

PEACE AND SECURITY

# AFGHANISTAN MONITOR

Volume 5

**Amina Khan**  
December 2023



Since August 2021, the Taliban govern as Afghanistan's de facto authorities. The constitution is suspended, minorities are underrepresented, human and women rights continue to be violated.



Economic policies focus on infrastructure and regional connectivity with support from regional countries. The economy remains weak. Unemployment and poverty are high. Tax collection and foreign exchange rates have improved.



Afghanistan continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis, with 30 million people in need of assistance. Natural disasters and expelled refugees from neighbouring countries have further deteriorated the situation.



## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Political Situation .....	2
Ongoing Infrastructure Projects .....	4
Humanitarian Situation .....	5
Human Rights and Women's Rights .....	8
Economic Situation .....	10
Foreign Policy .....	15
Security Situation .....	19
Opinion Corner .....	20
Addressing Afghanistan's Economic and Security Problems .....	20
The Afghanistan Affairs: A Japanese Perspective .....	24
Digital Freedom: Paving the Way for Transforming and Empowering Afghan Women .....	28
Endnotes .....	31



## Acronyms

AFJC	Afghanistan Journalists Center
AFN	Afghani (national currency)
ETIM	Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Agency
NPPF	National Public Protection Force
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme



## Introduction

The Afghanistan Monitor, a regular publication by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan, extensively covers Afghanistan's political, economic, security and humanitarian landscape since the Taliban's ascendancy. This edition focuses specifically on post-October 2023 developments till December 2023 and features expert analyses.

Since August 15, 2021, the state of affairs in Afghanistan has been constantly evolving as the Taliban assumed power as the de-facto authorities. Despite being in power for over two years, uncertainties regarding the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan remain, particularly over issues such as governance, inclusivity, human and women's rights, and counter-terrorism assurances -- matters that the Taliban had agreed to in the Doha agreement. However, considering the past two years, there is a nuanced understanding of the Taliban's governing style which is characterized by a combination of authoritarian policies and selective pragmatism.

In their diplomatic efforts, the Taliban now actively seek integration into the international community, a notable departure from their isolation in the late 1990s. While the Taliban have seemingly solidified their position as the de facto political authority in

Afghanistan, their formal recognition from the international community remains elusive. They are still facing challenges in achieving political and social cohesion vis-à-vis inclusivity and representation of ethnic minorities.

Since assuming power, the Taliban have asserted improvements in some areas, such as a stabilized Afghan economy through revenue generation and customs collection, leading to modest economic progress and a decrease in corruption.

However, a concerning aspect casting a shadow on the Taliban's claimed achievements is the ongoing violation of women's rights. Restrictions on the education and jobs of women are not only violating their fundamental rights but also dampening the international community's willingness to engage with the Taliban, hindering the work of non-governmental organisations and UN agencies addressing the severe humanitarian crisis.

Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has faced formidable humanitarian challenges arising from prolonged conflict, economic collapse, internal displacement, widespread poverty, food scarcity, and limited healthcare access. Natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the situation, significantly escalating humanitarian needs nationwide. As a consequence, Afghanistan remains one of the

world's most severe humanitarian disasters, with approximately two-thirds of its population experiencing food insecurity. According to the UN, various Afghan and international stakeholders and UN bodies across the globe have shown serious concerns related to the state of governance and the protection of rights under the de facto Taliban rule and the potential security threats emanating from Afghanistan.

While conflict was the primary driver of past humanitarian needs, 2023 has seen different key drivers, including drought, earthquakes and climate change. Even though the initial crisis was triggered by the loss of international aid and financial assistance, the more recent situation has further worsened due to changing environment patterns coupled with the Taliban's increasingly oppressive policies and the return of Afghan refugees from different regional countries.

Despite certain improvements in the security situation within Afghanistan, the growing threat from transnational terrorist groups continues to pose a significant risk to the stability of both Afghanistan and the wider region. While these groups present challenges for the Taliban, Afghanistan's neighboring countries are equally concerned about the threats emanating from them. Despite the Taliban's assurances of preventing

Afghan soil from becoming a safe haven for international terrorist organizations, the upswing in attacks by these groups against neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, has raised doubts about the Taliban's commitment to addressing such threats.

In summary, the Taliban are still in the process of transitioning from insurgency to administration. Their aspirations for international recognition as the legitimate representatives of Afghanistan continue to be undermined by their reluctance to uphold commitments regarding human and women's rights, and their compliance with international norms, and counter-terrorism assurances.

## Political Situation

Since August 2021, the Taliban have been operating as Afghanistan's de facto authority, by relying on the approach heavily influenced by their specific interpretation of Sharia law. Initially, there was uncertainty about the style of governance the group would adopt, but the current interim arrangement mirrors aspects of the governance system employed during the Taliban's previous rule in the 1990s, i.e., the presence of a supreme leader, a prime minister, and the establishment of relevant ministries – the group mainly maintained the



ministries established by the previous government.<sup>1</sup> Currently, interim Taliban ministers are heading 19 Afghan ministries.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after assuming power, the Taliban opted to suspend the prior Afghan constitution of 2004, which had served as the governing framework before their takeover. Since then, the Taliban have neither announced nor implemented a new constitution to replace it. Even though the Taliban authorities are working on the making of a new constitution, the absence of any administrative framework raises uncertainties about the future governance structure and legal framework in Afghanistan. Taliban spokesperson, Zabiullah Mujahid, said that work is being done on the laws of the country as the matter of establishment of council is under discussion.<sup>3</sup> According to the Taliban, their interim government has set certain priorities, i.e., the improvement of governance and the economic conditions of Afghans, before reaching a point where the group can prepare the ground for a new constitution.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Taliban ministers have been holding meetings with groups of local stakeholders, including some who are known for their critical views on the Taliban's policies.<sup>5</sup>

In the past months, the Taliban have not made any substantial changes in their ministerial appointments;

however, they have given the additional charge of deputy prime minister to the Afghan foreign minister, Amir Muttaqi, in a bid to regulate the internal as well as external policies of their self-named 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' (IEA). Previously, Maulvi Abdul Kabir was serving as the Political Deputy Prime Minister of the IEA. Reportedly, for the last three months, due to his illness, he has not been participating in the meetings or attending the foreign delegations - his last meeting was with the former Turkish ambassador on September 4, 2023.<sup>6</sup>

The inclusion of minority and ethnic groups in the current Afghan interim setup remains a mutual demand of the international community and many Afghans. Being a multicultural country, the inclusion of all communities in the nation's governance structures is imperative to the social and political stability of the country. However, the absence of various ethnic, political and linguistic sections of the society in the policy making process has shrunk the space for political engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

## Ongoing Infrastructure Projects

Since taking control, the Taliban have been actively exploring opportunities to attract and generate economic and infrastructure development, through both domestic initiatives and foreign investments (see earlier issues of Afghanistan Monitor).

According to the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Mohammad Yonis Akhund, there are currently nearly 50 ongoing infrastructure projects across Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> These projects aim at energy production, infrastructure building and construction projects.

Of all these projects, the Qosh Tepa project holds most prominence due to the nature of its construction itself.<sup>9</sup> The Qosh Tepa Canal is under construction in northern Afghanistan in a bid to divert water from the Amu Darya River to different regions of the country. It is estimated that the canal will be 285 km long (more than 100 km of canal has already been excavated)<sup>10</sup> and would convert 550,000 hectares of desert into farmland. Moreover, to ensure the safety of the project, in November, the Taliban Ministry of Interior announced the establishment of a special unit that will work under the framework of the National Public

Protection Force (NPPF) and consist of 200 personnel -- the strength of which can be increased as the construction of the canal progresses.<sup>11</sup>

However, on September 15, 2023, the Uzbek President, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, declared concerns over the construction of the Qosh Tepa irrigation canal in Afghanistan. While talking at a meeting of the Council of Heads of the Founder States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in Tajikistan, he noted that the construction of the canal could “radically change the water regime and balance” in Central Asia. Therefore, he called for the establishment of a joint working group “to study all aspects of the construction” of the Qosh Tepa canal as well as “its impact on the water regime of the Amu Darya with the involvement of research institutes.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, to further meet the country’s demand of water scarcity, in September 2023, the Taliban announced the construction of dams in 142 districts across 13 Afghan provinces.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, they have also started the construction of a five kilometer long wall in Spin Boldak to prevent the destruction of agricultural lands from water due to climate change in the area. Until the end of August 2023, flash floods and heavy rains have destroyed nearly 3,000 acres of agricultural lands in the country.<sup>14</sup> The project would take

nearly six months to complete with an estimated cost of more than 75 million Afghani (1.07 million USD).<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, as an effort for regional connectivity, on October 8, 2023, the Taliban deputy Chief Minister, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, announced the inauguration of the "Kabul-Shanghai Air Corridor."<sup>16</sup> As of now, no information is available if the air corridor is operational and if the announcement was made in coordination with the Chinese side. Originally, the air corridor was established during the Ghani government in 2018, named the Afghanistan-China Air Corridor, and facilitated the export of nearly 20 tons of goods from Afghanistan to China on a daily basis.<sup>17</sup> Later, in November 2023, the Taliban also started the construction of a road from Badakhshan to China that would be completed by January or February 2024.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, on October 9, the arrival ceremony of a container train carrying 22 containers of automobile spare parts was held. The train arrived in Afghanistan from China along the multimodal transport corridor "China – Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan – Afghanistan." Earlier, 42 containers with similar cargo were delivered along the same route.<sup>19</sup> The route is important for land-locked Afghanistan as it could minimize the financially damaging barriers faced by exporters at the customs

areas of neighboring countries. Moreover, the route can also provide Afghanistan with access to regional markets in a more efficient manner resulting in an increased export base for Afghan products.

## Humanitarian Situation

With a population of 43 million, Afghanistan is facing one of the most substantial and severe humanitarian crises globally.<sup>20</sup> Over the last two decades, the country has been confronted with numerous challenges arising from a combination of conflict, economic instability, internal displacement, widespread poverty, food shortages, and limited healthcare access. Moreover, the recent and compounding factors of natural disasters due to climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly escalated humanitarian needs throughout Afghanistan. According to the latest reporting by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 29.2 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 15.3 million face acute food insecurity.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the revised Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 (HRP) suggests that from June onwards, the humanitarian partners have decided to reach out to 22.3 million people in Afghanistan (until December 2023) and therefore require 2.26 billion USD in new funds

for the period between June and December.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, since August 2021, while the “Afghan economy has stabilized at a new, very low equilibrium at the macro level”, welfare conditions within the country remain severe.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, ongoing levels of international aid to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis are insufficient to provide for all the Afghans who are in desperate need of assistance. Citing humanitarian concerns, the UN has anticipated further reductions in aid to the Afghan people due to the restrictions imposed by the donor countries on development and technical assistance in response to the Taliban’s treatment of women and girls.<sup>24</sup>

Such situations are anticipated to increase due to the return of Afghan refugees from different regional countries. In October, the interim Pakistan government gave an ultimatum to irregular Afghan refugees - including 1.7 million Afghan refugees lacking documentation - to leave the country by October 31, 2023.<sup>25</sup> Some of them have lived for decades in Pakistan or have even been born there. Among other reasons, the Pakistani authorities tied the deteriorating security situation in the country to the involvement of Afghan refugees in terrorist attacks.<sup>26</sup> According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

by November 17, over 350,000 Afghans have returned since the announcement, with a large number of people arriving at border crossings “in need of emergency assistance.”<sup>27</sup> Responding to the announcement, the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that the decision of sending back the refugees “could bring further trouble to the region.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the Taliban also termed the decision as “unacceptable,” and called for reconsideration, as they believe that regional countries “should tolerate them.”<sup>29</sup> The UNHCR further predicted that the abrupt return of Afghans just before the winter season could worsen Afghanistan’s humanitarian situation along with a possible increase in the competition of resources.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, an inter-agency appeal by several UN bodies has asked for 51.9 million USD in humanitarian assistance.<sup>31</sup>

However, to mitigate the effects of the crisis due to returning Afghans, the Taliban Supreme Leader, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, issued a decree to establish a high commission to resolve the problems of returning refugees. The commission led by Abdul Salam Hanafi, the deputy prime minister for administrative affairs, consists of 31 senior officials, 12 committees, and a secretariat, having an aim of providing facilities ranging from temporary accommodation to health necessities.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, to provide legal assistance to those

returning to Afghanistan, the Taliban authorities established a joint committee of legal experts, chaired by the deputy head of the General Directorate of Legislation of the Ministry of Justice. One of the main purposes of the committee is to defend property and other rights of Afghans living abroad.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, to facilitate the refugees, the Taliban have allocated 2 billion Afghanis (27.4 million USD) to provide shelter, food, medical and mobile requirements.<sup>34</sup> The Taliban Ministry of Higher Education assured that these people would be provided with education as well as work opportunities in the country.<sup>35</sup>

However, analysts believe that many returning Afghans would face numerous challenges in Afghanistan due to Taliban policies and the approaching winter. Before the announcement of the deportation deadline, there were nearly 200 Afghan journalists residing in Pakistan who were forced to flee the Taliban's crackdown on media.<sup>36</sup> Returning to Afghanistan will put their lives in danger. Raising their concerns about the possible challenges in the winter, UNHCR and IOM have issued a joint statement saying the refugees' "arrivals back to Afghanistan are adding to the worsening humanitarian crisis," as women and children could lose their lives if left without any support.<sup>37</sup>

To facilitate the repatriation of refugees, Pakistan's authorities opened three new border crossings in the southwestern province of Balochistan, complementing the two previously functional border outlets at Chaman and Torkham. After the opening of new border crossings, the number of Afghans returning home rose to 15,000 per day.<sup>38</sup> It is to be noted that Pakistan is not the only country that is repatriating Afghan refugees. There is a regional trend as Iran and Türkiye are also sending refugees back to Afghanistan – the latter had sent back nearly 4,000 illegal Afghan migrants to Afghanistan by mid-November.<sup>39</sup>

Natural disasters have also worsened the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. A series of deadly earthquakes between October 7 and 15, 2023, have struck the country which resulted in the killing of 2,000-4,000 people in the affected areas – nearly 90 percent of those were women or children.<sup>40</sup> According to OCHA, the quakes directly affected 382 villages, including 48,347 families and more than 275,000 people. The substantial devastation has also resulted in the complete destruction of 10,002 houses. In addition to these, 20,430 houses were severely damaged and 17,588 houses moderately damaged. Similarly, of the affected population, almost 37,139 families had to live in makeshift tents, while 8,801 families resorted to tent

shelters as a temporary solution and another 1,268 families were living in informal settlements.<sup>41</sup>

The report noted that 175,000 people in nine districts were directly affected due to significant damage to schools, water systems and healthcare facilities. Apart from the aid packages from different countries, the UN agencies provided 900 metric tons of mixed food commodities to more than 12,000 households along with the distribution of more than 22,000 USD to over 10,000 affected households.<sup>42</sup>

Later, in November 2023, the Revised Herat Earthquake Response Plan<sup>43</sup> was released to target nearly 275,000 people, with a specific focus on those with severely damaged homes.<sup>44</sup> The Plan estimated the need of nearly 173 million USD to “address the critical and time-sensitive needs of the most vulnerable people throughout the winter season” in the affected areas and to provide early support from October 2023 till March 2024.<sup>45</sup>

## Human Rights and Women’s Rights

Despite repeated warnings from the international community, the Taliban have failed to deliver on issues concerning women’s and human rights. The group had pledged that it would respect women’s rights within

the context of Islamic law and would endorse women’s access to education and participation in public life.<sup>46</sup> However, the Taliban quickly deviated from these commitments after coming into power. By November 9, 2023, the Taliban have issued almost 80 edicts, of which 54 edicts focus on women and girls in relation to their education, employment, travel etc.<sup>47</sup> The culminating effect of these edicts is the limited ability of women and girls to engage in society and their inability to access basic services.<sup>48</sup>

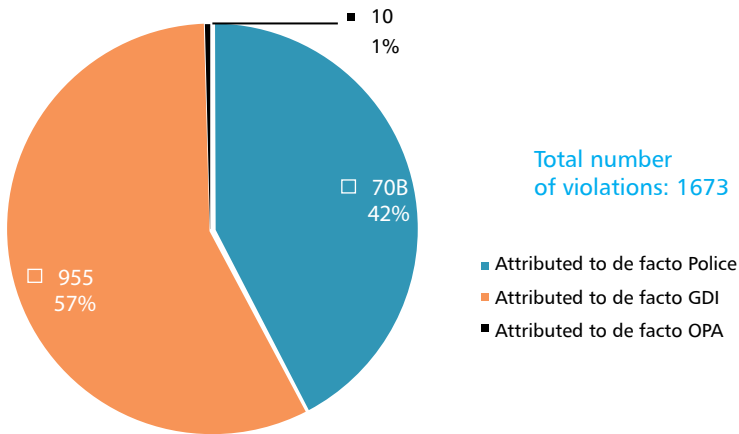
Hence, a report published by the Georgetown Institute for Peace, Women and Security, concerning women’s inclusion, justice and security in society, ranked Afghanistan at last out of 177 countries. The report also points out that unlike global trends, where financial inclusion of women is rising, less than five percent of Afghan women have a personal bank account.<sup>49</sup>

On November 16, 2023, the first-ever international women empowerment exhibition in Afghanistan, the Khadijat-ul-Kubra Empowerment Exhibition, took place in Kabul. Organized by the Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the exhibition continued for seven days, and it gathered women from across the country who displayed their handicrafts in 850 booths.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, on October 26, the Taliban released Matiullah Wesa, an Afghan women

rights activist, after spending 215 days in prison. Since the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul in August 2021, Wesa’s local non-profit organization, PenPath, had been at the forefront of advocating women’s rights in the country.<sup>51</sup>

Including the violations of women rights, the overall profile of human rights at the hands of the Taliban in Afghanistan is not showing any improvement. In September 2023, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published a report on the treatment of detainees in Afghanistan which documented human rights violations from January 1 to July 31, 2023. In the six-month period covered by the report, there

were 1,673 cases of human rights violations involving the arrest and subsequent detention of individuals, of which 11 percent involved women, across 29 of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Of the total cases, 955 instances (57 percent) were attributed to the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), whereas, 708 instances (42 percent) were related to the Ministry of Interior (MOI).<sup>52</sup> The Taliban denied the findings of the report saying that “UNAMA has always published propaganda,” and “misused its position other than recognizing its duty and resolving problems in Afghanistan,” as the reports “are not in line with the facts on the ground in Afghanistan.”<sup>53</sup>



**Instances of violations by Institutions**

Source: UNAMA<sup>54</sup>

On October 22, 2023, the Taliban appointed a representative for Hindu and Sikh minority groups in Kabul as a member of the Council of

Representatives of the 22 municipality districts of Kabul. According to the officials, the appointment of the representative would help in the

process of returning seized properties to these minorities in the capital.<sup>55</sup> The appointment was framed by the Taliban as an effort to safeguard the rights of minorities in Afghanistan.

Since coming into power, the Taliban have limited the freedom of media in Afghanistan's media houses. According to the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC), from March 21 to November 17, 2023, the Taliban issued 13 directives to the Afghan media under the country's media laws.<sup>56</sup> The Taliban media policies provide local officials powers to control media activities by officially forbidding media houses from publishing selective information.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, those who go against these provisions could face arrest or judicial charges. The AFJC also reported that during the first six months of the current solar year, it documented 75 incidents of the violation of the free media: 33 arrests and 42 instances of threats against journalists.<sup>58</sup>

On October 23, 2023, the spokesman for the Afghan Supreme Court, Rahim Rashid, said that from July till September, all the courts of the country resolved 44,496 different cases and this would prove that the judicial system is working properly. During the same period, the judicial department also issued nearly 44,000 different documents, i.e. marriage certificates, across the country.<sup>59</sup>

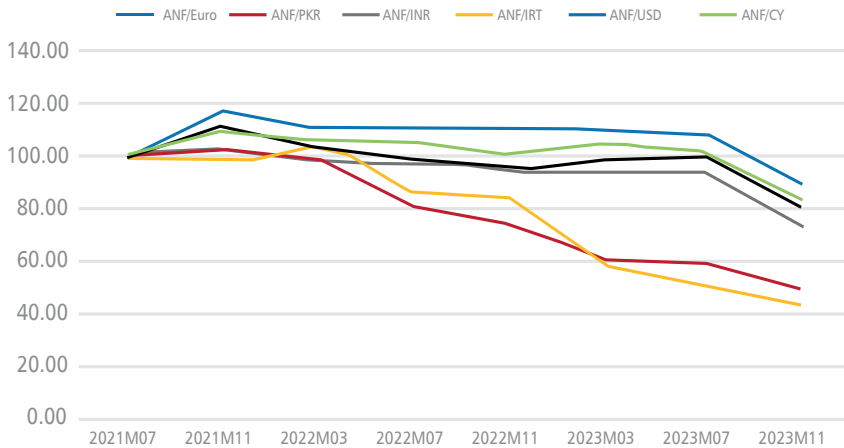
## Economic Situation

Since taking control, the Taliban have shifted their attention to the economy, and recent economic indicators suggest that they have exceeded expectations in maintaining economic stability. This has been achieved through efforts to curb corruption, increase revenue collection, enforce strict control over dollar exports, and provide support to domestic products.

### Currency

For the 2023 September quarter, the Afghan currency, the Afghani (AFN), was declared as the third best performing currency across the globe with a 9 percent gain against the US dollar. Similarly, the Afghani gained 14 percent on a year-on-year basis.<sup>60</sup> The World Bank noted that apart from the rising trade deficit, the Afghan currency is appreciating since the beginning of 2023. From January 1 to November 27, the Afghani showed a 27.8 percent rise against the US dollar, 22.4 percent against the euro, 23.8 percent against the Chinese yuan, 71.4 percent against the Iranian toman, 44.5 percent against the Pakistani rupee, and 28.9 percent against the Indian rupee.<sup>61</sup> On November 27, 2023, the Afghani traded at 69.7 against the US dollar, marking a 23.5 percent appreciation since August 15, 2021.<sup>62</sup>





**Afghani (AFN) appreciation against different currencies**

Source: World Bank<sup>63</sup>

Economic analysts attribute the upward trajectory of the Afghan currency to various factors: a strict ban on the export of US dollar; restrictions on the use of the US dollar or Pakistani rupee for intra-Afghan transactions; and the huge inflow of foreign humanitarian aid in the country.

However, a World Bank report noted that the Afghan economy would only hover around no-growth territory this year. This is mainly due to a 6.5 percent fall in the services, which constitute nearly 45 percent of the country's GDP. Similarly, the Afghan agriculture sector, which contributes nearly 36 percent to the total GDP, declined by 6.6 percent in 2022 due to climate change and lack of resources.<sup>64</sup> Given this, the World Bank's country director for Afghanistan, Melinda

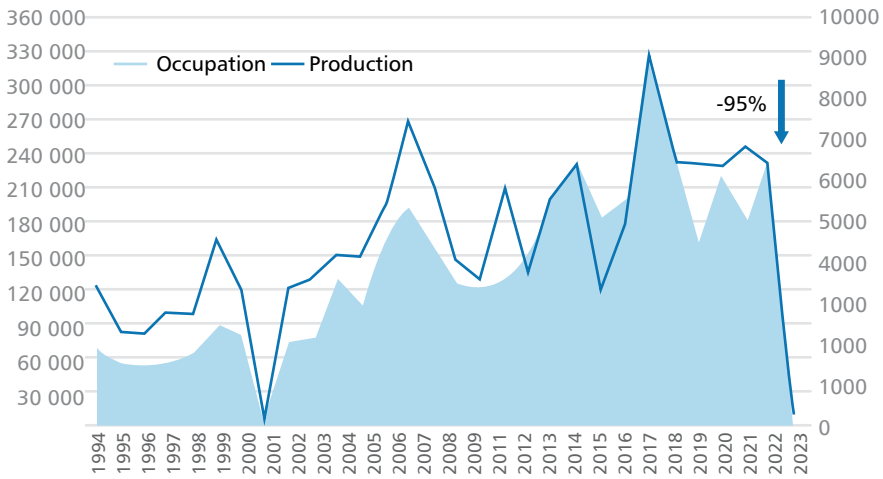
Good, termed the Afghan economy as "fragile" due to its dependency on external support amid a weak private sector.<sup>65</sup> Subsequently, analyzing the report, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) noted that the Afghan economy is close to "the precipice" due to its inability to create jobs, manage the pace of growing population (Afghanistan's population is expected to grow by 2.7 percent in 2023) and provide basic facilities.<sup>66</sup>

## Poppy cultivation

Earlier, one of the major factors for the stability of the Afghan economy was the production and selling of opium and other drugs. However, in April 2022, the Taliban imposed a ban on the production of opium in Afghanistan. As a result, in November

2023, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) noted that the production of opium in the country has been reduced by 95 percent -- from 233,000 hectares to just 10,800 hectares in 2023. Similarly, its supply has dropped from

6,200 tons in 2022 to just 333 tons in 2023. Subsequently, the total farmers' income dependent on opium harvesting has dropped by 92 percent from US\$1,360 million in 2022 to US\$110 million in 2023.<sup>67</sup>



Opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan (1994-2023)

Source: UNODC<sup>68</sup>

To find an alternative to opium production in the country, farmers have started to cultivate wheat instead. Even in Farah, Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar - provinces with 74 percent of the total opium production in 2022 - almost 68 percent of these fields are now being used for wheat cultivation and cereal production.<sup>69</sup> Such steps by the Taliban were praised internationally, as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, acknowledged the results of the Taliban's policies vis-a-vis reduction of

poppy cultivation.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the Taliban officials note that they have arrested nearly 10,500 drug-dealers in the last year and sent them to the Sharia courts.<sup>71</sup>

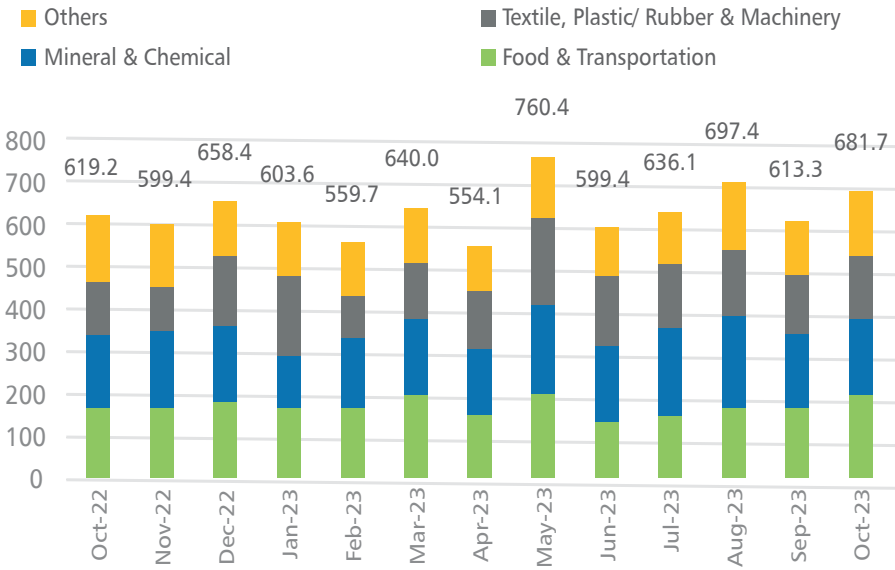
Afghanistan is considered as a capital of drug abusers. Of the total Afghan population of over 40 million, nearly 4 million Afghans are drug addicts.<sup>72</sup> However, since the return of the Taliban into power, those people are being rounded up and taken to several rehabilitation centers.<sup>73</sup> The Afghan department of counter-

narcotics in the interior ministry noted that it has collected nearly 100,000 drug abusers since August 2021.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, given the rising number of drug addicts, the ministry aims at establishing 10 more supporting centers across the country.<sup>75</sup> The need is mainly driven from the declining international support and underpaid unskilled staff at different rehabilitation centers.<sup>76</sup> The UN reported that mostly such centers are facing food scarcity with a limited supply of nutrients, thus adding to the suffering of the already struggling segment of Afghan society.

## Trade

Since August 2021, the Afghan economy is in transition, with the Taliban's de-facto government trying to increase revenue collection; increase the market value of the Afghani; and increase trade with its neighbors and regional countries. However, the data from multiple sources shows that regardless of the appreciation of the Afghani, Afghanistan is facing a rise in its trade deficit.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, the periodic opening and closing of borders with its neighboring countries has led to volatility in the overall trade and economic profile of Afghanistan.

According to the World Bank, from January till September 2023, the Afghan imports stood at 5.7 billion USD.<sup>78</sup> However, in October 2023, Afghanistan's imports reached 6.3 billion USD - a significant 25 percent increase compared to the same period from the previous year.<sup>79</sup> This growth in imports saw an increase in almost all the categories, such as food, textiles, and minerals, with growth rates of 9 percent, 18 percent, and 20 percent, respectively. As compared to September 2023, the Afghan imports increased by 11 percent in October 2023 due to a temporary closure of borders. In October, Afghanistan's imports from Pakistan, Iran and the UAE increased by 28 percent, 22 percent and 16 percent respectively. Country-wise, Iran remained the most significant exporter (21 percent), followed by Pakistan (18 percent), China (17 percent) and the UAE (14 percent). During these months, the Afghan trade deficit increased by 4.8 billion USD as compared to 3.5 billion USD for the same period in the last year.<sup>80</sup>

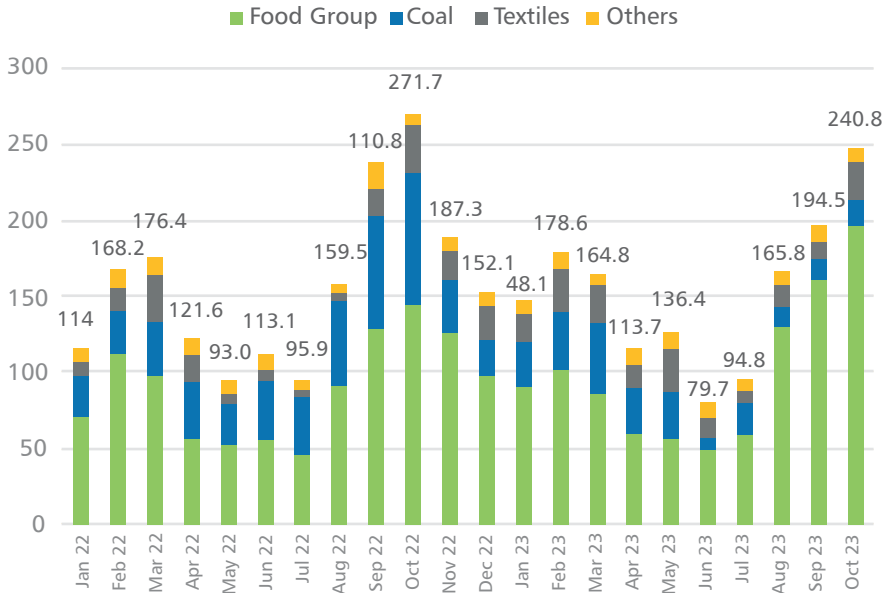


**Afghanistan’s imports (US\$ millions): 2022 - 2023**

Source: World Bank<sup>81</sup>

The World Bank also noted a slight decrease in Afghanistan’s exports from January till September which totaled at 1.3 billion USD.<sup>82</sup> However, in October 2023, the total Afghan export further decreased as it reached 1.5 billion USD - a 2 percent decrease compared to the exports in the previous year for the same period. This slight drop in the export figure is mainly due to a 43 percent fall in the country’s coal exports. However, the Afghan food and textile sectors saw an increase in their exports by 13 percent and 31 percent respectively. For Afghanistan, Pakistan is the largest export destination for Afghan

products (51 percent), which is followed by India (30 percent). However, from January till October 2023, Afghanistan’s overall exports to Pakistan decreased by 19 percent; whereas the country’s food exports to India increased by 49 percent, thus contributing to the overall increase in the Afghan food exports. The World Bank report noted that despite the overall negative export growth from January till October, the Afghan exports have experienced a 49 percent rise from August till October 2023.<sup>83</sup>



**Afghanistan's exports (US\$ millions): 2022 - 2023**

Source: World Bank<sup>84</sup>

To expand the horizon of Afghanistan's trade, the Taliban are engaging with different countries to discuss and explore economic options. On November 14, 2023, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan held the first trilateral commerce ministers' meeting to explore potential avenues of economic cooperation and foreign direct investment. During the meeting, the countries founded a trilateral trade working group to discuss matters related to "customs, logistics, trade promotion, tariffs, TIR [customs transit] procedures, etc."<sup>85</sup> The meeting was co-chaired by the economic ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the deputy prime minister of Uzbekistan.<sup>86</sup>

## Foreign Policy

Despite lacking formal international recognition, the Taliban persist in viewing themselves as equal and active members of the international community, endeavoring to conduct foreign affairs in a manner similar to recognized states. Since assuming power, the Taliban have engaged with neighboring countries and the broader international community through various means. This involvement encompasses interactions with representatives of diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, hosting incoming foreign delegations, international travel, and participation in various

regional and global interactions. The Taliban have also taken control of Afghanistan's diplomatic missions in at least 18 countries.<sup>87</sup> After the Taliban takeover, many Afghan embassies remained loyal to the previous government and the Taliban have struggled to take control of Afghanistan's diplomatic missions abroad.<sup>88</sup> On October 7, 2023, the Afghan embassy in Spain announced its willingness to interact with the Taliban government in Afghanistan. In a statement on its Facebook page, the embassy reiterated that it represents "Afghanistan and its people," and therefore, aims to "provide better consular services for citizens of the country residing in Spain."<sup>89</sup>

On September 13, 2023, China appointed its ambassador to Afghanistan - the first such foreign diplomatic appointment since the fall of Kabul in August 2021. The ambassador, Zhao Sheng, presented his diplomatic credentials to the Taliban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Muttaqi, who termed the appointment as a "significant message".<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in October 2023, Türkiye's new ambassador to Afghanistan, Cenk Ünal, said that his country is ready to cooperate with the people of Afghanistan in various areas. Speaking to an audience at a ceremony regarding reforms in Afghanistan's university entrance process, he said that Türkiye wants to see Afghanistan increase its multifaceted capacity.<sup>91</sup>

In October 2023, the Taliban suspended their consular services in London and Vienna for an indefinite period, accusing the governments of these countries of a lack of transparency and an inability to cooperate with the de facto Afghan authorities.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, on November 24, 2023, the Afghan embassy in India announced the permanent suspension of its mission citing the inability of the diplomatic staff appointed by the Ghani government to receive visa extension from the Indian authorities as well as due to the mounting pressure from both the Taliban and the Indian government.<sup>93</sup> However, the Taliban Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, reiterated that the Afghan embassy in India would reopen soon with Taliban appointed staff as the Afghan consulates in Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad remain active to provide services with staff loyal to the Taliban government.<sup>94</sup>

Apart from manifesting active diplomacy, the Taliban are commenting on international politics by issuing formal statements. During the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh the Taliban supported Azerbaijan. On September 16, 2023, the Taliban's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid said that for Afghanistan the matter of territorial integrity holds utmost importance, and therefore, "it is also important for Azerbaijan to the same extent."<sup>95</sup> He subsequently

showed the group's willingness to open Azerbaijan's diplomatic mission in Afghanistan and vice versa. Similarly, on September 20, 2023, the Taliban welcomed the efforts of Saudi Arabia and Oman to materialize a permanent ceasefire in Yemen.<sup>96</sup> After the Hamas terror attack on October 7 and the subsequent Israeli offensive in Gaza, the Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has carefully monitored the recent events in the Gaza Strip" and reiterated its support for Palestinians and their right to have an independent state.<sup>97</sup>

The Taliban also demand inclusion in international conferences. In the run-up to the COP28 forum in Dubai, the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) issued a statement regretting the lack of an invitation. A Taliban government spokesperson attributed the Taliban's absence at the conference to "political factors."<sup>98</sup>

Other than giving statements about regional and global issues, the Taliban are also receiving or participating in various diplomatic meetings. On September 21, 2023, the Taliban Foreign minister, Amir Muttaqi, met Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, during his second trip to Kabul.<sup>99</sup> On September 25, Muttaqi met the members of the rightwing Austrian Freedom Party and appreciated their close observation of the "real situation" in Afghanistan.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover he also stressed upon the need of providing necessary consular services to deal with the problems of the Afghans in Vienna.<sup>101</sup>

On September 29, 2023, the Taliban foreign minister attended the fifth meeting of the Moscow Format in the Russian city of Kazan. During his welcome remarks, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said that the format is an "open and universal platform" to serve as a common ground for Afghanistan's neighbors to develop relations with the Taliban.<sup>102</sup> Subsequently, he expected that the Taliban would consider the reconfiguration of the government system in Afghanistan based on inclusive principles. On the sidelines of the Format, the Taliban Foreign minister also met various dignitaries such as the adviser to the Russian President Edelgeriev Ruslan Said-Khusainovich,<sup>103</sup> Saudi Arabia's Prince Al-Jawad bin Turki Al Saud, and the President of the Russian Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Menikhanov.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, on October 3, 2023, the Taliban Foreign Minister led a delegation to China to attend the third Trans-Himalaya Forum for International Cooperation that was held in Tibet from 4 to 5 October.<sup>105</sup> The Afghan minister also met his counterparts from China and Pakistan on the sidelines of the forum.<sup>106</sup> The Forum did not produce any tangible outcomes.

On November 4, 2023, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, led a 30-member economic delegation to Iran. During his visit, he met a number of Iranian officials including Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian, and others. During his meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mullah Baradar gave "a comprehensive overview" of the bilateral trade between the two countries. The Iranian Foreign Minister pledged to work for an increased bilateral trade and establish joint initiative committees.<sup>107</sup> Matters concerning regional developments and the increasing number of Afghan refugees in Iran were also discussed.<sup>108</sup>

In November 2023, the Taliban Minister of Commerce, Haji Nooruddin Azizi, visited Pakistan and met its Foreign Minister, Jalil Abbas Jilani.<sup>109</sup> During the meeting, matters related to mutual trade and the return of Afghan refugees were discussed. The Taliban minister also asked for the release of nearly 3,000 Afghan-bound containers stranded at Karachi port.<sup>110</sup> Pakistan's authorities have argued that the duty and tax-free transit of containers was causing a loss of a million dollars to their traders. However, after the rigorous

negotiations, the two countries reached an agreement to permit the transit of the stranded containers in Karachi port to Afghanistan.<sup>111</sup> For Afghanistan, Pakistan's Karachi port provides one of the easiest and cheapest transit routes for its trade with the world.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, under the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), the two countries have an arrangement that Afghan transit products can use the ports of Karachi and Gwadar.<sup>113</sup>

On October 12, 2023, Flydubai, a Dubai-based air carrier, announced the resumption of double-daily flights operations to Kabul International Airport from November 15, 2023.<sup>114</sup> After the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, Flydubai will be the first international carrier to offer regular commercial flights to Kabul. As of now, the Afghan airlines Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines are operating limited services from Kabul to several destinations, i.e., Dubai, Moscow, Islamabad and Istanbul.<sup>115</sup>

On November 16, 2023, the Taliban head of the Food and Medicine Authority, Abdul Bari Omar, conducted an unauthorized visit to Germany to address an audience of Afghan expatriates in a mosque in Cologne.<sup>116</sup> The German Minister of Interior took to X (formerly Twitter) to condemn the visit as "completely unacceptable." Later, the Taliban



Foreign Ministry reiterated that it was not informed about the visit of Omar.<sup>117</sup>

## Security Situation

Since the Taliban assumed control of the government, there has been a significant improvement in the security situation within the country. This positive shift can be largely attributed to the cessation of insurgency activities previously carried out by the now-ruling group.

However, the presence of transnational terrorist organizations, particularly the Daesh regional affiliate the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), continues to present significant challenges not only for Afghanistan but also for the broader region.<sup>118</sup>

In November 2023, a UN Security Council report noted the acknowledgement by various stakeholders regarding the Taliban's actions against global terrorism, especially against ISKP.<sup>119</sup> However, there are still many member states that have their concerns regarding the presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan.<sup>120</sup> Reports from these states suggest that a significant number of TTP fighters are freely moving across and seeking shelter in

Afghanistan and carrying out violence against Pakistan.<sup>121</sup> The report by the UN noted that the Taliban have shown a limited response against such groups, as the Taliban have taken countermeasures which are not sufficient enough to address the concerns. However, the member states have noted that in the past two years, border engagements between Afghanistan and its neighbors have become more professional such as the foundation of bilateral inter-agency working groups.<sup>122</sup>

To enhance the spectrum of Taliban security forces, on October 21, 2023, almost 110 Afghan soldiers completed their three-month special forces training from the Centre of Police Special Units that falls under the Taliban Ministry of Interior. It is to be noted that a series of these special trainings are being carried out across Afghanistan.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, on October 24, almost 500 soldiers graduated from the 205 Al Badr Corps under the Ministry of National Defence after receiving three months of military training.<sup>124</sup>

## Opinion Corner

### Addressing Afghanistan's Economic and Security Problems

#### Mohammad Yousef Pashtun

The Taliban administration during the past 18 months in Afghanistan has created infinite problems for the Afghans. The Taliban administration is the source of all kinds of political, economic, social, and administrative problems. This so-called administration had resulted in the total destruction of the Afghan economy, human resources, governance structure and interest among the public. The result of all these negative developments is poverty and the need for humanitarian aid.

This article aims to establish the fundamental reasons behind all these major problems that Afghanistan is facing currently and to pinpoint some solutions that will guide us towards a detailed policy and strategy for a new and effective working national plan to counter these issues successfully.

After August 15, 2021, the nation faced a myriad of challenges, each posing a significant threat to its stability and prosperity. However, in the midst of turmoil, a glimmer of

hope emerged as the people sought to find solutions to their problems. This is the story of how Afghanistan can embark on a journey to tackle its major issues and build a new and effective national plan to secure a brighter future.

#### The Journey Begins: Identifying the Major Problems

As the tale unfolds, we encounter Afghanistan grappling with major problems, each demanding urgent attention. Foremost among these challenges is the lack of national security, stability, and trust among the local population. The people of Afghanistan yearned for a government they could trust, and the Taliban, now in power, need to demonstrate that they could govern inclusively and collaboratively.

Another obstacle that hindered the country's progress was its underutilized economic potential. With a population of over 40 million, Afghanistan possesses abundant resources that could pave the way for revenue generation and development projects. However, corruption and brain drain had plagued the nation for years, preventing the effective utilization of its economic potential and undermining its growth.

## **A Turning Point: The Taliban's Return to Power**

As the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, their swift takeover marked the end of two decades of efforts by the United States and its allies to establish stability and democracy in the country. The Taliban's return brought apprehension, as the world observed their rule closely.

One of the most concerning aspects of the Taliban's governance is their stance on freedom of speech, human rights, women's education and a democratic governance system. During their previous rule in the 1990s, girls were banned from attending school, and women faced severe restrictions on education. Sadly, despite the passing years, the Taliban showed no signs of reversing this policy, sparking fears of a lost generation of Afghan girls deprived of their right to education.

## **Challenges Faced by the New Government**

With time, the Taliban struggled to establish a functioning government administration. Inexperienced officials and a lack of technocrats hampered their efforts, leading to slow progress and uncertainty. Afghanistan faced pressing issues such as a collapsing economy, widespread poverty, and a

deteriorating security situation, which further complicated the government's tasks.

As the new government under the Taliban sought to establish itself, it faced a series of formidable challenges that tested its ability to govern effectively. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of experienced officials and technocrats in key positions. Many of the leaders in the new administration are former fighters with limited experience in governance, leaving them ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of running a modern state. This dearth of expertise hindered the government's decision-making processes and contributed to a sense of uncertainty and stagnation.

One of the most pressing and daunting issues confronting the Taliban-led government is the state of Afghanistan's economy. Over the years of conflict and political instability, the economy had been in a state of disarray, and the recent Taliban takeover exacerbated the situation. The country is facing a collapsing economy, characterized by a rapid depreciation of the Afghan currency and a decrease in foreign reserves. Prior to the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan was already grappling with economic challenges, including sluggish economic growth, high inflation rates, and low revenue collection. The ongoing conflict further disrupted

trade and commerce, deterred foreign investments, and cast doubt on the prospects of international aid and financial support.

Widespread poverty is yet another critical issue that demands immediate attention. Poverty levels in Afghanistan are alarmingly high, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women and youth. The Taliban government inherited the responsibility of alleviating poverty and ensuring social welfare, but the scale of the problem posed immense difficulties. As they sought to address poverty, they faced the additional challenge of a collapsing economy, making it even more challenging to implement poverty alleviation programs effectively.

The security situation in Afghanistan is also precarious, presenting a grave concern for the new government. The country is grappling with a deteriorating security environment, with internal conflicts and the resurgence of terrorist groups causing instability and fear among the population. The Taliban's efforts to establish security and stability are further complicated by the need to deal with domestic and international terrorist groups that continue to carry out attacks within Afghanistan's borders. Addressing these security threats demands a delicate balance of military action, intelligence operations, and diplomatic engagement.

Amidst these daunting challenges, the Taliban government faces the critical task of earning the trust and support of the Afghan people. Their legitimacy and ability to govern effectively were intrinsically tied to their capacity to gain the confidence of the populace. This requires transparency, accountability, and meaningful engagement with local communities across the country. Winning the trust of the people is essential for the success of the government's policies and initiatives.

As the days passed and the government grappled with these multifaceted challenges, the Afghan people held their breath, hoping for a brighter future. The international community, too, closely watches the developments in Afghanistan, offering support and aid while monitoring the government's actions and commitments.

The journey ahead for the new government is uncertain, and the road to stability and prosperity is fraught with complexities. However, the people of Afghanistan remain resilient, holding on to the hope that their leaders would rise to the occasion and chart a path towards a more secure and prosperous future for their nation.

## **A Call for Change: Solutions and Recommendations**

However, amidst the challenges, the people of Afghanistan and the international community recognize the need for change. Solutions and recommendations can emerge, offering a glimmer of hope for a better future. To address the lack of trust and security, the government needed to invest in its security forces and intelligence capabilities. Improved coordination, communication, and economic sustainability could bring Afghans together to fight against terrorist groups and support the government's efforts.

Empowering women and prioritizing their rights and education is deemed crucial for the nation's progress. Policies that ensure equal access to education and employment opportunities are essential, alongside financial support for girls' education and scholarships for university studies.

The government's focus on economic development should be paramount. Investment in infrastructure projects and incentives for local businesses could drive economic growth and attract foreign investments. Addressing corruption is equally crucial, demanding anti-corruption policies and accountability for those engaged in corrupt practices.

To improve governance, attracting and retaining experienced professionals is vital. Competitive salaries, training programs, and mentorship opportunities could strengthen the government's capacity to provide quality services.

Building trust with local communities requires transparency, accountability, and involvement in decision-making processes. Access to basic services such as healthcare and education in rural areas would further reinforce trust.

## **The Path Forward: A Nation's Resolve**

As our story reaches its conclusion, the people of Afghanistan stand united, determined to overcome their challenges and build a brighter future. Trust and unity serve as their foundation as they navigate the path towards progress and prosperity. The tale of Afghanistan's journey continues, with hope and determination lighting the way to a better tomorrow.

*The author has served as Senior Adviser to the Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani*

## The Afghanistan Affairs: A Japanese Perspective

**Kenta Aoki**

### Introduction

Within the author's limited knowledge, the Afghan people generally view Japan as a friendly country, and have often voiced sympathy for Japan, saying that Japan and Afghanistan gained independence in the same year. This view is evident in various aspects such as no Japanese involvement in combat operations on the ground, over 6.9 billion USD in civil assistance in the past 20 years, and a historical bond between the two countries. Whatever the truth may be, one could say that Japan's standpoint on Afghanistan is somewhat unique among major donor countries.

On August 15, 2023, the Taliban returned to power, and the Afghan society underwent a drastic change. While this article was being written, the Taliban was in effective control of the entire country, dominating most of the cabinet seats. The World Food Programme estimates that 15.3 million people out of the 41.7 million total population of Afghanistan face acute food insecurity. Women and girls' access to education and work is severely restricted. However, as per reports,

the security situation has improved, the number of homeless persons has decreased, and poppy cultivation has almost been eliminated. Since the real situation in Afghanistan is difficult to grasp, careful analysis from multiple perspectives is imperative.

How does Japan currently perceive Afghanistan? What approach has Japan adopted and implemented? Most importantly, what role does Japan play in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan? To answer these questions, this essay sheds light on the Japanese perspective of Afghanistan.

### Japan and Afghanistan: Overview and Recent Response

Japan and Afghanistan are both Asian countries; Afghanistan is located at the heart of Asia, whereas Japan is a part of East Asia. In ancient times, both countries were connected by the Silk Road. The existence of artifacts made of Lapis Lazuli in Japan, a gemstone which used to be extracted only in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, illustrates that goods and commodities were traded between the two countries. The bond through Buddhism is also notable. Most Japanese are Buddhists, while in some parts of Afghanistan, the historical remains of Buddhism still exist.

In the modern period, the first Japanese person to visit Afghanistan was Hisao Tani, the then Japanese Military Attaché to India. He traveled to make a courtesy visit to King Amanullah Khan in 1922. In 1930, Japan and Afghanistan signed the Treaty of Amity, and in 1933, the Afghan Legation in Japan was established, which was later raised to the status of an embassy. In 1934, Japan established its Legation in Afghanistan. Until the 1970s, exchange between the royal families was active. However, bilateral relations between the two countries were difficult during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), the civil war period (1992-1994), and the first period of Taliban control (1994-2001).

The 9/11 attack changed everything. There were 24 Japanese victims during the attack. Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven against terrorism has become one of Japan's top national security concerns. In addition, Japan's involvement in Afghanistan has been shaped considerably by the US-Japan Security Alliance. From 2001 onwards, Japan has hosted the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan twice (2002, 2012), and the Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Afghanistan exceeds 6.9 billion USD since 2001, making Japan the second-largest donor to Afghanistan. Through such assistance, schools, hospitals,

roads, and airports were built, and people's livelihoods improved. In the political sphere, Doshisha University, a private university in Japan, invited representatives from the Taliban, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and Hizb-e Islami, and hosted an international conference on peace and reconciliation in Japan in June 2012.

The legacy of Dr Tetsu Nakamura is also noteworthy. Dr Nakamura began his work in Peshawar, Pakistan, in the early 1980s. Upon assignment, he established the Peace Medical Service in September 1983. Initially, Dr Nakamura treated patients with leprosy. However, in 1991, he began to develop a medical practice to assist Afghans. Dr Nakamura believed insufficient clean drinking water was an underlying cause of all diseases, and in 2003, he began the construction of irrigation canals to restore rural villages in the midst of a drought. An irrigation water project was initiated to obtain water from the Kunar River, a raging river, and supply it to agricultural land. He was awarded the Medal of Honour for his services by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in 2018. In December 2019, Dr Nakamura was killed by unknown militants. This shocking news from Afghanistan caused an uproar in Japan. Many Afghans conveyed their condolences and sympathy to Dr Nakamura's family and the Japanese people. His legacy is still remembered vividly.

In September 2021, Japan temporarily relocated its embassy in Afghanistan to Doha, Qatar, owing to security threats. In September 2022, Japan resumed part of its embassy functions and continued its engagement with the de facto authorities in Afghanistan, while Western countries kept their embassies shut.

### **Key Messages to the de facto Authorities**

Japan regularly communicates with the de facto authorities. In these meetings, the de facto authorities are requested to (1) establish a politically and ethnically inclusive government; (2) ensure women's access to education, work, and social life; and (3) comply with the Doha Agreement (counterterrorism commitment). These key messages are similar to those expressed by the United Nations and other Western countries.

However, it is important to mention that Japan's position differs slightly, because it does not impose values originating from the West. This attitude was proven at the G7 Summit. Japan hosted the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May 2023, but there was no mention of 'democracy' in the Preamble of the Summit's communique. It certainly states that '(we) uphold and reinforce the free and open international order based on the rule of law' and 'promote universal human rights,

gender equality and human dignity'; however, there is no mention of an ideal political system or favorable values. According to the author's communication with a reliable source, the communique deliberately did not touch on values which could have been controversial at a critical time when the world was deeply divided by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Partly, this seems a reflection of failure in 'post-conflict' reconstruction efforts in the Middle Eastern countries.

Western media often portrays Afghanistan's situation from this perspective. It goes without saying that the Taliban's disregard for human rights and oppression of women cannot be tolerated. That said, it is also true that democratization led by the West did not succeed in Afghanistan, and eventually Afghanistan's future should be decided by the Afghans themselves. The isolation of the Taliban would result in more catastrophic consequences, although there is no way to recognise the Taliban with its current status. Given these difficult circumstances, Japan's approach seems practical and moderate.

### **Way Forward**

Japan's policy toward Afghanistan is shaped largely by economic and historic motives, and less by geopolitical motives. Now that Japan's traditional ally, the US, is reluctant to engage



deeply in Afghanistan affairs, Japan is obliged to seek its own approach. So far, Japan's continued assistance in areas of education, nutrition, health, shelter, humanitarian assistance, etc., is largely welcomed by the de facto authorities and the Afghan public.

Japan could play a role in organizing conferences for reconciliation as part of its confidence-building measures. Afghanistan is a multiethnic country with political, social, and cultural diversity. It is imperative to achieve national reconciliation, possibly via third-party mediation, as well as to protect socially vulnerable people such as Panjishiris and Hazaras. It is equally important to remedy the economic crises by creating job opportunities for the younger generation to be able to make their own living. Finally, preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists remains an important agenda. Japan, in partnership with major donors and regional countries, can contribute to attaining lasting peace in Afghanistan. The Afghan people, who have suffered war for almost 50 years, deserve a peaceful life.

*The author is an Executive Research Fellow at the Middle East Institute of Japan (MEIJ)*

## Digital Freedom: Paving the Way for Transforming and Empowering Afghan Women

### Zahra Nazari

Amidst the turmoil that followed the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the situation for Afghan women has become increasingly dire. Although Afghanistan has been no stranger to adversity, its women have borne the brunt of deeply ingrained gender inequalities. They face severe restrictions on education and employment, and their fundamental rights are being violated. The sudden closure of schools and universities and the exclusion of women from the workforce have left many with limited options for personal and professional growth.

According to the UN report, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) is 0.655, ranking Afghanistan 157 out of 162 countries, making it one of the least favorable countries for women, and the World Economic Forum reports paint a bleak picture of women's status in Afghanistan, ranking it among the lowest regarding gender equality and the gender divide. However, amid the turmoil, a ray of hope emerges from an unexpected source: the digital world. As the country grapples

with political upheavals and social challenges, the digital world presents an opportunity to empower Afghan women, foster their rights, amplify their voices on a global stage, and transcend the barriers imposed upon them in the real world.

During the two decades of the Republic (2001–2021), Afghanistan has taken the initial steps toward digitalization despite significant regional challenges. Remarkable milestones in telecom and connectivity have been achieved, and 85 percent of Afghanistan is covered by 3G and 4G networks, and over 10 million (1/3 of the population) have access to the Internet and smart devices. However, Afghanistan was unsuccessful regarding women's inclusion in the race toward digitization. More than 90 percent of women are digitally illiterate, have no access to the Internet, and the country faces the most significant gender digital divide globally. The access divide and use/skills gap are contributing to the digital gender divide and are causing isolation, a lack of communication, creating barriers to studies and education, highlighting social differences, and intensifying gender discrimination. Low literacy rates, social constraints, affordability, and a lack of supportive legislation were the most influential reasons women have limited access to the Internet and digital environment.

To unlock the full potential of the digital world for Afghan women, we must address the gender digital divide. Efforts to narrow the gender digital divide were seen as positive achievements in the past. However, in the current Taliban era, they have become an absolute necessity and a crucial means of supporting Afghan women. In an era where information is a currency of its own, digital literacy and internet access are essential tools for Afghan women to break free from the chains of ignorance and exclusion. The power of social media and online connectivity has been evident in igniting global social movements. For Afghan women, this virtual realm has become a sanctuary for collective mobilization and virtual activism. The availability of online courses, educational resources, and skill development opportunities opens doors that were previously bolted shut. Afghan women can enhance their employability and financial independence by learning new skills and acquiring knowledge, empowering them to challenge societal norms and expectations.

Consequently, initiatives focused on digital literacy and access must be prioritized to ensure no woman is left behind. Bridging the digital gap will not only empower Afghan women but also contribute to the overall development and progress of the country. Furthermore, we must work in tandem with real-world

efforts to secure women's rights. Digital activism should complement on-the-ground initiatives, bolstering the fight for gender equality, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. The digital space should act as a catalyst, not a substitute, for tangible change. Sustainable progress in women's rights demands a holistic approach that intertwines the virtual and physical realms.

The digital world is a double-edged sword. It can empower and liberate but also perpetuate harm and discrimination. It is essential to harness its potential responsibly and ethically, ensuring that Afghan women's rights are protected and advanced. By leveraging technology to challenge stereotypes and advocate for gender equality, we pave the way for a brighter and more equitable future for all Afghan women. Bridging this gap requires collective efforts from both national and international actors to ensure that the digital age benefits all women, regardless of their geographic location.

As Afghanistan navigates uncertain times, the global community must unite to empower Afghan women through the digital revolution. We sow seeds of hope and progress by supporting initiatives that provide digital literacy, enhance online security, and bridge the digital divide. Only by empowering women can we

build a stronger and more resilient Afghanistan. The digital world holds immense power to liberate, educate, and connect. As we champion this realm as a beacon of hope for Afghan women's rights, we must remain vigilant and advocate for their safety, dignity, and right to participate in shaping their nation's future. The digital revolution may have begun, but its true potential lies in our collective determination to make it a force for positive change in the lives of Afghan women.

The digital world holds immense promise for advancing the rights and aspirations of Afghan women. Through virtual activism, education, and connectivity, Afghan women can strengthen their position and inspire change in the real world. By bridging the digital divide and safeguarding their digital presence, we can create a safer, more inclusive environment that empowers them to excel and thrive. Together, let us seize the power of the digital age to foster a more equitable and just society for all.

The author is a Post Doc. researcher – Machine Learning & A.I. University of Alberta

## Endnotes

- 1 See Afghanistan Monitor vol. 4, p. 3-9, for more detail: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/20679.pdf>.
- 2 Fatema Adeeb, "Two Years Passed, Interim Govt Yet to Be Official," ToloNews. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185142>, accessed September 17, 2023.
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 Mitra Majeedy, "Work on Constitution Underway: Mujahid," ToloNews. <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186103>, accessed on November 19, 2023.
- 5 Obaidullah Baheer, <https://twitter.com/ObaidullaBaheer/status/1707411309547946149>, accessed September 29, 2023.
- 6 "Spokesperson: Muttaqi Temporarily to Assume Some Duties of Deputy PM," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186196>, accessed November 25, 2023.
- 7 UNGA and UNSC "Kazan Declaration of the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan," UNSC <https://undocs.org/en/A/78/517>, accessed October 9, 2023.
- 8 "Ministry: Road Between Badakhshan and China Will Be Completed in 3 Months," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/provincial-186226>, accessed November 27, 2023.
- 9 Freshta Jalalzai, "The Qosh Tapa Canal: A Source of Hope in Afghanistan," The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/the-qosh-tapa-canal-a-source-of-hope-in-afghanistan/>, accessed December 16, 2023.
- 10 "1st phase of crucial irrigation canal in northern Afghanistan completed," The Express Tribune, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2440532/1st-phase-of-crucial-irrigation-canal-in-northern-afghanistan-completed>, accessed December 16, 2023.
- 11 Habib Rahman Qooyash, "MoI Establishes Special Unit to Ensure Security of Qosh Tapa Canal," ToloNews <https://tolonews.com/index.php/business-186063>, accessed on November 16, 2023.
- 12 "Uzbek president expresses concern over Afghanistan's new Qosh Tapa canal," Ariana News, <https://www.ariananews.af/uzbek-president-expresses-concern-over-afghanistans-new-qosh-tapa-canal/>, accessed September 16, 2023.
- 13 Zahir Khan, "Construction of Check Dams kicks off in 13 provinces," Al Emarah English, <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/construction-check-dames-kicks-off-in-13-provinces/>, accessed September 28, 2023.
- 14 "Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update, August 2023," UNOCHA, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-august-2023>, accessed November 9, 2023.
- 15 "Ministry: Road Between Badakhshan and China Will Be Completed in 3 Months," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/provincial-186226>, accessed November 27, 2023.
- 16 "Taliban inaugurates 'Kabul-Shanghai air corridor,' Amu TV, <https://amu.tv/68051/>, accessed October 8, 2023.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 "Ministry: Road Between Badakhshan and China Will Be Completed in 3 Months," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/provincial-186226>, accessed November 27, 2023.
- 19 "The next container train arrived from China to Afghanistan," [https://railway.uz/en/informatsion/naya\\_sluzhba/novosti/35076/](https://railway.uz/en/informatsion/naya_sluzhba/novosti/35076/), accessed October 9, 2023.
- 20 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Asia Pacific Humanitarian Update: situation report," OCHA, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/asia-pacific/>, accessed December 12, 2023.

- 21 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan," <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1117>, accessed December 2023.
- 22 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan: Revised Humanitarian Response Plan (Jun - Dec 2023)," OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-revised-humanitarian-response-plan-jun-dec-2023>, accessed December 2023.
- 23 *ibid.*; World Food Programme, [www.wfp.org/countries/Afghanistan](http://www.wfp.org/countries/Afghanistan); and World Bank, Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey: round 3 (October 2023), p. 6.
- 24 UNSC, "Report of the independent assessment pursuant to Security Council resolution 2679(2023)," <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/11/afghanistan-private-meeting-and-closed-consultations.php>, accessed November 9, 2023.
- 25 Munir Ahmed and Riaz Khan, "Pakistan announces big crackdown on migrants in the country illegally, including 1.7 million Afghans," AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-illegal-immigrants-afghans-crackdown-deadline-bb00216d688b1c70d1438d5c28f4031a>, accessed October 4, 2023.
- 26 Niels Hegewisch and Hamayoun Khan, "The perfect scapegoat", IPS Journal, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/the-perfect-scapegoat-7121/>, accessed December 12, 2023.
- 27 Caroline Gluck, "Forced returns from Pakistan deepen Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis," UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/forced-returns-pakistan-deepen-afghanistan-s-humanitarian-crisis>, accessed November 17, 2023.
- 28 Fatema Adeeb, "Mass Deportations 'Could Bring Further Trouble' to Region: ICG," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186033>, accessed on November 14, 2023.
- 29 "Pakistan's plan to evict thousands of Afghans 'unacceptable', says Taliban," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/4/pakistans-plan-to-evict-thousands-of-afghans-unacceptable-says-taliban>, accessed October 4, 2023.
- 30 Caroline Gluck, "Forced returns from Pakistan deepen Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis," UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/forced-returns-pakistan-deepen-afghanistan-s-humanitarian-crisis>, accessed November 17, 2023.
- 31 UNHCR, "Border Consortium Appeal," <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/border-consortium-appeal>, accessed November 8, 2023.
- 32 Zabihullah Muhajid, [https://twitter.com/Zabehulah\\_M33/status/1717580486418296847](https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1717580486418296847), accessed on October 26, 2023.
- 33 "Joint Committee of Legal Analysts Formed to Address Refugee Issues," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-185899>, accessed November 5, 2023.
- 34 *ibid.*
- 35 "Educational Opportunities Will Be Provided for Returnees: MoHE," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185856>, accessed November 3, 2023.
- 36 International Federation of Journalists, "Pakistan: Deportation deadline looms for Afghan refugees," OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-deportation-deadline-loom-afghan-refugees>, accessed October 8, 2023.
- 37 Michael Scollon, "Afghan Returnees Face Harsh Winter Of Discontent," rferl, <https://www.rferl.org/a/32725956.html>, accessed December 11, 2023.

- 38 "Taliban minister raised refugee assets issue during Pakistan visit: Embassy," AlJazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/taliban-minister-raised-refugee-assets-issue-during-pakistan-visit-embassy>, accessed November 14, 2023.
- 39 "Turkey deports thousands of Afghans, following Pakistan, Iran," Afghanistan Times, <https://www.afghanistantimes.af/turkey-deports-thousands-of-afghans-following-pakistan-iran/>, accessed November 14, 2023.
- 40 Derek Cai & Mahfouz Zubaide, "Afghanistan hit by second earthquake in days," BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67073958>, accessed October 11, 2023.
- 41 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Revised Herat Earthquake Response Plan," <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/b00e66f2-73cc-4571-ba07-d421ad44c0bd/Afghanistan>, accessed November 16, 2023.
- 42 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan: Herat Earthquake Response Situation Report No. 2," OCHA <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-herat-earthquake-response-situation-report-no-2-2-november-2023>, accessed November 2023.
- 43 The humanitarian needs, response activities, and financial requirements outlined in this response plan will be incorporated into the forthcoming 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan.
- 44 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Revised Herat Earthquake Response Plan," <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/b00e66f2-73cc-4571-ba07-d421ad44c0bd/Afghanistan>, accessed November 16, 2023.
- 45 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan: Herat Earthquake Response Plan (October 2023 - March 2024)," OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-herat-earthquake-response-plan-october-2023-march-2024-endaripashoto>, accessed October 2023.
- 46 "Afghanistan: Taliban asked if there will be a place for women in new government," BBC, [www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-58407424](http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-58407424), accessed September 1, 2021
- 47 The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Situation of human rights in Afghanistan – Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session54/advance-versions/A\\_HRC\\_54\\_21\\_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session54/advance-versions/A_HRC_54_21_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx), accessed September 2023.
- 48 The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5321-situation-women-and-girls-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>, accessed November 2023.
- 49 "Women, Peace and Security Index," Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-Index-executive-summary.pdf>, accessed October 2023.
- 50 Hadia Ziaei "Women Empowerment Exhibition Opens in Kabul," <https://tolonews.com/index.php/business-186055>, accessed November 16, 2023.
- 51 "Afghan girls' education advocate is freed from Taliban prison, npr, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/26/1208704097/afghanistan-taliban-girls-education-activist-matiullah-wesa-freed>, accessed October 26, 2023.
- 52 "The treatment of detainees in Afghanistan," United Nations, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_report\\_-\\_eng\\_-\\_treatment\\_of\\_detainees\\_sept\\_23\\_0.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_-_eng_-_treatment_of_detainees_sept_23_0.pdf), accessed September 20, 2023.

- 53 Fatema Adeeb, "Islamic Emirate Denies Claims of UNAMA's Report on Human Rights," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185701>, accessed September 24, 2023.
- 54 *ibid.*
- 55 Geeta Mohan, "Taliban appoint representative for Hindus, Sikhs in Kabul, say 'crucial role..'," India Today, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/taliban-appoint-representative-for-hindus-sikhs-in-afghanista-kabul-say-will-play-crucial-role-2452483-2023-10-23>, accessed October 22, 2023.
- 56 "108 Cases of Violence Against Journalists in 2023 in Afghanistan: Watchdog," <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186108>, accessed on November 19, 2023.
- 57 AHRDO, "Afghan Media Under The Taliban," [https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/AHRDO\\_Report\\_Afghan-Media-Under-Taliban.pdf](https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/AHRDO_Report_Afghan-Media-Under-Taliban.pdf), accessed September 2022.
- 58 Naweed Samadi, "108 Cases of Violence Against Journalists in 2023 in Afghanistan: Watchdog," <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186108>, accessed November 19, 2023.
- 59 Naweed Samadi, "Over 40,000 Cases Tried in Past 3 Months: Supreme Court," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185675> accessed October 23, 2023.
- 60 "Afghan currency emerges as world's best performer this quarter," The Financial Express, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/global/afghan-currency-emerges-as-worlds-best-performer-this-quarter>, accessed October, 2023.
- 61 The World Bank, "Afghanistan Economic Monitor," <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/cdfea1bf5a7804a1f570bc20b433897a-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-November-2023.pdf>, accessed November 2023.
- 62 *ibid.*
- 63 *ibid.*
- 64 "World Bank report paints grim picture of Afghanistan's 'fragile' economy," Amu TV, <https://amu.tv/67442/>, accessed October 3, 2023.
- 65 *ibid.*
- 66 "USIP: 'Afghanistan's Economy Once Again Nears the Precipice,'" ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/business-186092>, accessed November 18, 2023.
- 67 "Afghanistan Opium Survey," UNODC, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan\\_opium\\_survey\\_2023.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2023.pdf), accessed November 5, 2023.
- 68 *ibid.*
- 69 *ibid.*
- 70 Islamuddin Sajid, "Taliban bring poppy cultivation to near zero, Afghans want alternate livelihood," AA News, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/taliban-bring-poppy-cultivation-to-near-zero-afghans-want-alternate-livelihood/2917799>, accessed June 8, 2023.
- 71 Nazir Shinwari, "Russian Official Praises Afghan Counter-Narcotics Efforts," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186000>, accessed November 12, 2023.
- 72 Law and Crime Prevention, "A knowledge-based approach to tackling Afghanistan's drug abuse crisis," the UN, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138067>, accessed June 25, 2023.
- 73 "A Second Shot: Inside Afghanistan's growing drug epidemic," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/witness/2023/6/21/a-second-shot-inside-afghanistans-growing-drug-epidemic>, accessed June 21, 2023.
- 74 Nazeer Shinwari, "Nearly 100,000 Addicts Collected Under Islamic Emirate Rule: Official," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186422>, accessed December 10, 2023.



- 75 *ibid.*
- 76 Law and Crime Prevention, "A knowledge-based approach to tackling Afghanistan's drug abuse crisis," *the UN*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138067>, accessed June 25, 2023
- 77 The World Bank, "Afghanistan Economic Monitor," <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/cdfea1bf5a7804a1f570bc20b433897a-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-November-2023.pdf>, accessed November 2023.
- 78 *ibid.*
- 79 *ibid.*
- 80 *ibid.*
- 81 The World Bank, "Afghanistan Economic Monitor," <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/2ab75317f6e86c9bb6fcf342f72e0b64-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-31-October-2023.pdf>, accessed October 2023.
- 82 *ibid.*
- 83 *ibid.*
- 84 *ibid.*
- 85 Saima Shabbir, "Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan set up trade working group at first trilateral meeting," *Arab News*, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2408546/pakistan>, accessed on November 14, 2023.
- 86 Mubark Zeb Khan, "Landmark trilateral moot in Islamabad resolves to boost regional connectivity," *Dawn*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1789415/landmark-trilateral-moot-in-islamabad-resolves-to-boost-regional-connectivity>, accessed on November 14, 2023.
- 87 "Stanikzai: Afghan Embassy in India to Reopen in Coming Days," *ToloNews*, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186263>, accessed on November 29, 2023.
- 88 Abudakar Siddique, "Afghanistan's Embassies Remain In Limbo As Most Staff Still Loyal To Toppled Government," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-embassies-taliban-limbo/31657924.html>, accessed December 15, 2023.
- 89 "Afghan Embassy in Spain 'Interacting' With Islamic Emirate Foreign Ministry," <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185438>, accessed on October 7, 2023.
- 90 MFA-Afghanistan, <https://mfa.gov.af/en/the-newly-appointed-ambassador-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-to-afghanistan-mr-zhao-sheng-presented-his-diplomatic-credentials-to-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-islamic-emirate-of-afgha/>, accessed September 13, 2023.
- 91 "Incoming Turkish Envoy Says Ankara Ready to Cooperate with Afghans," *ToloNews*, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186023>, accessed on November 13, 2023.
- 92 "Taliban suspend Afghan consular services in Vienna and London for lack of transparency, coordination," *AP News*, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-embassies-suspension-ce67bc90574efdac3f0d9bb7752c98e4>, accessed October 8, 2023.
- 93 "Afghan embassy in India shuts down citing lack of support, Taliban pressure," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/afghan-embassy-india-shuts-down-citing-lack-support-taliban-pressure-2023-11-24/>, accessed November 24, 2023.
- 94 "Stanikzai: Afghan Embassy in India to Reopen in Coming Days," *ToloNews*, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186263>, accessed on November 29, 2023.
- 95 "IEA comes out in support of Azerbaijan over Karabakh issue," *Ariana News*, <https://www.ariananews.af/iea-comes-out-in-support-of-azerbaijan-over-karabakh-issue/>, accessed September 16, 2023.

- 96 MFA-Afghanistan, <https://mfa.gov.af/en/iea-mofa-welcomes-the-efforts-of-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-and-oman-to-establish-a-permanent-ceasefire-in-yemen-deeming-the-initiative-aimed-at-strengthening-peace-and-stability-in-the-republic-of/>, accessed September 20, 2023.
- 97 "Taliban show support to Palestine, call for cessation of hostilities," Aamaj News, <https://aamajnews24.com/taliban-901/>, accessed October 7, 2023.
- 98 "Afghanistan's Taliban government slams lack of invite to COP28," Business Recorder, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40276034>, accessed December 15, 2023.
- 99 Amu TV, <https://twitter.com/AmuTelevision/status/1704863533794501008>, accessed September 21, 2023.
- 100 Hafiz Zia Ahmad <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1706170991720673636>, accessed September 25, 2023.
- 101 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1706171007256433073>, accessed September 25, 2023.
- 102 "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's greetings to participants in the 5th meeting of the Moscow Format of Consultations on Afghanistan," [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1906861/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1906861/?lang=en), accessed September 29, 2023.
- 103 Maheen Hamayoun, "Afghan Foreign Minister meets Adviser to Russian President," The Diplomatic Insight, <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/afghan-foreign-minister-meets-adviser-to-russian-president/>, accessed September 29, 2023.
- 104 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1707989427606143371>, accessed September 30, 2023.
- 105 "Muttaqi Leads Delegation to China to Attend Trans-Himalaya Forum," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185375>, accessed October 3, 2023.
- 106 Hafiz Zia Ahmad, <https://twitter.com/HafizZiaAhmad1/status/1709952827856937336>, accessed October 5, 2023.
- 107 Bibi Amina Hakimi, "Mullah Baradar Meets Iranian FM During Tehran Visit," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185896>, accessed on November 5, 2023.
- 108 "Large Taliban Delegation Visits Tehran To Strengthen Ties," Iran International, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202311051289>, accessed on November 5, 2023.
- 109 "Taliban minister raised refugee assets issue during Pakistan visit: Embassy," Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/taliban-minister-raised-refugee-assets-issue-during-pakistan-visit-embassy>, accessed on November 14, 2023.
- 110 "Afghanistan urges Pakistan to release 1,000s of containers from port, Arab News, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2408556/world>, accessed November 14, 2023.
- 111 "Kabul Delegation Says Agreement With Pakistan Reached Over Goods in Karachi," <https://tolonews.com/index.php/business-186083>, accessed November 18, 2023.
- 112 Habib Rahman Qooyash, "Containers With Afghan Commercial Goods Stopped in Karachi," ToloNews, <https://tolonews.com/business-185415>, accessed October 6, 2023.
- 113 Aamir Saeed, "Pakistan holds hundreds of Afghanistan-bound containers at Karachi port amid escalating trade row," Arab News, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2387031/pakistan>, accessed October 7, 2023.
- 114 "flydubai resumes operations to Kabul," <https://news.flydubai.com/flydubai-resumes-operations-to-kabul>, accessed October 12, 2023.

- 115 "flydubai becomes first international carrier to resume Kabul flights," France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231012-flydubai-becomes-first-international-carrier-to-resume-kabul-flights>, accessed on October 12, 2023.
- 116 "Afghan Taliban Official's Puzzling European Visit Stirs Controversy," VOA, <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-taliban-official-s-puzzling-european-visit-stirs-controversy/7360928.html>, accessed on November 16, 2023.
- 117 *ibid.*
- 118 See Afghanistan Monitor vol. 4 for more detail: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/20679.pdf>.
- 119 UNSC, "Report of the independent assessment pursuant to Security Council Resolution, 2679," [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023\\_11\\_sg\\_special\\_assessment\\_report.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023_11_sg_special_assessment_report.pdf), accessed November 9, 2023.
- 120 UNSC, "Fourteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2093255/N2312536.pdf>, accessed December, 2023.
- 121 *ibid.*
- 122 UNSC, "Report of the independent assessment pursuant to Security Council Resolution, 2679," [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023\\_11\\_sg\\_special\\_assessment\\_report.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023_11_sg_special_assessment_report.pdf), accessed November 9, 2023.
- 123 "Over 100 graduate from General Command of Police Special Units," Al Emarah English, <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/over-100-graduate-from-general-command-of-police-special-units/>, accessed October 21, 2023.
- 124 *ibid.*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amina Khan is the Director of the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, where she oversees research and advocacy-related work on all facets of CAMEA. Before this, she served as a Research Fellow and a Senior Research Fellow at the ISSI, focusing on Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Over more than 15 years, she has published extensively on Afghanistan and has presented her research at multiple national and international forums. She is also the author of three edited books, *The Covid Challenge and its Impact on the Middle East and Africa* (2021), *The Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: International and Regional Perspectives* (2022), and *Pakistan's Strategic Frontiers* (2023).

A recipient of the OSI/FCO/Chevening Scholarship 2009-2010, Amina has a Master's degree in Democracy, Politics and Governance (DPG) from Royal Holloway University of London. She also has a Master's degree in Defense and Strategic Studies (DSS) from the Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad (2005). She has been a Visiting Fellow at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Germany. Currently, she is pursuing her doctoral degree from Quaid-e-Azam University.

## 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](mailto:info.pakistan@fes.de)

☎ +92 51 2803391-4

🌐 [pakistan.fes.de](http://pakistan.fes.de)

📘 @FESPakistanOffice

📧 @FES\_Pak

Published by: FES-Pakistan

Layout & Printed by: AGLOW Graphics

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

ISBN: 978-969-9675-64-5

© 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 Pakistan 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.

# AFGHANISTAN MONITOR

## Volume 5



Poppy cultivation has drastically decreased. International observers estimate a 95 per cent decrease. This has negatively affected the income situation of the rural population.



The Taliban continue to seek international recognition by interacting with diplomatic missions, commenting on global events, and seeking inclusion in international conferences.



The security situation has improved notably. Challenges persist with the presence of transnational terrorist organisations, posing threats to the broader region.