been employed as a means of suppressing freedom of expression.¹²¹ In the 2022 World Press Freedom

Index of Reporters Without Borders, Afghanistan stood at 156 (out of 180 countries), a drop from its place at 122 in 2020.¹²²

The Taliban continue to arbitrarily arrest and detain journalists. On May 8, 2023, in Khost, the Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, in coordination with the Department of Information and Culture, arrested four journalists, instructing them not to publish anti-Taliban news reports. They were released after three days.¹²³

The International Federation of Journalists recorded in its South Asia Press Freedom Report 2022-23 the arrests of 12 journalists in Afghanistan between May 1, 2022, and April 30, 2023.¹²⁴ Among the arrested was Mortaza Behboudi, a French-Afghan journalist who has been held in custody since January 7, 2023, in Kabul.¹²⁵ Khairullah Parhar, a freelance journalist who was arrested on January 9, was released after 4 months in prison,¹²⁶ and on June 18, 2023, Reza Shahir, a reporter from Rah-e-Farda TV, was detained for two days -- it is unknown whether Shahir was released from detention or if he escaped.¹²⁷ According to the Afghanistan Journalists Center since World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2022, at least 213 press freedom violations including 70 arrests of journalists have taken place.¹²⁸

The Taliban have revived a national Media Complaints and Rights Violations Commission to coordinate with journalists.¹²⁹ Under its Department of Information and Culture, Provincial Committees have been set up to oversee and monitor the activities of media outlets. However, cases of censorship, detention, and violence against media personnel continue to take place.¹³⁰

Economic Situation

Since assuming power, the Taliban have been focusing on the economy, and recent economic indicators show that the Taliban have been doing better than expected to keep the economy afloat by clamping down on corruption, collecting revenues, strictly controlling dollar exports, and supporting domestic products.¹³¹

According to the World Bank, in the first quarter of 2023, Afghanistan's revenue collection was positive, totaling 45 billion AFN (566 million USD), marking an 8 percent increase from the same period in 2022.¹³² Border taxes have contributed the most to this growth.

The Taliban have proven to be more effective at tax collection compared to the previous Afghan government.¹³³ Even though the new tax regime has been hard on local businesses, which are already struggling due to a crumbling

economy, the group has begun to create "a culture of tax collection."¹³⁴

According to the Taliban's Ministry of Finance, some key goals have been achieved since the takeover: cancellation of exemption from tax penalties, extension of working hours in customs from 16 to 24 hours, fighting against corruption, electronic revenue collection, installation of digital scales in customs, and an increase in transit trade through Afghanistan.¹³⁵

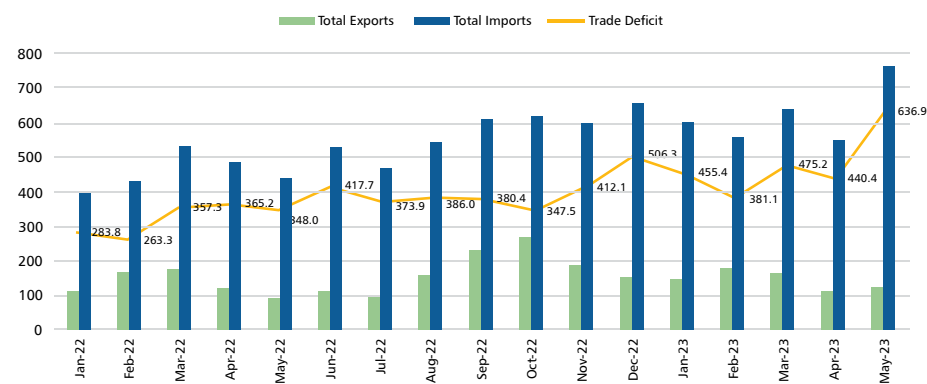
According to the Deputy Director of Revenues of the Ministry of Finance, there has been an increase of 37 percent in revenue collected in the fiscal year 2023 compared to 2022.¹³⁶ From January to mid-June, 2023, Afghanistan experienced an inflow of almost 880 million USD mainly from export products, humanitarian assistance, and investment by other countries, such as China.¹³⁷ This contributed to stabilizing the Afghan currency.¹³⁸

The Taliban also claim to be receiving regular payments for electricity supply. According to Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), the nation's electricity company, 37 billion AFN (466 million USD) have been collected. Abdul Rahman Rahmani, head of the commercial department of DABS, said that currently, 39 projects worth 72 billion AFN (907 million USD) are being implemented in the country.

The Taliban's Ministry of Industry and Commerce claimed that at the end

of the solar year on March 20, 2023, for the first time in the country's history, Afghan exports reached 2 billion USD.¹³⁹ Moreover, according to the World Bank, Afghanistan's total exports from January to May 2023 rose by 9 percent, to 0.73 billion USD, with coal exports being the main contributor. Vegetable exports also saw an increase of one percent during the period. Afghanistan's largest export market continues to be Pakistan (59 percent of total exports), followed by India (23 percent).¹⁴⁰ The export growth during January-May 2023 can be attributed to an increase

in the exports of textiles and coal, primarily to Pakistan, by 38.5 and 16.5 percent respectively. Similarly, from January to May 2023, Afghan imports accounted for 3.1 billion USD, showing an increase of 36 percent against the same period in 2022. Food products account for nearly a quarter of Afghan imports, followed by minerals which stand at nearly 20 percent. Additionally, the group has been focusing on wheat cultivation, which has increased by 100 percent, making the country's wheat imports down by 30 percent.



Afghanistan Trade (US\$ Millions), Jan 2022 – May 2023¹⁴¹

Currently, the Taliban are trying to attract foreign investments from regional and international stakeholders. The Taliban's Ministry of Economy has prioritized various areas and subsequently issued provisions to encourage investment.¹⁴² The Taliban claim that during the last two years, national companies and international organizations have helped complete

241 projects worth 328 million USD in the agriculture sector.¹⁴³ Additionally, to facilitate the sector, in 2021, the Taliban's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Agriculture established a development fund to provide interest-free loans worth 458 million AFN (5.8 million USD) to Afghan farmers.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, during the last year, the Taliban claim to have established 50 new

production factories and reactivated 80 manufacturing companies across the country.¹⁴⁵

Among the regional countries, China has been at the forefront of signing agreements with the Taliban. On April 16, 2023, the Taliban's Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Shahabuddin Delawar, met with representatives of the Chinese company Gochin who showed their interest in investing 10 billion USD in the extraction of lithium from Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶ The Fan China Afghan Mining Processing and Trading Company reportedly also aims to invest 350 million USD in multiple sectors in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ Earlier, in January 2023, the Taliban signed an oil-extraction deal with a Chinese company, Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co, to extract oil from the Amu Darya Basin and construct an oil reserve in the Sar-e-Pul province. Under the agreement, the Chinese company will extract oil from an area of 4,500 square kilometers collectively in three provinces: Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab.¹⁴⁸ The 25-year contract will include a 150 million USD Chinese investment that would increase to 540 million USD in three years and create nearly 3,000 job opportunities.¹⁴⁹

With Iran, Afghanistan's bilateral trade has reached one billion dollars.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, it continues to be an important import origin country for Afghanistan -- accounting for 21 percent of the total imports -- which

is followed by Pakistan (18 percent), China (18 percent), and the UAE (13 percent).¹⁵¹

The Taliban have also been holding national and international trade expos, to encourage local businesses to contribute to the Afghan economy. The Second Imam Abu Hanifa National and International Expo and Trade Fair took place from July 16 to 22, 2023, in Kabul. The Fair was attended by hundreds of traders from different countries, notably Pakistan, Iran, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan. Mohammad Yousuf Momand, the acting head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said that products worth 50 million AFN (60,000 USD) were sold and almost 500 contracts were signed between Afghan and foreign traders.¹⁵² A significant women participation in the expo was reported by the Taliban. Similarly, a five-day long exhibition was arranged in Kabul from May 11 to 16, 2023, where more than 600 entrepreneurs showcased their handicrafts and nearly 100 booths were reportedly provided for women.¹⁵³

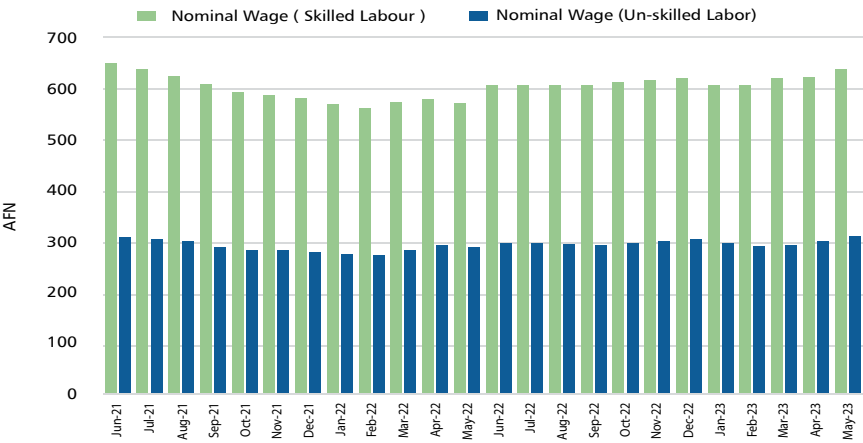
According to the Taliban's Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the number of businesswomen in Afghanistan has increased by 66 percent in 2023 compared to 2022.¹⁵⁴ According to the Taliban, almost 2,000 women have been issued business licenses in 2023 so far, whereas up until now a

total of 120,000 women are running small businesses such as beauty salons (until they were ordered to close by the Taliban), clothes, handicraft shops, and food stalls, with almost 560 women being a part of the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry.¹⁵⁵ Many of these women are receiving foreign assistance, as with the help of Japan and the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, UNDP has provided support to 34,000 small businesses, of which 80 percent are being led by women.¹⁵⁶

With regard to the availability of work for both skilled and unskilled laborers, since March 2023, there has been an improvement due to the harvesting season, which has had positive spillovers in the non-agriculture sector. Due to an improvement in labor demand and a decrease in inflation (from 18.3 percent to 9.1 percent in the last year),¹⁵⁷ nominal

and real wages have slightly increased, pointing to an overall improvement in wage conditions. About 90 percent of public servants received salaries through a bank account during May 2023. However, the widespread exclusion of women from the workforce (primarily due to bans) has had significant additional constraints on Afghanistan's economic growth.¹⁵⁸

Afghan households have responded to economic hardship by mobilizing work by women and youth. The labor market is now characterized by structurally higher labor force participation and unemployment compared to 2020. Increased female employment is concentrated in small-scale manufacturing (mostly home-based and micro businesses). Some improvement was shown in skilled and unskilled employment compared to spring 2022.¹⁵⁹



Source: Wage data from WFP, World Bank staff elaboration¹⁶⁰

Even though the Afghan economy is being somewhat revived, there are certain shortfalls that need to be addressed. Earlier, due to the suspension of development assistance to Afghanistan, development projects were replaced with humanitarian assistance -- nearly 3.5 billion USD annually -- thus lowering the incidence of development in the country.

The scale of corruption in Afghanistan has decreased significantly particularly in customs through the Taliban's clampdown on corruption and smuggling.¹⁶¹ In 2022, Afghanistan was ranked 150 on the Corruption Perception Index out of 180 countries compared to 174 in 2021.¹⁶² In this regard, the Taliban recently finalized plans for the establishment of a Ports Committee, consisting of 14 institutions in a bid to standardize ports and prevent smuggling.¹⁶³

The Taliban announced a ban on opium in April 2022, and since then they have taken steps to sharply reduce opium poppy cultivation. According to reports, poppy production in Afghanistan has dropped by 99 percent. The area of poppy cultivation in Helmand, which is the country's largest opium-producing province, has been reduced from over 129,000 ha in 2022 to only 740 ha as of April 2023. Similarly, a reduction in Nangarhar has dropped to only 865 ha compared to over 7,000 ha in 2022.¹⁶⁴

Subsequently, the Taliban have established a vocational and rehabilitation center called Aghous in Kabul for the treatment of drug addictions. In 2022, almost 42,000 patients were given treatment at the center. The nature of the treatment is unknown. Additionally, more than 5,000 anti-narcotics operations have reportedly been conducted by the Afghan security forces, as a result of which a large number of drug traffickers and their facilitators were arrested.¹⁶⁵

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, welcomed the Taliban's policies concerning the ban of drugs in the country and considered the move in the "shared interest" of the region and beyond.¹⁶⁶ While the ban on opium production is a positive step, it has created an immediate need for alternative development efforts in the country.

The UN recently summarized that the Afghan economy has been sustained in the face of international sanctions through taxation, domestic production, and foreign aid, however, it warned that there are limited chances of it achieving the pre-2021 level due to frozen foreign assets and frequent problems being faced by the business community.¹⁶⁷

Foreign Policy

Despite lacking international recognition, the Taliban continue to consider themselves an equal and active member of the international community and try to conduct foreign affairs like any other state. They regularly issue statements and comment on events taking place in the world, be it congratulating world leaders¹⁶⁸ or expressing concerns about political instability in the neighborhood and calling for “restraint and understanding.”¹⁶⁹

Notwithstanding the lack of formal recognition, since coming into power, the Taliban have been engaging with neighboring countries and the broader international community in one form or another. This involvement includes engaging with representatives of diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, hosting incoming foreign delegations, traveling abroad, and participating in various international and regional interactions. This also includes taking charge of Afghanistan’s diplomatic missions in at least 18 countries,¹⁷⁰ as a majority of Afghan diplomatic missions in the West continue to be run by officials of the previous government. However, according to the Taliban, these diplomats continue their activities in coordination with the Taliban Foreign Ministry.¹⁷¹ Regional countries, primarily China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan, have continued to keep their embassies open in Afghanistan

and have continued to engage with the Taliban on a regular basis.

While the Taliban’s engagement was initially limited to regional countries, the scope of the group’s diplomatic engagement has increased and moved beyond the immediate neighborhood. Since August 2021, the group has been holding regular interactions not only with representatives of its immediate neighbors but also with officials from Türkiye, Qatar, Japan, and Norway, as well as with international aid organizations. As of July 31, 2023, the representatives of more than 30 countries and international organizations are active throughout Afghanistan.¹⁷² Interactions with US and European government continue to be held primarily in Doha, with the exception of some visits by US, UK, and EU officials.

The Taliban claim, that in the last two years, around 80 high and middle officials from different countries have met with their representatives in Kabul.¹⁷³ The following paragraphs provide an overview of the most relevant diplomatic interactions by the Taliban:

Diplomatic missions headed by Taliban representatives have in recent months begun to increase their diplomatic engagements. On April 13, 2023, the Afghanistan Ambassador to Qatar, Mohammad Naeem, attended a festive fast-breaking dinner arranged

by Hamas in Doha. The event was also attended by the ambassadors of Iran, Türkiye, and Russia in Qatar.¹⁷⁴ On April 14, Kazakhstan accredited the Taliban-proposed ambassador to the country. However, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry clarified that the "arrival of representatives of the new administration of Afghanistan does not mean recognition."¹⁷⁵

On April 13, Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Muttaqi participated in the fourth ministerial meeting of Afghanistan's neighbors (Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, China, Russia, and Turkmenistan). The meeting was chaired by Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister and involved participation by the Foreign Ministers of China, Russia, Iran, and Tajikistan. Pakistan and Turkmenistan were represented by Deputy Foreign Ministers.¹⁷⁶ All parties agreed upon the need for a joint effort to extend humanitarian aid and in fighting terrorism in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷ On the same date, the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan held separate discussions related to bilateral relations, economic cooperation and connectivity, and opportunities arising out of the Trans-Afghan Railway.¹⁷⁸

On April 14, Serik Zhomangarin, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, paid a visit to Afghanistan, where he met with senior officials of the Taliban. During the meeting, opportunities

for investment in Afghanistan were discussed, considering the fact that the level of trade between the two countries has increased to 900 million USD in 2022¹⁷⁹ which is 2.1 times higher than 2021 (474.3 million USD).¹⁸⁰

On April 29, Jamal Nasir Gharwal, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Afghan Embassy in Russia, participated in a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at the invitation of the organization's secretary. During the meeting, matters pertaining to Afghanistan were discussed, as the members of the CSTO called on the Taliban to take the necessary steps to eliminate terrorism and curtail drug supply.¹⁸¹

On May 6, 2023, following the Samarkand Dialogue, the Taliban Foreign Minister took part in the fifth China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in Islamabad. All three sides reiterated commitments to a prosperous Afghanistan, for which the respective foreign ministers emphasized cooperation in multiple domains. At this occasion, the significance of women's and girls' rights, particularly their right to education, and security concerns were underscored. All sides stressed the need to not allowing any individual, group, or party, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), to use their territories to

harm and threaten regional security and interests or conduct terrorist actions.¹⁸² Responding to a question, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said that during the trilateral meeting, the Taliban made a written pledge to not let any group use Afghanistan's territory for terrorism.¹⁸³

Following the trilateral dialogue in Islamabad, the Taliban Foreign Minister had separate meetings with the Pakistani civil and military leadership, as well as religious clerics and legal scholars.¹⁸⁴ During the talks matters related to regional security, border management, and terrorism were discussed and an agreement was reached to increase trade, combat terrorism, and enhance bilateral relations.¹⁸⁵ The Taliban Minister of Industry and Trade, Nooruddin Azizi, who had accompanied Foreign Minister Muttaqi, also had a wide range of meetings with his Pakistani counterparts where matters pertaining to the facilitation of transit trade were discussed. Moreover, the delegation also had meetings in Karachi where they met with various Pakistani traders and requested 24-hour operationalization of the port. The Afghan delegation also expressed the need to renew the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement.¹⁸⁶

On May 12, in the first such meeting with any foreign leader, the Taliban's supreme leader Haibatullah

Akhundzada held talks with the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jassim Al-Thani. According to media reports, the overall situation in Afghanistan was discussed, including resolving the Taliban's tension with the international community and the need for the Taliban to end their bans on girls' education and women's employment.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, Al Thani met with the Taliban Prime Minister Hassan Akhund and discussed matters concerning the Afghan economy, women's and girls' education, and the humanitarian situation.¹⁸⁸

On May 13, the head of the Afghan Embassy in China, Syed Muhyiddin Sadat, participated in the Third International Exhibition of Construction Equipment and the Belt and Road Initiative Business Forum on Infrastructure and Construction in Changsha, Hunan province. During his visit to the province, Sadat also met with officials from the Zoomlion Machinery Company for possible cooperation on Afghanistan receiving construction equipment from the company.¹⁸⁹

Similarly, the Chinese Ambassador to Kabul, Wang Yu, regularly interacts with the Taliban. On May 22, he met the Taliban's Interior Minister to analyze the outcome of the tripartite meeting of foreign ministers in Pakistan.¹⁹⁰ This was followed by a meeting with Foreign Minister Muttaqi on May 23. During the

meeting, issues pertaining to bilateral interests were discussed, with a specific focus on the resumption of direct flights between the two countries, the export of products to China, and the inauguration of a new housing scheme in Afghanistan.¹⁹¹

Iran, which did not close its diplomatic mission after the Taliban assumed power, has, like other immediate neighbors, maintained its engagement with the Taliban. While diplomatic interactions have regularly taken place, in the recent past, Iran-Afghan tensions have erupted due to a river water distribution dispute over the Helmand River, which led to violent clashes between the Taliban and Iranian border forces near Nimroz on May 27, in which two Iranian and one Afghan border guard were killed.¹⁹²

Later, in a video message, a local Taliban leader, Abdul Hamid Khorasani, warned the Iranian authorities of not to challenge the group's capability since, if allowed by the Taliban leadership, the group would be capable enough to fight Iranians "with more passion" as compared to the US. However, the Iranian Interior Ministry later stated that the Taliban have dismissed some low-key individuals, allegedly Khorasani, over "irresponsible" remarks.¹⁹³ On May 27, the Taliban Foreign Minister called on the Iranian authorities to align their demands with the 1973 Helmand

water treaty. His remarks came in response to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's statement in which he reminded Afghan authorities of Iran's water rights under the international treaty.¹⁹⁴ The Iran-Afghan water dispute is decades old, and a treaty was signed between the two countries in 1973 to reach an agreement. However, in 2021, with the construction of the Kamal Khan Dam in Afghanistan, Iran alleges Afghan authorities of not releasing the agreed share of the Helmand River's water.¹⁹⁵

Moreover, on July 24, 2023, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in an interview said that ISIS fighters from Syria, Iraq, and Libya had recently relocated to Afghanistan and that one of the challenges facing the Taliban was the presence of Daesh.¹⁹⁶ Denying the claim, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a spokesman for the Taliban Foreign Ministry, said that the group has continuously fought against Daesh both during and after the end of the occupation and asked the Iranian authorities to work mutually for the economic prosperity and regional integration instead of making false accusations.¹⁹⁷

Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have been facing strains since the Taliban came into power. Although several high-level visits have taken place between the two sides, relations have been tense due to security issues, primarily the presence of the Tehreek-

e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan. An attack on the Chargé d'Affaires of Pakistan in Kabul, on December 2, 2022, led to the reduction of diplomatic activities of Pakistan's mission in Kabul. However, the attacked diplomat returned to Kabul in April 2023. Since then, he has held several meetings with the Taliban, including regular meetings with their Foreign Minister where both sides agreed to establish a committee between the Afghan Directorate of Consular Affairs and the Embassy of Pakistan in a bid to facilitate the movement of Afghan nationals.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the minister appreciated the release of 66 Afghan prisoners¹⁹⁹ -- who were arrested due to illegal entry or lack of documents -- from Karachi, Pakistan, calling this action a "positive step."²⁰⁰

On July 20, Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, paid his first official visit to Afghanistan, where he met the Taliban's Foreign Minister. During the meeting, the Foreign Minister called for cooperation on the economic front and work for regional security and development. Similarly, Pakistan's representative appreciated the improved security condition in Afghanistan and assured cooperation in the political and economic fields. Subsequently, the representative expressed support to complete the Torkham-Jalalabad Road and to facilitate issues related to visas.²⁰¹

Through Doha, the Taliban are also engaging with the US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West. From July 30-31, the Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi led a high-level delegation to Qatar to attend two-day plenary and technical committees level talks with the US Special Representative and Rina Amiri, the US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights. The Taliban delegation consisted of representatives from Da Afghanistan Bank and the Finance Ministry. Both sides discussed the status of the Afghan economy, the humanitarian situation, confidence-building measures, and issues of human rights.²⁰² During the visit, Foreign Minister Muttaqi also met with representatives of various countries, including the United Kingdom, Spain, South Korea, the Netherlands, Italy, Australia, and Canada. Muttaqi urged the envoys to resume their activities in Afghanistan and also discussed the recent political, economic, security, governance, anti-narcotics, and development projects in Afghanistan.²⁰³

Since August 2021, Russia has been one of the few countries that did not close its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan. Moscow has been regularly engaging with the Taliban. Dmitry Zhirnov, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Afghanistan, has regularly held meetings with different officials of the Taliban. Moreover, the

Special Representative of the Russian President for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, has also been visiting Kabul to talk with the Taliban.²⁰⁴

Türkiye is the only NATO member with a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. It has continued to engage with the Taliban on different levels and at the same time continued to run aid operations within the country through its Disaster and Emergency Management Authority and the Turkish Red Crescent. Given Türkiye once had a military presence in Afghanistan under ISAF, Ankara has experience operating in the region and the continuation of diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian transactions with the Taliban furthers its agenda of gaining regional influence. The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has often spoken about the “the importance of the international community’s engagement with the Taliban”, stating that “recognition and engagement are two different things.”²⁰⁵

The Turkish ambassador in Kabul, Cihad Erginay, has regularly been interacting with the Taliban. On April 25, 2023, he met Second Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Salam Hanafi, highlighting Ankara’s interest in helping to develop relations between the Taliban and the international community.²⁰⁶ Similarly, on July 30, the Turkish envoy met the Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Mohammad Arsalan Kharouti, in

Kabul to discuss issues concerning the illegal migration of Afghans to Türkiye and an upcoming visit to Türkiye in a bid to discuss the issue.²⁰⁷

Turkish companies have also been active in the Afghan energy sector, by providing technical and skilled assistance, particularly the Turkish company 77 Construction. Apart from ongoing projects in Herat, back in 2022, with an investment of 160 million USD, it completed the second phase of the Kajaki hydroelectric dam in Helmand.²⁰⁸ Prior to August 2021, Türkiye had established various cultural centers across the country, and the Yunus Emre Institute, which teaches different forms of art, continues to operate.²⁰⁹ Additionally, there are nearly 34 Afghan-Turkish Maarif schools operational in seven Afghan provinces.²¹⁰

India is another country that also began to engage with the Taliban. In June 2022, India reopened its embassy in Kabul by sending a “technical team” of officials. Since then, not only has trade resumed between the two states, but India has continued to provide military training programs to Afghan forces.²¹¹ Apart from military training, India has been providing Afghan diplomats with (online) diplomatic training. Moreover, a trade agreement that was signed with India in October 2022 to resume the air corridor between Afghanistan and India for trade continues to operate.²¹²

Amongst Western interactions, representatives from Japan and Norway have been holding regular meetings with the Taliban. Most of their interactions carry discussions concerning girls' education, women's rights, the humanitarian situation, and terrorism in the country. On July 6, 2023, the Japanese Ambassador to Afghanistan, Takashi Okada, called on the Taliban Minister of Foreign Affairs, where he said that Japan is looking into broadening engagement and cooperation with Afghanistan in issues relating to narcotics, education, climate change, water management, heritage sites, health and other areas.²¹³

The Norwegian Chargé d'Affaires for Afghanistan, Paul Klouman Bekken, has held three meetings with Foreign Minister Muttaqi, on May 10,²¹⁴ May 22,²¹⁵ and July 11.²¹⁶ On July 19 he also met Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai.²¹⁷ During these discussions, issues pertaining to security, Afghan citizens in Europe, and the eradication of drugs in the country were discussed.

While Western engagement with the Taliban is limited, on July 6, 2023, Robert Chatterton Dickson, the British Embassy's Chargé d'Affaires in Afghanistan who operates from Doha, met with Foreign Minister Muttaqi in Kabul.²¹⁸ During their discussion, matters related to commercial issues, education, consular services, and the relationship between Kabul

and London were focused on. The Taliban Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadim, also had a meeting with Dickson, where he urged collaboration in the area of education in Afghanistan.²¹⁹

Moreover, Tobias Ellwood, Member of Parliament and Chair of the UK Defense Select Committee of the House of Commons, visited Afghanistan in July 2023 and interacted with the Taliban. He recorded a controversial video message in which he said that he had witnessed real progress in Afghanistan and believes it is now time to start negotiating with the Taliban. He further said that the UK must review its diplomatic approach to Kabul and suggested that the UK should reopen its embassy in Kabul.²²⁰ After posting the video Ellwood faced criticism and later apologized in a tweet, stating, "however well-intentioned, reflections of my personal visit could have been better worded."²²¹ A day before facing a vote of no confidence in his chairmanship he resigned from his position as Chair of the UK Defense Select Committee of the House of Commons on September 13.²²²

Apart from interactions with diplomatic representatives of different countries, the Taliban have also continued to hold regular interactions with international organizations and aid agencies. On May 26, 2023, the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland, met

members of the Taliban's Ministry of Economy in Kabul. He urged the Taliban to work for the resumption of women's and girls' education.²²³

On June 1, 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, met Foreign Minister Muttaqi and discussed the Taliban's interactions with the international community and the current situation of the country and the region.²²⁴

On June 24, the Special Coordinator for the Independent Assessor Mandated by Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023), Feridun Sinirlioglu, called on Foreign Minister Muttaqi.²²⁵ On the same day, he also met the Interior Minister Anas Haqqani. During the meeting, both men discussed issues concerning drugs, terrorism, and the Taliban's interaction with the world.²²⁶

On July 24, 2023, the head of the Aga Khan Foundation for Afghanistan, Najmuddin Najm, met with Foreign Minister Muttaqi. In the meeting, the start of a new mission where the organization was asked to assist in the restoration and preservation of historical monuments within Afghanistan was discussed.²²⁷

On July 27, Foreign Minister Muttaqi held a coordination meeting with UN agencies in Kabul. Representatives from other ministries as well as UN agencies (UNAMA, OCHA, UNICEF, WFP) and the Deputy Special

Representative of the UN Secretary-General were also present. During the meeting, the Deputy Special Representative provided information about the new strategic plan of the UN for Afghanistan. Foreign Minister Muttaqi expressed a desire for the conversion of humanitarian aid into business opportunities.²²⁸

In summary, it can be stated that the world community's eagerness to help the Afghan people has led to a wide range of engagements with the Taliban government in an effort to ensure both the safety and prosperity of the country and the rights of the Afghan population, including girls and women. International engagement with the Taliban is likely to continue as the international community is eager to prevent the country from becoming a breeding ground for terrorism in the future. The Taliban are trying to use these increased engagements to shift the de facto recognition of their government towards a de jure recognition without actually fulfilling many of their international commitments.

Security Situation

Since the Taliban government came into power, the security situation in the country has significantly improved. This can be mostly attributed to the cessation of the insurgency previously carried out by the now-ruling de

facto authorities. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank in December 2022, perceptions of security have improved, with two-thirds of households reporting that they felt safer than a year ago.²²⁹ While it is reported in a UN Security Council (UNSC) Report, that 23 armed groups in Afghanistan oppose the Taliban, at the same time, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, in 2022, violence in Afghanistan decreased significantly and that for the first time since 2004, the conflict did not reach the intensity level of war.²³⁰ While anti-Taliban groups have remained strident in their opposition to the group, they have failed to pose a serious threat to the Taliban so far.²³¹

Although domestically, the Taliban have managed to achieve some semblance of security, the presence of transnational terrorist outfits, primarily the Daesh regional affiliate Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), continues to pose grave challenges not only for Afghanistan but the wider region.

The only potent violent threat to the Taliban is ISKP, a longtime adversary of the group. ISKP, estimated to have between 4,000 to 6,000 members (including family members), has launched multiple attacks against Taliban targets, killing several senior officials (including provincial

governors in March 2023 and June 2023) in Balkh, Baghlan, and Badakhshan provinces.²³² ISKP has also targeted Afghan civilians (mostly minority groups, Shia, Hazaras, and religious minorities) as well as Afghanistan's neighbors through externally-oriented operations, including cross-border rocket attacks against Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and attacks against the Russian, Pakistani, and Chinese presence in Afghanistan.²³³

According to the UNSC report, ISKP's attacks are intended to portray the Taliban as incapable of providing security and to undermine the relationship between the Taliban and neighboring countries.²³⁴ Additionally, ISKP continues to be a persistent security threat for relief operations and actors across the country. In July, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that one of the challenges facing the Taliban was the presence of Daesh, particularly the relocation of Daesh to Afghanistan from Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The Taliban have denied the claim.²³⁵

According to the UNSC's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Report on Afghanistan, the country has been referred to as a place of global significance for terrorism, with approximately twenty terrorist groups operating in the country.²³⁶ Moreover, since the Afghan Taliban took control in August 2021, the

TTP has been gaining momentum in Afghanistan and other terrorist outfits have been using the TTP cover to operate within Afghanistan.²³⁷ The report, however, notes that in June 2023, certain TTP elements were relocated away from the border area, as part of the Taliban's efforts to rein in the group under pressure from the government of Pakistan. The report stated that since the reunification with several splinter groups, TTP has aspired to re-establish control of territory in Pakistan after being emboldened by the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and that TTP was focused on high-value targets in border areas and soft targets in urban ones.²³⁸ Moreover, according to the UNSC's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Report, training camps of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Muslim separatist group founded by militant Uighurs and currently based in Kunar, are being used by TTP fighters.²³⁹ Beijing has often voiced concern over the alleged use of Afghan soil by ETIM militants to carry out cross-border activities in China.²⁴⁰

Al-Qaeda, with which the Taliban enjoy a "symbiotic" relationship according to the UNSC report, currently has 30 to 60 members in Afghanistan whereas the total number of their fighters is estimated to be 400.²⁴¹ The report further states that al-Qaeda is seeking cooperation with regional terrorist organizations

such as ETIM, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and Jamaat Ansarullah from Tajikistan.

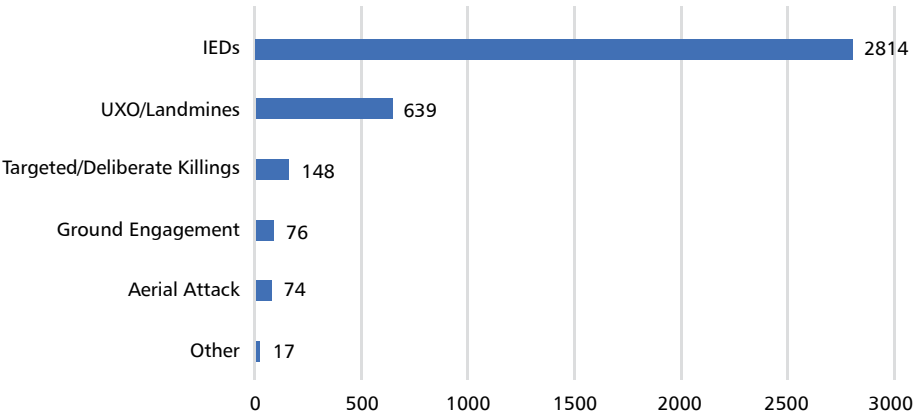
Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid strongly denounced the report which according to the group was baseless and "full of prejudice." The Taliban have continued to deny the presence of terrorist groups on its soil. According to the Taliban, groups like al-Qaeda are being monitored by the General Directorate of Intelligence.²⁴²

However, it is estimated that ETIM has expanded the scope of their operations by building new operational bases in Afghanistan's Baghlan Province and recruiting fighters of numerous nationalities. It is observed that ETIM has formulated a long-term plan of training young fighters and engaging them in drug trafficking to accumulate funds. Currently, the group is keeping its presence in Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Logar, Kunar and Sari Pul Provinces, and has a fighting strength of 300 to 1,200 fighters.²⁴³

UNAMA recorded that out of a total of 3,774 civilian casualties between August 15, 2021, and May 30, 2023, almost three-quarters of these casualties resulted from attacks with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) in populated areas, such as worship places, schools, and markets.²⁴⁴ Subsequently, of the total civilian casualties (1,095 killed and 2,679 wounded), there were 233 women

(92 killed, 141 wounded) and 866 children (287 killed, 579 wounded). During the period, almost 2,814 civilian casualties resulted due to

IED attacks, 639 due to explosive remnants of war, and 148 due to targeted killings.²⁴⁵



Civilian casualties (August 15, 2021, till May 30, 2023)²⁴⁶

Opinion Corner

Afghan People Need Action

Nargis Nehan

The collapse of the Afghan state on August 15, 2021, has plunged the country into a series of crises, made worse by climate change and seasonal floods. According to the WFP's latest report, more than 15 million people are acutely food insecure while three million are at the brink of famine, and that is at the height of summer, when locally produced food should be filling the gap.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Afghanistan humanitarian response is facing substantial "critical funding gaps" amounting to 1.3 billion USD with many programs already closed due to insufficient resources, and several others at risk of imminent rupture between July and September 2023.

Since August 2021, more than 1.6 million Afghans have migrated to Pakistan, one million to Iran, 13,000 to Uzbekistan, and around 6,000 to Tajikistan. Besides poverty and insecurity, most families leave Afghanistan to have access to education for their girls.

Moreover, the United Nations Security Council's Sanction Monitoring Team reports that around 20 international terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have established a strong presence in Afghanistan. Links between the Taliban and al-Qaeda are said to be "strong and symbiotic," with al-Qaeda now "rebuilding operational capability" from its base in Afghanistan. The report says that this is a "serious threat to Central Asia in the longer term."

And in this situation, where Afghanistan faces multiple crises, there is no legitimate and representative government with the political will to respond. The situation was caused by the collective failure of all actors, from the leaders of the former republic, who ran away, to the US and its allies, who abandoned the country, but most of all to the Taliban. They had an opportunity in 2021 to form an inclusive and genuinely representative government, with well-regulated education and job opportunities for women and girls, where former members of the security forces, activists, and the media were protected by an amnesty. Most importantly, they could have relied on the civil servants, those who were running the ministries and public institutions to continue providing the critical basic lifesaving services to people.

The Afghan people are exhausted from more than forty years of constant bloody warfare and would have accepted and cooperated with the Taliban's Islamic Emirate if it had governed competently with fairness, inclusivity, and justice.

But instead, the Taliban focused on controlling people's lives, imposing many severe restrictions on women. Recently they issued another edict banning the operation of women's beauty salons, making another 7,000 women jobless. Besides not protecting vulnerable communities, they even interfered with the Hazara community's commemoration of their most religious day, 10th Muharram. Many people, including children, were injured, and some killed when the Taliban opened fire on crowds who were gathering for the event. All the Afghan Hindu and Sikh religious minorities left Afghanistan and resettled in India.

Opposition has been stifled by the persecution and extrajudicial detention of activists and journalists who were peacefully advocating for education and freedom. These include the prominent education campaigner, Matiullah Wesa, who has not been seen since his arrest in April.

Despite all these challenges, Afghan society is still highly vibrant and resilient. Young women and girls protest on the streets and social media for their rights to be educated and to work. Some TV and radio channels are hosting

programs in which participants openly express their views about the current situation, despite the restrictions. In a land where poetry is revered, people meet for poetry evenings where they criticize the de facto authorities in their poems. In today's Afghanistan, people have learned to express their opinion and make themselves heard. Today, no one can assume solutions for Afghanistan except Afghans themselves and no one can impose their political agenda on Afghans against their will. Women's reaction to the latest statement of US Special Envoy for Afghan Women and Girls, Rina Amiri who tweeted that she is engaging with the Taliban based on the demand of Afghan women, demonstrates how betrayed Afghan people feel and how they are using different mediums to raise their voice.

Afghan people have had enough of people expressing sympathy for their plight. They demand action instead of nice tweets.

The Taliban must understand that the collapse of the Islamic Republic had less to do with their fight but more to do with political fragmentation, corruption, insecurity, and public frustration with the highly centralized and poor governance of the Islamic Republic.

It is not too late for there to be a peaceful change of mind by the Taliban. They still have a unique opportunity to form an inclusive and representative government,

grant women and girls their human and Islamic rights, protect ethnic minorities, uphold their general amnesty, avoid discriminatory policies, participate in dialogues, and talk to Afghan women, civil society, political oppositions, and neighboring countries and address their concerns. But if there is no change, the insecurity will only get worse. If the former Islamic Republic, with both internal and external legitimacy, and billions of dollars in assistance, could not survive, how could the Taliban think their Islamic Emirate with no internal and external legitimacy and popularity could survive?

Even some countries, such as Iran and Pakistan, who openly supported the Taliban and advocated for their recognition, have now changed their mind. Today, even these two immediate neighbors of Afghanistan complain about the Taliban's lack of cooperation.

Neighboring countries must see ordinary Afghans as their long-term partners as governments and regimes come and go. They must engage with Afghan women and civil society and provide them with platforms to have dialogues about bilateral and regional issues of states and propose forward-looking solutions.

Islamic countries, especially Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, must understand that the current policies of the Taliban damage the image of

the Islamic religion, turning such an extremist face to the world. They must unite their efforts in pressuring the Taliban to reverse their discriminative policies, particularly against women.

The US and its allies must accept that their withdrawal was irresponsible, causing political and social chaos in Afghanistan, and destroying many of the achievements made in the last 20 years. They should support Afghans with intra-Afghan and regional dialogues to discuss the domestic and regional dimensions of the Afghan conflict and discuss strategies to address them. They must also be transparent to the Afghan people about their policy towards Afghanistan and the region and be accountable for their engagement with the Taliban and all other groups.

The international community, Islamic countries, regional and neighboring countries, and all actors who are interested and expect to be engaged and consulted about Afghanistan affairs, must also contribute in addressing the current humanitarian crises. The Afghan people are being pushed into poverty in a collapsing economy and need lifesaving support not nice statements of sympathy.

Nargis Nehan is an Afghan former politician who served as the acting Minister of Mines, Petroleum, and Industries.

Taliban Rule in Afghanistan: Two Years On – A Pakistani Perspective

By Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

For over four decades, the people of Afghanistan have seen nothing but a fratricidal war ripping their country apart like a human body pierced by hundreds of needles, each hurting more than the other. A land of proud people, mighty mountains, fresh spring water, and uniquely tasting fruits deserves better than what it has endured all these years. The most recent turmoil started in December 1979 when the forces of the Soviet Union marched into Afghanistan. Pakistan concerned that it might be the next destination of the Soviet Union's quest for access to warm waters of the Indian Ocean, and the United States, charged with the mission to stop the spread of Communism, teamed together to create what came to be known as the "Afghan Jihad." The Afghan Mujahideen fought well and the Soviet forces decided to retreat in 1988. The field was now wide open for the Mujahideen to form an Afghan-led government. But, they did not, and started a bitter fight with each other as if they would fight to the last one of them. The country was shattered and its people

were traumatized. Emerging from this chaos was a group of students of madrassas (religious schools), who came to be known as the Taliban.

Led by Mullah Omar, the Taliban managed to overpower other groups and by September 1996 they had seized control of Kabul and several other parts of the country. Thus started the first rule of the Taliban, subjecting the Afghans to austere versions of cultural and Islamic practices. Women were confined to their homes. Girls' education was banned. The statutes of Buddha in Bamiyan were defaced. Non-Muslims were made to wear a yellow badge. Only three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, extended formal recognition to the group. Years of chaos had already attracted terrorist entities to the ungoverned territories of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda (AQ), led by Osama Bin Laden, being the most prominent of them.

Sensing the gathering of a storm, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed in 1999 a sanctions regime on the Taliban and AQ under Resolution 1267. Then came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which the US blamed on AQ based in Afghanistan. The US decided to launch a Global War on Terror (GWOT) to punish the perpetrators of 9/11. The first target was Afghanistan which the US invaded in late 2001 after the Taliban refused to hand over

the AQ leadership. The Taliban did not fight the US frontally and went underground.

For the next twenty years, the US remained occupied by the war in Afghanistan. Decimating AQ was relatively swift thanks to the support extended by Pakistan, which had become an ally of the US in its GWOT. The intense bombing of certain Afghan territories, like Tora Bora, made several militants and terrorists flee towards the tribal areas of Pakistan. The war on terror thus spilled into Pakistan, which fought against terrorist forces at a huge human and financial cost for the next decade and a half. Meanwhile, the US was getting frustrated with the lack of success in Afghanistan and started blaming Pakistan for providing safe havens to the Taliban. Pakistan's view was that the Taliban's fighting cadre was in Afghanistan and the US should pursue a political approach rather than seek a military victory.

The US finally decided to engage with the Taliban, which led to the agreement of February 2020 and paved the way for the US to pull out its troops from Afghanistan. Pakistan had advised the US to undertake a responsible withdrawal lest another civil war set in. However, the US leadership had already made up its mind to pull out of wars in "distant" lands and thus decided to leave Afghanistan in August 2021. Within

days, the government of President Ashraf Ghani fell and the Afghan National Army dissipated. The Taliban walked into the vacuum unhindered and captured Kabul and the rest of the country in just eleven days.

The second rule of the Taliban started off well, giving an impression that much of what they had done in their first rule might not be repeated. The international community decided to first watch closely the principles on which the Taliban would predicate their governance and withheld formal recognition of the Taliban regime. Nearly all countries of the world were unanimous in their expectation that the Taliban deliver on three important facets of their governance.

First, the world expected the Taliban to form an inclusive government. The idea was that other ethnic groups of the multicultural Afghan society, like Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, should be taken along so that the country does not descend into another civil war, which neither the people of Afghanistan nor the region could afford. Second, the international community wanted the Taliban to fully respect the human rights of Afghans, especially the right of girls to education and women to work. Third, the Taliban must honor their commitment that they would not allow Afghan territory to be used by any entity to commit terrorism anywhere. On all three counts, the

progress seems to be under par. The initial hopes of moderate governance by the Taliban during their second rule have since been dashed.

It would be pertinent to inquire if the inability of the Taliban to meet the expectations of the international community is because of its political will or lack of capacity or both.

If one looks at the initial days of the Taliban rule right after the American troops started to leave in August 2021, the Taliban inherited an extremely difficult situation. The focus of the US and Western powers at that time was to evacuate the foreigners and Afghans who had worked with them or wanted to leave. The Taliban did cooperate with the evacuation though this caused a serious brain drain of economists, civil servants, and other skilled workers, and thus undermined the capacity of the Taliban government to run even routine administration. To compound the Taliban's problems, the country suffered systematic and repeated terrorist attacks, mostly by the so-called Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), targeting mosques, hospitals, and schools in predominantly Shia neighborhoods and the Hazara community. ISKP is also reportedly absorbing the disillusioned Taliban fighters and other smaller militant groups. Despite this continuing threat, the Taliban have managed to maintain administrative

control over the entire territory of the country.

In August 2021, in the wake of the terrorist bombing at the Kabul airport, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution 2593 demanding that the Afghan territory not be used to threaten any country. Yet, a year later on August 2, 2022, a US drone strike killed Ayman Al-Zawahiri of AQ in a house in Kabul. This had raised questions whether the Taliban were aware of the presence of Al-Zawahiri in Kabul, and whether they were serious about honoring their commitment that Afghan soil would not be used for terrorism. Like Pakistan, which has faced terrorist attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) using Afghan soil, the entire international community is concerned and anxious if the Taliban were fully determined to not allow Afghan territory for terrorism anywhere.

Meanwhile, the country is facing the "world's worst humanitarian disaster" according to Human Rights Watch. The country's population is food insecure, including 875,000 children facing acute malnutrition. Since there are other issues occupying the global attention, particularly the war in Ukraine, the situation in Afghanistan has disappeared from the world news. The country's economy is in distress, made worse by the continuing sanctions under UNSC resolutions 1267 and 1373, making it difficult for

any country to engage in economic activity with the Taliban government. There is also a substantial loss of international aid, partly because the Taliban government's repressive policies such as against the rights of women have made it difficult to mobilize additional assistance.

Poverty levels in the country have risen alarmingly high. According to the World Bank, poverty levels, which were already high at 47 percent in 2019-20, have risen further, and by mid-2022, "two-thirds of Afghan households reportedly could not afford food and other basic non-food items." UNDP has released a report on Afghanistan's Socio-Economic Outlook 2023 which indicates that Afghanistan's economic output "collapsed by 20.7 percent" following the Taliban takeover in 2021. Despite improvements in some indicators, the GDP has further "declined by 3.6 percent in 2022." The economy is mainly running on the inflow of foreign aid and customs duty collection at the borders. According to UNDP, in 2022, nearly 3.7 billion USD flowed into Afghanistan out of which the United Nations contributed 3.2 billion USD. The prospects of economic recovery remain "weak and insufficient" over the long term.

Pakistan is most affected by the situation in Afghanistan because of strong economic, commercial, cultural, ethnic, and religious ties. The

TTP fighters, who were released from the prisons in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, have been attacking Pakistani border posts and mainland cities. Pakistan also requires full cooperation of the Taliban to guard the 2,430-kilometer-long border, which the Afghans call the Durand Line. Close cooperation between the two countries is also required to facilitate bilateral trade and transit trade through the ports of Pakistan. Both countries also need to find ways for the return of millions of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Close and cooperative relations with the Taliban government is, therefore, a strategic imperative for Pakistan.

Notably, all countries of the region, including Pakistan, are consulting regularly to find a way to contribute to a lasting peace in Afghanistan. Multiple regional projects, such as the TAPI gas pipeline or Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) power project, have to pass through Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan would benefit not just the people of Afghanistan but also the entire region. Conversely, an unstable Afghanistan could become, once again, a haven for terrorist organizations. Pakistan has urged the US to stay engaged and not abandon Afghanistan. Although the US has been contributing to the aid flowing into Afghanistan through the UN, it could help further by unfreezing the Afghan overseas financial assets to

the tune of seven billion USD lying in New York. It is pertinent to recall that the representative of China, which had abstained on the resolution 2593 in August 2021, stated at the Council that the international community should “work with the Taliban and provide them with guidance in order to help maintain stability.”

All said and done, the international community and the neighbors of Afghanistan, including Pakistan, are keen to help the Taliban government stabilize the country and become prosperous. There is a recognition of the capacity issues and the world is willing to help. However, for that to happen, the Taliban need to show some concrete progress in meeting the expectations of the international community, especially on women’s rights and counter-terrorism. That would also facilitate formal recognition of the Taliban government. It is clear that the Taliban will have to walk half the mile before the international community walks the other half.

The writer is a former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan and author of Diplomatic Footprints. He also headed a premier think tank in Islamabad.

Endnotes

- 1 Haroun Rahimi, "Remaking of Afghanistan: How the Taliban are Changing Afghanistan's Laws and Legal Institutions," <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/remaking-of-afghanistan-how-the-taliban-are-changing-afghanistans-laws-and-legal-institutions/>, National University of Singapore, Institute of South Asian Studies, accessed July 26, 2022.
- 2 "Taliban Supreme Leader Outlines Sharia Law Plans in Eid Sermon," Kabul Now, <https://kabulnow.com/2023/06/taliban-supreme-leader-outlines-sharia-law-plans-in-eid-sermon/>, accessed June 29, 2023.
- 3 "IEA supreme leader issues Eid ul-Adha message," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/iea-supreme-leader-issues-eid-ul-adha-message/>, accessed June 2, 2023.
- 4 Ahmad Deir, Rahim Faiez, Kathy Gannon, Joseph Krausse, "Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression," Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-1d4b052cce113adc8dc94f965ff23c7>, accessed August 18, 2021.
- 5 "Taliban pledges to form inclusive and accountable govt," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/taliban-pledges-to-form-inclusive-and-accountable-govt/>, accessed September 5, 2021.
- 6 see Afghanistan Monitor vol. 1, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/19703.pdf>.
- 7 Ahmad Deir, Rahim Faiez, Kathy Gannon, Joseph Krausse, "Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression," Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-1d4b052cce113adc8dc94f965ff23c7>, accessed August 18, 2021.
- 8 Haroun Rahimi, "The Taliban in government: A grim new reality is settling in," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/3/23/taliban-in-government-a-grim-new-reality-is-settling-in>, accessed March 23, 2023.
- 9 Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, "Afghanistan is ready to work with the US, but sanctions must go," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/3/23/afghanistan-is-ready-to-work-with-the-us-but-sanctions-must-go>, accessed March 23, 2023.
- 10 "'Talented' Ex-Officials Will be Given Jobs If They Return: Commission," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-182478>, accessed March 13, 2023.
- 11 "Afghanistan bar association head pleads for international help as armed Taliban take over offices, displace leadership," Jurist, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2021/11/afghanistan-bar-association-head-pleads-for-international-help-as-armed-taliban-take-over-offices-displace-leadership/>, accessed November 24, 2021.
- 12 Mohammad Farshad Daryosh, "Supreme Court Appoints 69 Provincial Judges", Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175920>, accessed December 16, 2021.
- 13 Peter Mandaville, "Whither Islam in Afghanistan's Political System After the Taliban Talks?", USIP, October 7, 2020, accessed August 14, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/10/whither-islam-afghanistans-political-system-after-taliban-talks>.
- 14 Andrew Watkins, "What's Next for the Taliban's Leadership Amid Rising Dissent?", United States Institute of Peace (USIP), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/whats-next-talibans-leadership-amid-rising-dissent>, accessed April 11, 2023.
- 15 Afghan Analyst, <https://twitter.com/AfghanAnalyst2/status/1654008754730401792>, accessed May 4, 2023.

- 16 *"Taliban Leader Appoints Mullah Shirin As Governor of Kandahar,"* Afghanistan International, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202305046258>, accessed June 25, 2023.
- 17 *"Taliban Appoints New Police Chief for Panjshir Province,"* Afghanistan International, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202307257249>, accessed July 25, 2023.
- 18 Islamudding Sajid, *"Taliban chief says 'no' to 'interference' in Afghanistan's internal affairs,"* Andalou Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/taliban-chief-says-no-to-interference-in-afghanistans-internal-affairs/2875255>, accessed April 18, 2023.
- 19 *"Top Afghan Taliban leader issues decree against nepotism,"* Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/taliban-afghanistan-government-decree-nepotism-9fbda80fe3f6b84afb4b349fa836788c>, accessed March 20, 2023.
- 20 Ayaz Gul, *"Taliban Raid Kills 8 Afghan Opposition Fighters,"* Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-raid-kills-8-afghan-opposition-fighters-/7046058.html>, accessed April 11, 2023.
- 21 *"Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Roza Otunbayeva,"* UNAMA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/briefing-united-nations-security-council-secretary-generals-special-representative-afghanistan-roza-otunbayeva-new-york-20-december-2022>, accessed December 20, 2022.
- 22 According to a statement made by the Taliban's Ministry of Interior's spokesman Abdul Nafee Takkur on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Takor786/status/1650081276865531904>, accessed April 23, 2023.
- 23 Andrew Watkins, *"What's Next for the Taliban's Leadership Amid Rising Dissent?"* United States Institute for Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/whats-next-talibans-leadership-amid-rising-dissent>, accessed April 11, 2023.
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 *"Afghanistan's Taliban ruler faces rare internal criticism, revealing divisions,"* CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-divisions-supreme-leader-akhundzada-rare-criticism/>, accessed February 17, 2023.
- 26 *"Afghanistan: Authorities increasing security nationwide for Ashura July 28,"* Crisis 24, <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/07/afghanistan-authorities-increasing-security-nationwide-for-ashura-july-28>, accessed July 24, 2023.
- 27 *"Shi'ite Scholars Ask Mourners to Tone Down Muharram Observance After Taliban Imposed Restrictions,"* Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Radio Azadi, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-shia-muharram-taliban-restrictions/32522069.html>, accessed July 27, 2023.
- 28 *"Deputy administrative PM meets a number of Shiite scholars, leaders,"* Alemarah English, www.alemarahenglish.af/deputy-administrative-pm-meets-a-number-of-shiite-scholars-leaders/, accessed January 2, 2023.
- 29 Sangar Paykar, <https://twitter.com/paykhar/status/1654822649535643648>, accessed May 6, 2023.
- 30 *"Bamiyan cave-dwellers to be moved to residential settlement,"* Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/bamiyan-cave-dwellers-to-be-moved-to-residential-settlement/>, accessed May 2, 2023.
- 31 As claimed in this video on the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs' Twitter account, https://twitter.com/FDPM_AFG/status/1642434807148756994?cxt=HHwWhIC27anwjMstAAAA, accessed April 2, 2023.
- 32 See Afghanistan Monitors vol. 1-3 for more details.
- 33 *"A Joint Cooperation Agreement was signed with 77 Turkish Construction company to invest in the 200 MW wind power generation project,"* Ministry of Energy and Water, <https://mew.gov.af/>

- index.php/en/joint-cooperation-agreement-was-signed-77-turkish-construction-company-invest-200-mw-wind-power, accessed May 9, 2023.
- 34 "First Freight Train From Iran Arrives in Afghanistan's Herat," Financial Tribune, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/118050/first-freight-train-from-iran-arrives-in-afghanistan-s-herat>, accessed May 10, 2023.
- 35 "Work on Construction of Farah's Bakhshabad Dam Begins," Tolo News, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWYUJ9cnW84>, accessed June 2023.
- 36 Habib Rahman Qooyash, "Uzbekistan Electricity to Be Imported: MOFA," TOLO News, <https://tolonews.com/business-181744>, accessed January 25, 2023.
- 37 "Electricity Import Contract Renewed with Tajikistan," Bakhtar News, <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/%20electricity-import-contract-renewed-with-tajikistan>, accessed January 11, 2023.
- 38 Pamela Constable, "In Kabul, Taliban rulers are changing the face of the capital," The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/06/kabul-taliban-reconstruction-development/>, accessed June 30, 2023.
- 39 "Baradar assess progress of key Qosh Tepa Canal," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/baradar-assess-progress-of-key-qosh-tepa-canal/>, accessed March 8, 2023.
- 40 "The Taliban are digging an enormous canal," The Economist, <https://www.economist.com/%20asia/2023/02/16/the-taliban-are-digging-an-enormous-canal>, accessed February 16, 2023.
- 41 Embassy of Afghanistan in Islamabad, <https://twitter.com/Afghanembassy1/status/1681297873181474824>, accessed July 18, 2023.
- 42 Amin Ahmed, "Trans-Afghan railway to connect Uzbekistan with Pakistan," Dawn News, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1765398>, accessed July 18, 2023.
- 43 "Reconstruction Project of Salang Highway Officially Begins Wednesday," Bakhtar News, <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/reconstruction-project-of-salang-highway-officially-begins-wednesday/>, accessed July 13, 2023.
- 44 Imran Danish, "Officials: 25% of 1st Phase of Qosh Tepa Canal Construction Completed," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-180913>, accessed November 25, 2022. Bakyt Ibraimov and Fawad Ali "A lot of work for diplomats' in Central Asia as the Taliban build huge canal," The Third Pole, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/a-lot-of-work-for-diplomats-as-taliban-build-qosh-tepa-canal/>, accessed May 18, 2023.
- 45 Embassy of Afghanistan in Beijing https://twitter.com/beijing_embassy/status/1656565698465009664, accessed May 11, 2023.
- 46 Nazir Shinwari, "108 Contracts for Mine Extraction Signed in Last Solar Year," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-184337>, accessed July 24, 2023.,
- 47 Habib Rahman Qooyash, "Chinese Mining Company to Invest in Afghanistan," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-184095> accessed July 8, 2023.
- 48 "First Qashqari oil well extraction starts in Afghanistan's Sar-e-Pul," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/first-qashqari-oil-well-extraction-starts-in-afghanistans-sar-e-pul/>, accessed July 8, 2023.
- 49 "Acting Defense Minister Visits The 207 Al-Farooq Corps," Ministry of National Defense, <https://mod.gov.af/en/acing-defense-minister-visits-207-al-farooq-corps%C2%A0>, accessed July 25, 2023.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ministry of National Defense, <https://twitter.com/MoDAfghanistan2/status/1684592336440119296>, accessed July 27, 2023.

- 52 "Taliban Aim to Boost Afghan Security Forces, Anti-aircraft Capacity -army Chief," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-aim-boost-afghan-security-forces-anti-aircraft-capacity-army-chief-2023-04-12/>, accessed April 12, 2023.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 <https://twitter.com/Paktyaw4l/status/1684209229769449477>, accessed July 26, 2023.
- 55 Fidel Rahmati, "20 Ex-Afghan Military Students Return to Afghanistan from India," Khaama News, <https://www.khaama.com/20-ex-afghan-military-students-return-to-afghanistan-from-india/>, accessed February 9, 2023.
- 56 "Taliban Aim to Boost Afghan Security Forces, Anti-aircraft Capacity - Army Chief," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-aim-boost-afghan-security-forces-anti-aircraft-capacity-army-chief-2023-04-12/>, accessed April 12, 2023.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Abubakar Siddique, "Taliban Effort To Resurrect Afghan Air Force Runs Into Turbulence," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-air-force-aircraft-helicopters-training/32427528.html>, accessed May 25, 2023.
- 59 "Taliban Aim to Boost Afghan Security Forces, Anti-aircraft Capacity - Army Chief," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-aim-boost-afghan-security-forces-anti-aircraft-capacity-army-chief-2023-04-12/>, accessed April 12, 2023.
- 60 Ministry of National Defense, <https://twitter.com/MoDAfghanistan2/status/1685197043709468672>, accessed July 29, 2023.
- 61 "Afghanistan: Humanitarian Crises," International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, <https://go.ifrc.org/emergencies/5220>.
- 62 "UN official in Afghanistan says country 'at a tipping point'," Amu TV, <https://amu.tv/45431/>, accessed April 19, 2023.
- 63 "Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis," Center for Disaster Philanthropy, <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/afghanistan-humanitarian-crisis/>, accessed May 31, 2023.
- 64 "Afghanistan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for April 2023 and Projection for May - October 2023," Integrated Security Phase Classification, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156351/?iso3=AFG> accessed May 15, 2023.
- 65 "Afghanistan: Acute Malnutrition Situation for September-October 2022 and Projection for November 2022-April 2023", Integrated Security Phase Classification, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156185/?iso3=AFG>, accessed April 2023.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ramiz Alkabarov, <https://twitter.com/RamizAlakbarov/status/1648672686669791232>, accessed April 19, 2023; "Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis," Center for Disaster Philanthropy, <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/afghanistan-humanitarian-crisis/>, accessed May 31, 2023.
- 68 "Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update," OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-june-2023>, accessed June 2023.
- 69 "Budget for Afghanistan Aid Plan Revised Down to \$3.2 Billion," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/budget-afghanistan-aid-plan-revised-down-32-billion-2023-06-05/>, accessed June 5, 2023.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Munir Ahmed, "Afghan Taliban suspend all activities of Swedish aid groups over burning of Islam's holy book," Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/afghan-taliban-sweden-quran-burning-suspend-islam-8c0503b4aa04f3a43c6c2a7486ada678>, accessed July 13, 2023.

- 72 "Secretary-General Appoints Feridun Sinirlioğlu of Türkiye Special Coordinator, Independent Assessment Mandated by Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023)," United Nations, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sga2194.doc.htm>, accessed April 25, 2023.
- 73 "UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan: 2023 - 2025," United Nations, https://afghanistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/UNSF%20Afghanistan_formatted_20230629.pdf, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 74 Humanitarian Response, "Afghanistan WASH Cluster Dashboard (January - June 2022)," OCHA, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographic/afghanistan-wash-cluster-dashboard-january-june-2022>, accessed July 12, 2023.
- 75 ibid.
- 76 "IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023," International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/#:~:text=There%20were%2060.9%20million%20internal,million%20with%20conflict%20and%20violence>.
- 77 <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/afghanistan>, UNHCR, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 78 "Afghanistan Crisis update: Women and Girls in Displacement | Factsheet III - May 2023," UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100885>, accessed May 2023.
- 79 "Operational Data Portal," UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/afg?>, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 80 "Afghanistan Appeal," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/afghanistan>.
- 81 "USG Response to Complex Emergency," USAID, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/2023-05-10_USG_Afghanistan_Complex_Emergency_Program_Map.pdf, accessed May 10, 2023.
- 82 "January 30, 2023 Quarterly Report to Congress," Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2023-01-30qr-section3-security.pdf#page=5>, accessed June 30, 2023.
- 83 "What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction," Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, August 2021, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf>, accessed on July 29, 2023.
- 84 "EU: Afghanistan's Vulnerability to Climate Change Discussed at Conference," TOLO News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183273>, accessed May 7, 2023.
- 85 "Afghanistan: the EU's response to the crisis," European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/afghanistan-eu-response/#assistance>, accessed August 2023.
- 86 "EU announces 7.6 million euros in aid to Afghans," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/eu-announces-7-6-million-euros-in-aid-to-afghans/>, accessed July 20, 2023.
- 87 Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan, <https://twitter.com/JapaninAFG/status/1655141628712214529>, accessed May 7, 2023.
- 88 "The German commitment," Federal Ministry for Development Cooperation (BMZ), <https://www.bmz.de/de/laender/afghanistan>, accessed March 7, 2023.
- 89 "Germany offers scholarships for Afghan female students," Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/communication-publications/press/press_releases/deutschland-foerdert-stipendien-fuer-afghanische-studentinnen/, accessed September 28, 2023.
- 90 "Afghanistan: Taliban asked if there will be a place for women in new government," BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-58407424>, accessed September 1, 2021.
- 91 "The Taliban closes Afghan girls' schools hours after reopening," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/23/taliban-orders-girls-schools-shut-hours-after-reopening>, accessed March 23, 2022.

- 92 "Afghanistan school year starts without millions of teenage girls," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/23/afghanistan-school-year-starts-without-teenage-girls>, accessed June 23, 2023.
- 93 "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: May - June 2023," UNAMA, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf, accessed June 2023.
- 94 Sangar Paykar, <https://twitter.com/paykhar/status/1655667105776148497>, accessed May 9, 2023.
- 95 Sayed Slahuddin, <https://twitter.com/sayedsalahuddin/status/1648313392887627776>.
- 96 "Afghanistan – Complex Emergency," USAID, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023-05-10_USG_Afghanistan_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_2.pdf, accessed June 9, 2023.
- 97 Margaret Besheer, "Taliban Ban Afghan Women from Working for UN," Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-ban-afghan-women-from-working-for-un/7036166.html>, accessed April 04, 2023.
- 98 "Taliban Bans Restaurant Gardens For Families, Women In Herat," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-afghanistan-women-families-banned-gardens/32357294.html>, accessed April 10, 2023.
- 99 Nedaeybaloch, <https://twitter.com/nedaeybaloch/status/1657143195132633088>, accessed May 13, 2023.
- 100 "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: May-June 2023," UNAMA, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf, accessed June 2023.
- 101 Provisions of the decrees are: (1) Hairdressers should perform prayers inside their shops during prayer times. (2) Strict observance of hijab. (3) Material that does not have the ability to absorb water and prevents the passage of water to the skin of the body is prohibited (4) Salons should not overcharge their customers. (5) As much as possible, salons should use materials that do not harm ablation. (6) Women must perform ablation before beautification. (7) Don't use makeup that breaks the ablation or does not make the prayer valid. (8) Hairdressers should perform their work according to Sharia. (9) Cameras are forbidden inside the salons (10) Photos and videos inside beauty salons are disallowed. (11) Men are forbidden to enter a beauty salon. (12) There should be a place for ablation for women in every salon and its should be in good condition. (13) Hairdressers are not allowed to go to customers' house to provide make-up service.
- 102 "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: May-June 2023," UNAMA, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf, accessed June 2023.
- 103 "Taliban order Afghanistan's hair and beauty salons to shut," BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66094490>, accessed September 28, 2023.
- 104 "Afghanistan: Women protest against beauty salon closures," BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-66244408>, accessed September 28, 2023
- 105 "UNAMA Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May-June 2023," UNAMA <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/unama-human-rights-situation-afghanistan-may-june-2023-update-endarips>, accessed July 17, 2023.
- 106 "Taliban treatment of women could be 'gender apartheid': UN expert," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/20/taliban-treatment-of-women-could-be-gender-apartheid-un-expert>, accessed June 20, 2023.

- 107 "Report: The Taliban's War on Women: The Crime Against Humanity of Gender Persecution in Afghanistan," Amnesty International, https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/TALIBAN-WAR-ON-WOMEN_ICJ-AI-Afghanistan-Report.pdf, accessed May 26, 2023.
- 108 "Human rights violations: EU lists 18 individuals and five entities responsible for gender-based violence and linked to the Navalny and Kara-Murza cases", Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/07/20/human-rights-violations-eu-lists-18-individuals-and-five-entities-responsible-for-gender-based-violence-and-linked-to-the-navalny-and-kara-murza-cases/>, accessed 20 July 2023.
- 109 "CRC: 700,000 people have lost their jobs in Afghanistan in the past year," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/icrc-700000-people-have-lost-their-jobs-in-afghanistan-in-the-past-year/>, accessed November 4, 2022.
- 110 "ILO's Employment in Afghanistan in 2022: A rapid impact assessment Report," ILO, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_869949.pdf, accessed March 2023.
- 111 "Women, Business and the law," World Bank, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2023/snapshots/Afghanistan.pdf>, accessed 2023.
- 112 Mitra Majeedy, "World Bank: Afghanistan Low on 'Women, Business and Law Scores'", Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183827>, accessed June 18, 2023.
- 113 "Corporal Punishment and the Death Penalty in Afghanistan," UNAMA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/corporal-punishment-and-death-penalty-afghanistan-may-2023-endarips>, accessed May 31, 2023.
- 114 Ayaz Gul, "US Slams Taliban for Publicly Flogging Afghan Men, Women," Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-slams-taliban-for-publicly-flogging-afghan-men-and-women/6848755.html>, accessed November 24, 2023.
- 115 *ibid.*
- 116 *ibid.*
- 117 "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: May - June 2023," UNAMA, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf, accessed June 30, 2023.
- 118 "Latest UNAMA Report: The Taliban Continues Discriminatory and Unlawful Actions" <https://8am.media/eng/latest-unama-report-the-taliban-continues-discriminatory-and-unlawful-actions/> accessed on June 30, 2023.
- 119 Mujeeb Rahman Awrang Stanikzai, "PenPath Concerned by Prolonged Detention of Founder, Matiullah Wesa," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-184235>, accessed July 17, 2023.
- 120 UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett, https://twitter.com/SR_Afghanistan/status/1681335204235837440, accessed July 18, 2023.
- 121 "Future of Afghanistan's media in the balance as world marks World Press Freedom Day," UNAMA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/future-afghanistans-media-balance-world-marks-world-press-freedom-day>, accessed May 3, 2023.
- 122 "Afghanistan," Reporters without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/country/afghanistan>, accessed September 28, 2023.
- 123 "Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May- June 2023 Update," UNAMA, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf, accessed September 28, 2023

- 124 *"Afghanistan: Returning journalist detained and tortured,"* The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/media-release-afghanistan>, accessed June 23, 2023.
- 125 *"Concern grows for detained French-Afghan journalist Mortaza Behboudi,"* Le Monde, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/06/07/concern-grows-for-detained-french-afghan-journalist-mortaza-behboudi_6030338_19.html, accessed June 7, 2023.
- 126 *"AFJC welcomes the release of journalist Khairullah Parhar after 4 months in prison,"* Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC), <https://afjc.media/english/news/eastern-province-news/nangerhar/afjc-welcomes-the-release-of-journalist-khairullah-parhar-after-4-months-in-prison>, accessed May 4, 2023.
- 127 *"Afghanistan: Returning journalist detained and tortured,"* IFJ, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/media-release-afghanistan>, accessed June 23, 2023.
- 128 *"Afghan-American Journalist Ali Latifi Released After One Day in Detention,"* AFJC, <https://afjc.media/english/news/kabul-region/kabul/afghan-american-journalist-ali-latifi-released-after-24-hours-detention>, accessed June 4, 2021.
- 129 *"Future of Afghanistan's media in the balance as world marks World Press Freedom Day,"* UNAMA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/future-afghanistans-media-balance-world-marks-world-press-freedom-dy>, accessed May 3, 2023.
- 130 *"World Press Freedom Day marked Country wide by MoIC,"* Bakhtar News, <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/world-press-freedom-day-marked-country-wide-by-moic/>, accessed May 5, 2023.
- 131 *"Afghanistan Economic Monitor,"* World Bank, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fa0c4e858c221e38c01d92fc2f0df7b3-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-28-June-2023.pdf>, accessed June 28, 2023.
- 132 *ibid.*
- 133 Saed Shah, *"Taliban Prove to Be Formidable Tax Collectors, Putting Squeeze on Afghans,"* Wall Street Journal, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-prove-to-be-formidable-tax-collectors-putting-squeeze-on-afghans-e45e5a24?st=8yu4vf5b18g9p2i>, accessed April 16, 2023.
- 134 *ibid.*
- 135 *"Finance ministry reports 37% rise in revenues,"* Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/finance-ministry-reports-37-rise-in-revenues/#.ZDOF6y6ZjA8.twitter>, accessed April 10, 2023.
- 136 *"Finance ministry reports 37% rise in revenues,"* Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/finance-ministry-reports-37-rise-in-revenues/>, accessed April 10, 2023.
- 137 *ibid.*
- 138 *ibid.*
- 139 Noorullah Zazai, *"Afghanistan's exports touch \$2 billion for first time: Ministry,"* Pajhowk, <https://pajhwok.com/2023/03/28/afghanistans-exports-touch-2-billion-last-solar-year-ministry>, accessed March 28, 2023.
- 140 *"Afghanistan Economic Monitor,"* World Bank, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/556f10c93b28f880074208ad43583bf7-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-31-July-2023.pdf>, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 141 Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), <https://asycuda.org/en/usercountries-afghanistan/>, accessed July 30, 2023.
- 142 Deputy Prime Minister of Economic Affairs, https://twitter.com/FDPM_AFG/status/16587878867025920, accessed May 17, 2023.

- 143 Remarks made by Afghan Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad at an online seminar on August 15, 2023, for more see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GupKX5U80>, accessed August 15, 2023.
- 144 *ibid.*
- 145 *ibid.*
- 146 "Gochin company to invest \$10 bln to extract Afghanistan's lithium," The Kabul Times, <https://thekabultimes.com/gochin-company-to-invest-10-bln-to-extract-afghanistans-lithium/>, accessed April 16, 2023.
- 147 "Chinese Mining Company to Invest in Afghanistan," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-184095>, accessed July 8, 2023.
- 148 "Afghanistan signs oil extraction deal with Chinese company," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/6/afghanistan-signs-oil-extraction-deal-with-chinese-company>, accessed January 6, 2023.
- 149 Diksha Madhok, Ehsan Popalzai and Masoud Popalzai, "A Chinese company has signed an oil extraction deal with Afghanistan's Taliban," CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/06/business/%20china-company-taliban-oil-deal-hnk-intl/index.html>, accessed January 6, 2023.
- 150 "Afghanistan, Iran economic ties boosted: officials," Ariana News <https://www.ariananews.af/afghanistan-iran-economic-ties-boosted-officials/>, accessed April 7, 2023.
- 151 "Afghanistan Economic Monitor," World Bank, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/556f10c93b28f880074208ad43583bf7-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-31-July-2023.pdf>, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 152 "Agreements Worth \$45 Million Signed at Imam Abu Hanifa Expo," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-184323>, accessed July 23, 2023.
- 153 "Afghan girls deprived of education showcase handicrafts at Kabul exhibition," Salam Times, https://afghanistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_st/features/2023/05/24/feature-01, accessed May 24, 2023.
- 154 "Business Licenses for Women have increased: Ministry," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-182946>, accessed April 13, 2023,
- 155 "Women entrepreneurship on the rise under sure security," The Kabul Times, <https://thekabultimes.com/women-entrepreneurship-on-the-rise-under-sure-security/>, accessed May 18, 2023.
- 156 UNDP Afghanistan, <https://twitter.com/UNDPaf/status/1658723305564835840>, accessed May 17, 2023.
- 157 Bibi Amina Hakimi, "World Bank Releases Report on Afghan Economic Condition," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-181764>, accessed July, 2023.
- 158 "United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023–2025," United Nations, https://afghanistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/UNSF%20Afghanistan_formatted_20230629.pdf, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 159 "Afghanistan Economic Monitor," World Bank, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fa0c4e858c221e38c01d92fc2f0df7b3-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-28-June-2023.pdf>, accessed June 28, 2023.
- 160 *ibid.*
- 161 William Bryd, "Two Years into Taliban Rule, New Shocks Weaken Afghan Economy," United States Institute for Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/two-years-taliban-rule-new-shocks-weaken-afghan-economy>, accessed July 31, 2023.

- 162 Banafsha Binesh, "Afghanistan Ranks 150th on Corruption Perception Index," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-181854>, accessed July 11, 2022.
- 163 Remarks made by Afghan Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad at an online seminar on August 15, 2023, for more please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GupKX5U80>, accessed August 15, 2023.
- 164 William Byrd, "The Taliban's Successful Opium Ban is Bad for Afghans and the World," USIP, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/06/talibans-successful-opium-ban-bad-afghans-and-world>, accessed June 8, 2023.
- 165 Remarks made by Afghan Charge d'Affaires in Islamabad at CAMEA Webinar on August 15, 2023, for more please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GupKX5U80&t=880s>, accessed August 15, 2023.
- 166 US Special Representative Thoman West, <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1666474423040262145>, accessed June 7, 2023.
- 167 "United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan," United Nations, https://afghanistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/UNSF%20Afghanistan_formatted_20230629.pdf, accessed September 28, 2023.
- 168 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Congratulatory message by IEA Prime Minister Al-Haj Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund," https://twitter.com/MoFA_Afg/status/1662878963411058689, accessed May 28, 2023.
- 169 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "IEA-MoFA statement concerning developments in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/iea-mofa-statement-concerning-developments-in-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan/>, accessed 22, 2023.
- 170 Remarks made by Afghan Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad at an online seminar on August 15, 2023, for more see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GupKX5U80>, accessed August 15, 2023.
- 171 "Taliban want control of more Afghan diplomatic missions", Arab News, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2275761/world>, accessed March 26, 2023.
- 172 Remarks made by Afghan Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad at an online seminar on August 15, 2023, for more see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GupKX5U80> accessed August 15, 2023.
- 173 *ibid.*
- 174 "Hamas hosts festive Iftar Dinner for diplomats in Qatari Capital; guests include Ambassadors of Iran, Taliban, Turkey, Russia," Middle East Media Research Institute, <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-hosts-festive-iftar-dinner-diplomats-qatari-capital-guests-include-ambassadors-iran>, accessed April 25, 2023.
- 175 Kazakhstan agreed to accredit diplomats proposed by the new Afghan authorities, <https://vlast.kz/novosti/54801-kazahstan-soglasilsa-akkreditovat-diplomatov-predlozennyh-novymi-vlastami-afganistana.html>, accessed on April 17, 2023 (translated from Russian language).
- 176 "Participants of the 4th ministerial meeting conduct in-depth discussions on the Afghan issues," Asia-Plus, <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/world/20230414/participants-of-the-4th-ministerial-meeting-conduct-in-depth-discussions-on-the-afghan-issues>, accessed April 14, 2023.
- 177 Burc Eruygur, "4th ministerial meeting of Afghanistan's neighbors voices need for joint mechanism to provide humanitarian aid," Andalou Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/4th-ministerial-meeting-of-afghanistan-s-neighbors-voices-need-for-joint-mechanism-to-provide-humanitarian-aid/2871719>, accessed April 14, 2023.
- 178 Deputy Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1646866890180943875?s=20>, accessed April 14, 2023.

- 179 "Kazakhstan's Deputy PM Visits Kabul, Calls for Expansion of Trade Ties," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/kazakhstans-deputy-pm-visits-kabul-calls-for-expansion-of-trade-ties/>, accessed April 15, 2023.
- 180 Aida Haidar "Kazakhstan Delivers Humanitarian Aid to Afghan People," The Astana Times, <https://astanatimes.com/2023/04/kazakhstan-delivers-humanitarian-aid-to-afghan-people/>, accessed April 17, 2023.
- 181 "Moscow-based Afghanistan Ambassador Attends CSTO," The Kabul Times, <https://thekabultimes.com/moscow-based-afghanistan-ambassador-attends-csto/>, accessed April 30, 2023.
- 182 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Joint Statement of the 5th China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue," <https://mofa.gov.pk/joint-statement-of-the-5th-china-afghanistan-pakistan-foreign-ministers-dialogue/>, accessed May 8, 2023.
- 183 "Taliban Has Given Written Pledge To Counter Terrorism For First Time, Says China," Afghanistan International, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202305116058>, accessed May 11, 2023.
- 184 "General Syed Asim Munir, COAS, met Acting Afghan Minister for Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Muttaqi, at his office," Inter Services Public Relations <https://ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail?id=6530>, accessed July 25, 2023.
- 185 "Pakistan, Afghanistan Stress Need for Enhanced Regional Economic Integration," Radio Pakistan, <https://radio.gov.pk/07-05-2023/bilawal-muttaqi-discuss-matters-pertaining-to-bilateral-affairs>, accessed July 25, 2023; "Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to boost trade, lower border tensions," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/8/pakistan-afghanistan-agree-to-boost-trade-lower-border-tensions>, accessed May 8, 2023.
- 186 Bibi Amina Hakimi, "Acting Industry and Commerce Minister Meets Pakistani Traders," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/business-183313>, accessed May 10, 2023.
- 187 Jonathan Landay, "Exclusive: Qatar prime minister, Taliban chief hold secret Afghan talks," Al Jazeera, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-prime-minister-taliban-chief-hold-secret-afghan-talks-source-2023-05-31/>, accessed May 31, 2023.
- 188 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar, https://twitter.com/MofaQatar_EN/status/1657034017584152577, accessed May 12, 2023.
- 189 Embassy of Afghanistan in Beijing, https://twitter.com/beijing_embassy/status/1657362407990370307, accessed May 13, 2023.
- 190 Ministry of Interior Affairs, <https://twitter.com/MJalal0093/status/1660902040682233865>, accessed May 23, 2023.
- 191 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Today the Chinese Ambassador to Kabul Mr. Wang Yu called on IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-chinese-ambassador-to-kabul-mr-wang-yu-called-on-iea-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed May 23, 2023.
- 192 "What Caused Deadly Afghan-Iran Border Clashes? What Happens Next?" Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/30/what-caused-deadly-afghan-iran-border-clashes-what-happens-next>, accessed May 30, 2023.
- 193 "Iran's Interior Minister Claims 'Irresponsible' Low-Ranking Taliban Officials Dismissed," Afghanistan International. <https://www.afintl.com/en/202305317664>, accessed May 31, 2023.
- 194 "We Want Iranian Officials to Align Water Demands with Treaty': Muttaqi," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183468>, accessed May 22, 2023.
- 195 "Iran-Afghanistan Water Dispute and Regional Implications," Modern Diplomacy, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/14/iran-afghanistan-water-dispute-and-regional-implications/>, accessed June 14, 2023.

- 196 *"Taliban rejects Iran claim leaders of ISIL sent to Afghanistan,"* Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/23/taliban-rejects-claims-that-leaders-of-isil-sent-to-afghanistan/>, accessed July 23, 2023.
- 197 Abdul Qahar Balkhi, <https://twitter.com/QaharBalkhi/status/1682614535528624129>, accessed July 22, 2023.
- 198 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *"Today the Chargé d'Affaires of the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul Mr. Obaidurrahman Nizamani, called on IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi,"* <https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-charge-daffaires-of-the-pakistani-embassy-in-kabul-mr-obaidurrahman-nizamani-called-on-iea-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed May 27, 2023.
- 199 *"Pakistan releases 66 Afghan prisoners in goodwill gesture,"* Daily Pakistan, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/25-May-2023/pakistan-releases-66-afghan-prisoners-in-goodwill-gesture/>, accessed May 25, 2023.
- 200 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *"Today, the Pakistani Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Mr. ObaidurRahman Nizamani called on IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi,"* <https://mfa.gov.af/en/3today-the-pakistani-embassy-charge-daffaires-mr-obaidurrahman-nizamani-called-on-iea-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed May 22, 2023; Mitra Majeedy, *"290 Afghan Prisoners in Pakistan May Be Released Soon: Consulate,"* Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183565>, accessed May 29, 2023.
- 201 Abdul Qahar Balkhi, <https://twitter.com/QaharBalkhi/status/1681890637925302272>, accessed July 20, 2023.
- 202 Abdul Qahar Balkhi, <https://twitter.com/QaharBalkhi/status/1686034498985529344>, accessed July 31, 2023; *"Meeting of U.S. Officials with Taliban Representatives,"* United States Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/meeting-of-u-s-officials-with-taliban-representatives/>, accessed July 31, 2023.
- 203 *"Muttaqi Urges Envoys of Several Countries to Resume Activity in Afghanistan,"* Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-184465>, accessed August 1, 2023.
- 204 Islamuddin Sajid, *"Russia assures Afghan Taliban of continued cooperation,"* Andalou Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/russia-assures-afghan-taliban-of-continued-cooperation/2786082>, accessed January 12, 2023.
- 205 Turkey urges engagement with Taliban after talks with group, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/14/taliban-delegation-in-ankara-for-talks-with-turkish-officials>, accessed on April 25, 2023.
- 206 Mitra Majeedy, *"Islamic Emirate: Turkey Working to Bridge Kabul And Intl Community,"* Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183106>, accessed April 25, 2023.
- 207 *"Deputy Refugee Minister Meets Turkish Ambassador in Kabul,"* Bakhtar News Agency, <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/deputy-refugee-minister-meets-turkish-ambassador-in-kabul/>, accessed July 30, 2023.
- 208 *"Kajaki Dam power plant project officially inaugurated,"* Arian News, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.ariananews.af/kajaki-dam-power-plant-project-officially-inaugurated/>.
- 209 *"The Disappearing Thuluth Calligraphy Revivified in Afghanistan,"* Yunus Emre Institute, <https://www.yee.org.tr/en/news/disappearing-thuluth-calligraphy-revivified-afghanistan>, accessed July 28, 2023.
- 210 Ezel Sahinkaya, *"Turkey's Engagement With Afghanistan Has Grown Since Taliban Takeover,"* Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-s-engagement-with-afghanistan-has-grown-since-taliban-takeover-6699437.html>, accessed August 9, 2023.
- 211 Fidel Rahmati, *"20 Ex-Afghan Military Students Return to Afghanistan from India,"* Khaama News, <https://www.khaama.com/20-ex-afghan-military-students-return-to-afghanistan-from-india/>, accessed February 9, 2023.

- 212 "Air Corridor Reopens between Afghanistan and India," Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/aircorridor-reopens-between-afghanistan-and-india/>, accessed October 31, 2022.
- 213 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1677196468455604225>, accessed July 7, 2023.
- 214 Abdal Qahar Balkhi, <https://twitter.com/QaharBalkhi/status/1656302330046820356>, accessed May 10, 2023.
- 215 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Norwegian Chargé d'Affaires for Afghanistan, Mr. Paul Klouman Bekken, called on the Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/norwegian-charge-daffaires-for-afghanistan-mr-paul-klouman-bekken-called-on-the-afghan-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed May 22, 2023.
- 216 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Today the Chargé d'Affaires of the Kingdom of Norway for Afghanistan, Mr. Paul Klouman Bekken, called on IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-charge-daffaires-of-the-kingdom-of-norway-for-afghanistan-mr-paul-klouman-bekken-called-on-iea-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed July 11, 2023.
- 217 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Today the Chargé d'Affaires of the Norwegian Embassy for Afghanistan, Mr. Paul Klouman Bekken, called on IEA Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-charge-daffaires-of-the-norwegian-embassy-for-afghanistan-mr-paul-klouman-bekken-called-on-iea-deputy-foreign-minister-sher-mohammad-abbas-stanekzai/>, accessed July 19, 2023.
- 218 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1676626741777899549>, accessed July 5, 2023.
- 219 Mohammad Farshad Daryosh, "Muttaqi meets with Charge d'Affaires of UK Mission in Afghanistan," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-184073>, accessed July 6, 2023.
- 220 "IEA welcomes British MP's call to reopen UK's embassy in Kabul," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/iea-welcomes-british-mps-call-to-reopen-uks-embassy-in-kabul/>, accessed July 18, 2023.
- 221 James Tapsfield, "Commons Defence Committee tables unprecedented no-confidence motion in 'f***ing idiot' chair Tobias Ellwood after he posted a 'Taliban propaganda' video of Afghanistan visit and issued groveling apology," Daily Mail, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12318819/Commons-Defence-Committee-Tobias-Ellwood-Taliban-propaganda-video-Afghan-visit-apology.html>, accessed July 20, 2023.
- 222 "Tory MP Ellwood quits Commons post after Afghanistan row," BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66797794>, accessed September 21, 2023.
- 223 Jan Egeland, https://twitter.com/NRC_Egeland/status/1661996045742505984, accessed May 26, 2023.
- 224 "Muttaqi meets UN's special envoy in Kabul," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/muttaqi-meets-uns-special-envoy-in-kabul/>, accessed June 1, 2023.
- 225 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Today, the Special Coordinator, Independent Assessor of the UN, Mr. Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu called on IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi," <https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-special-coordinator-independent-assessor-of-the-un-mr-feridun-hadi-sinirlioglu-called-on-iea-foreign-minister-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/>, accessed June 24.
- 226 "Sinirlioğlu meets with two acting ministers in Kabul," Tolo News, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183896>, accessed June 23, 2023.

- 227 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1683486607469424641>, accessed July 24, 2023.
- 228 "Foreign Ministry holds coordination meeting with UN Agencies in Kabul," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/foreign-ministry-holds-coordination-meeting-with-un-agencies-in-kabul/>, accessed July 27, 2023.
- 229 "Living conditions remain dire for the Afghan people," World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/22/world-bank-survey-living-conditionsremain-dire-for-the-afghan-people>, accessed December 9, 2022.
- 230 "Afghanistan," <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/700>, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, accessed July 29, 2023.
- 231 Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Raid Kills 8 Afghan Opposition Fighters," Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-raid-kills-8-afghan-opposition-fighters-/7046058.html>, accessed April 11, 2023.
- 232 "Thirty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015)," UN Security Council, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/189/74/PDF/N2318974.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed July 25, 2023.
- 233 "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service Report, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45122>, accessed June 21, 2023.
- 234 "Thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015)," UN Security Council, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/N2303891.pdf>, accessed February 13, 2023.
- 235 "Taliban rejects Iran claim leaders of ISIL sent to Afghanistan," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/23/taliban-rejects-claims-that-leaders-of-isil-sent-to-afghanistan>, accessed July 23, 2023.
- 236 "Thirty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015)," UN Security Council, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/189/74/PDF/N2318974.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed July 25, 2023.
- 237 *ibid.*
- 238 Anwar Iqbal, "TTP looking to merge with Al Qaeda to expand influence," Dawn, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1767395>, accessed July 29, 2023.
- 239 Kamran Yousaf, "UNSC report endorses Pakistan's stance on TTP," Dawn, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2428272/unsc-report-endorses-pakistans-stance-on-ttp>, July 28, 2023.
- 240 Ayaz Gul, "China Asks Afghanistan's Taliban to Address Terrorism Worries," Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-asks-afghanistan-s-taliban-to-address-neighbors-terrorism-worries/7081901.html>, accessed May 6, 2023.
- 241 Anwar Iqbal, "TTP looking to merge with Al Qaeda to expand influence," Dawn, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1767395>, accessed July 29, 2023.
- 242 *ibid.*
- 243 Kamran Yousaf, "UNSC report endorses Pakistan's stance on TTP," Express Tribune, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2428272/unsc-report-endorses-pakistans-stance-on-ttp>, accessed July 28, 2023.
- 244 "Impact of Improvised Explosive Devices on Civilians in Afghanistan," UNAMA, <https://unama.unmissions.org/impact-improvised-explosive-devices-civilians-afghanistan>, accessed June 27, 2023.
- 245 *ibid.*
- 246 *ibid.*

Illustration Credits

- Page no. 13: IPC, License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO, 30-01-2023, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156185/>
- Page no. 15: Beneficiaries of WASH, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographic/afghanistan-wash-cluster-dashboard-january-june-2022>
- Page no. 16: Internally Displaced People for 2023, USAID, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/2023-05-10_USG_Afghanistan_Complex_Emergency_Program_Map.pdf
- Page no. 23: Trade Developments, World Bank, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fa0c4e858c221e38c01d92fc2f0df7b3-0310012023/original/Afghanistan_Economic-Monitor-28-June-2023.pdf
- Page no. 26: Labour Market Conditions, World Bank, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fa0c4e858c221e38c01d92fc2f0df7b3-0310012023/original/Afghanistan_Economic-Monitor-28-June-2023.pdf
- Page no. 37: Civilian Casualties, UNAMA, <https://unama.unmissions.org/file/21205/download?token=-TeeWpAe#:~:text=IED%20attacks%20targeting%20the%20de,de%20facto%20authorities%20and%20bystanders>

Author: Amina Khan

Imprint


Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Pakistan Office
1st Floor, 66-W, Junaid Plaza, Jinnah Avenue,
Blue Area, P.O Box 1289, Islamabad, Pakistan

Responsibility for content and editing:

Dr. Niels Hegewisch | Country Director
Hamayoun Khan | Program Advisor

Contact/Order:

 info.pakistan@fes.de

 +92 51 2803391-4

 pakistan.fes.de

 @FESPakistanOffice

 @FES_Pak

Printed by: FES-Pakistan

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Commercial use of media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

ISBN: 978-969-9675-63-8

© 2023

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany.

FES Islamabad Office was established in 1990, though the cooperation with national institutions of Pakistan had already commenced during the middle of the 1980s. Based on its commitment to the basic values of social democracy including peace and social justice, FES-Pakistan formed partnerships to carry out activities for promoting dialogue involving state institutions, political parties, social partners, civil society actors, opinion leaders and citizens.