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The Taliban's return to power has led to a significant decline in Afghan media employees, with restrictions on women's work and new media laws. Reports show media freedoms have diminished, with 447 violations and 220 arrests of journalists from 2021-2024.



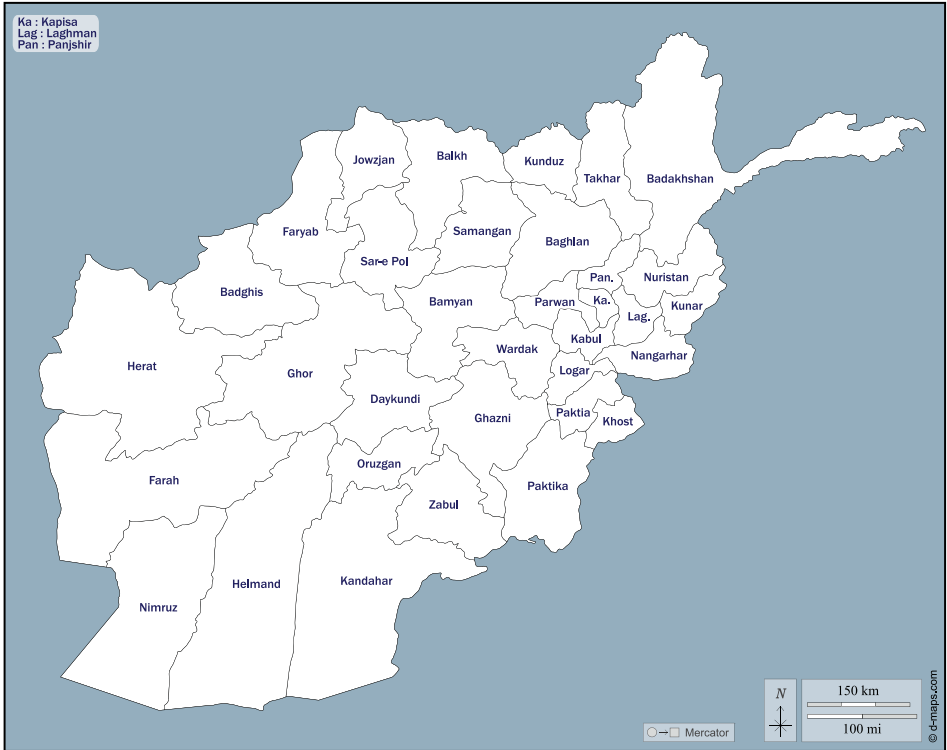
The Taliban's 2022 opium ban led to a 95% drop in production, but in 2024, cultivation rose by 19%. The focus shifted to north-western regions, especially Badakhshan. Despite efforts to provide alternative crops, opium prices have soared.



In the first nine months of 2024, Afghanistan's trade deficit rose by 43% to \$6.3 billion, with imports surging by 31%. Exports decreased by 12%, though food and coal made up 73%. Trade with Pakistan remains key, but Iran, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are emerging markets.

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Source: d-Maps

Acronyms

ACD	Afghanistan Customs Department
ACRP	Afghanistan Community Resilience Programme
ARD	Afghan Revenue Department
AFJC	Afghanistan Journalists Center
AFN	Afghan currency (Afghani)
CTCN	Climate Technology Centre and Network
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
HPC	Humanitarian Program Cycle
IARCSC	Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
ICCT	Inter-cluster Coordination Team
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
NRF	National Resistance Front of Afghanistan
PVPV	Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

The Afghanistan Monitor, a periodic publication by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan, provides a comprehensive analysis of Afghanistan's political, economic, security, and humanitarian landscape since the Taliban's return to power. Its ninth edition, covering September to November 2024, features expert insights into key developments during this period.

Since August 15, 2021, Afghanistan has undergone significant transformations under the Taliban's rule as de facto authorities. Over the past three years, their governance has drawn growing scrutiny, marked by authoritarian policies tempered with selective pragmatism.

Despite consolidating control nationwide, the Taliban face persistent uncertainties surrounding the quality of their governance and their safeguarding of women's and human rights. Concerns about potential security threats originating from Afghanistan further compound the challenges.

The Afghan economy presents a nuanced picture. Positive developments, such as improved revenue collection and a strengthened Afghan currency (Afghani), are offset by ongoing difficulties, including the country's reduced humanitarian aid,

limited employment opportunities, and the economic strain returning Afghan refugees, particularly from Pakistan. Put on its already faltering economy.

A significant issue undermining the Taliban's reported achievements is the continued violation of women's and human rights. Restrictions on women's access to education and employment not only infringe upon fundamental rights but also deter international engagement with the Taliban.

Seeking to enhance their global legitimacy, the Taliban have shifted from their isolated stance of the 1990s, aiming for greater integration into the international community. However, they have yet to achieve formal recognition. Their efforts to foster political and social unity face challenges, particularly regarding inclusivity and ethnic minority representation.

Finally, while Afghanistan's security situation has seen improvements, including a decline in terror attacks, transnational terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remain significant threats. These groups pose significant challenges to the Taliban's authority and fuel regional security concerns among neighboring countries.

Political Situation

Since their takeover in August 2021, the Taliban have been implementing a system deeply rooted in their interpretation of Sharia law. While initially, their choice of government structure was uncertain, the current interim administration resembles their 1990s regime, featuring a supreme leader and a prime minister and the continuation of several ministries from the previous government. Notably, the Women's Ministry has been replaced by the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, while most other ministries remain unchanged. Reflecting on the group's three years in power, the Taliban's Supreme Leader, Amir al-Mu'minin, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, stated that their system steadily strengthens itself over time, as Sharia law ensures the rights of Muslims. He also urged Taliban leaders to uphold justice to secure the longevity of their rule.¹

Soon after taking power, the Taliban suspended the 2004 Afghan constitution, which had previously guided the country's governance and claimed to be drafting a new constitution rooted in Sharia principles.² While the interim administration focuses on governance under Sharia and addressing economic challenges, there needs to be a formal legal framework that raises concerns about Afghanistan's future governance and legal structure. Deputy Minister of Justice

Abdul Karim Haidar emphasized that drafting a constitution is not an "ordinary matter," requiring a decree from Amir al-Mu'minin, Haibatullah Akhundzada.³ In response to UNAMA, the Taliban stated that "the decrees of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Supreme Leader (May Allah protect him) form the basis of formal documents derived from Islamic sources," asserting that such decrees and legal texts are essential for societal reform and must be enforced.⁴

At the administrative level, in November 2024, the Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum signed an agreement with the Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) to streamline the bidding and contracting processes for mines. Under the agreement, the two agreed upon reducing the steps for large-scale mining from 228 to 95, whereas for small-scale mining, the steps were reduced from 187 to 67. Due to these reductions in steps, the bidding and operational procedures for mines have been simplified, aiming to standardize the extraction process across the country. As per the Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, in the last three years, "708 (administrative) processes in around ten ministries and departments have been simplified".⁵ Similarly, on November 24, 2024, the Prison Administration in Kabul organized a five-day prison reforms

and education seminar for prison officials from across the country. The seminar, titled: “Better Management of Prisoner Reform and Education,” aimed at providing moral and ethics-based education to prisoners and improving the educational and reform processes. In addition, the seminar aimed at establishing facilities that could provide technical and professional education to prisoners - currently, there are 16 such facilities in 16 different provinces across Afghanistan.⁶

Moreover, since May 1, 2024, the Afghan Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation has issued nearly 7000 temporary admission documents to Pakistani drivers. Likewise, an equal number of Afghan drivers also received such permits from Pakistan’s embassy in Kabul and consulate in Kandahar. The permit, which has a validation of six months, allows the drivers to move across all the cities and crossing areas of the two countries. However, drivers on both sides of the country request the expansion of facilities and the extension of the permit’s validity period.⁷

In addition, in October 2024, the Deputy Minister for Arts and Culture, Atiqullah Azizi, hosted the fourth regular meeting of the Commission for Naming Sacred Places. During the meeting, it was agreed upon that from now onwards, newly opened roads or intersections would be named

after religious and national values. During such previous meetings, the names of a few intersections were changed, such as the Deh Afghanan Intersection, which was renamed as Farhang Intersection.⁸

The inclusion of minority and ethnic groups in Afghanistan’s interim government remains a key demand of both the international community and many Afghans. While the administration is predominantly male and Pashtun-led, the Taliban have included nine cabinet members from non-Pashtun ethnic groups, such as Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara. Moreover, they have retained over 500,000 officials from the previous Afghan administration in mid and lower-level public offices, including 513 former ministers, governors, and deputy governors.⁹ Moreover, the Taliban repeatedly appoints or reshuffles individuals in leadership roles. At the national level, they have appointed two ministers, seven deputy ministers, one deputy national spokesperson, Governor and Deputy Governor of the Central Bank, and introduced 12 national directors in the ministries. Likewise, at the sub-national level, the Taliban has appointed four provincial governors, four provincial deputy governors, two provincial mayors, nearly 26 directors, and almost 24 district governors.¹⁰ Similarly, in the security domain, the group has appointed five new provincial chiefs of police, one provincial deputy

chief of police, five new provincial chiefs of the General Directorate of Intelligence, one deputy chief of police for a provincial capital, and two district chiefs of police, and reshuffled four core commanders.¹¹

However, the exclusion of women and representatives from various ethnic, political, and civil society groups in policymaking raises serious concerns about the Taliban's commitment to creating an inclusive, transparent, and accountable government.¹² In April 2024, the Ministry of Justice banned political parties, effectively silencing political participation. The Ministry's spokesperson, Barkatullah Rasouli, confirmed the removal of the directorate overseeing political parties and the prosecution of individuals involved in political activities.¹³ Additionally, two television channels, Noor TV and Barya TV, were temporarily shut down by Taliban authorities due to their owners' affiliations with political parties.¹⁴

It seems that the Taliban are not experiencing any potential resistance to their rule inside Afghanistan. However, in one of his interviews, Ahmad Massoud – the exiled leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF) - said that since January 2024, his resistance group has carried out over 200 military operations in Afghanistan with the help of 5,000 fighters that are operating across 20 provinces of the

country. In this regard, he claims that the Taliban would lose their grip over Afghanistan in the long run due to their "lack of discipline, competence, legitimacy, and internal disunity."¹⁵

Ongoing Infrastructure Projects

Since taking control, the Taliban have been striving to boost economic growth and enhance Afghanistan's infrastructure through a blend of domestic initiatives and efforts to attract foreign investment.

During the inauguration ceremony of a hygiene product factory in the Parwan province, the Afghan Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Aziz, claimed that almost 98 percent of production factories have become functional across Afghanistan in the past three years. Apart from the newly inaugurated hygiene product factory, which was built at nearly \$3 million, the country has nearly 5000 small and large factories. Moreover, the Afghan Minister also announced the allocation of 160,000 Jeribs.¹⁶ of land for industrial parks.¹⁷

Moreover, the Taliban also aims to establish a precious stone processing center in the country. During a meeting with representatives from different departments of the country, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Homayoon

Afghan, said that the function of “this center is to ensure that the extraction of precious stones is carried out in a standard manner so that these stones can be transported from provinces to Kabul, where there will be standard laboratories for processing these stones.” According to the spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Akhandzada Abdul Salam Jawad, during the first two quarters of the solar year (1403), Afghanistan exported precious stones worth more than \$31.7 million.¹⁸

Similarly, in the irrigation sector, the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture has launched an irrigation network project for Jangal Bagh in the Jowzjan Province. The Jangal Bagh is one of the biggest recreational gardens in the province, with an estimated area of 400 acres, but it has lost a significant number of trees due to the unavailability of water. Therefore, the revival project, worth 4.016 million Afghani (AFN), would constitute 1,200 meters of skem pipes and 1,200 meters of irrigation canals.¹⁹ Moreover, according to the Ministry of Energy and Water, 80 percent of construction work on Pashdan Dam in the Herat Province has been completed. The dam will have the capacity to irrigate 13,000 acres of agricultural land across the country, generate 2 MW of electricity, store 54 million cubic meters of water, and is estimated to be completed by the end of Solar year 1403. Currently,

Afghanistan has 85 billion cubic meters of water, which can have the capacity to produce 23,000 MW of electricity if carefully managed (Afghanistan’s electricity needs stand at 10,000 MW).²⁰

On the side of the education sector, the Taliban are planning to build a network of mosques and religious schools across the country. In this regard, the governor of Jawzjan, Gul Haidar Shafaq, said: “The mental and intellectual upbringing of our children and learning religious and Islamic teachings should begin from the mosque.” While speaking at the inauguration ceremony of three mosques in Jawzjan, the Afghan Deputy Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Azizur Rahman Mansoor, stated that his Ministry aims to build 34 Jihadi schools across the country - one school in each province. Each such school will have the capacity of having more than 1000 students. Subsequently, he mentioned that apart from one large school in each province, each district of every region will have an additional three religious schools - two-day schools and one boarding school - with lesser capacity.²¹

Apart from undertaking infrastructure projects using domestic financial means, the Taliban have also sought investments from regional and other international public or private investors. In this regard, Iran’s advisor

to the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Seyed Hossein Mirshafi, claimed that a joint commission between Iran and Afghanistan has agreed upon Iran's investment of \$6 billion in Afghanistan's transportation infrastructure. Moreover, a delegation from Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Works also visited Iran to discuss railway connectivity via the Herat-Khaf railway between the two countries.²² Per the Ministry of Public Works, Afghanistan has only 260 km of active railway lines connecting the country with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran.²³

In the field of mines, during the past three years, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum signed more than 200 mining extraction contracts, which in turn created job opportunities for nearly 150,000 individuals.²⁴ Likewise, during the current solar year, the Ministry signed three mining contracts worth \$1.2 billion - including the mining of salt, gas, and cement - with domestic and international contractors, such as Uzbekistan, Turkiye, Iran, and China.²⁵

Likewise, to preserve Afghanistan's cultural heritage, Japan intends to host an international cultural conference in Tokyo, which was agreed upon during a meeting between Japan's ambassador to Kabul and the Afghan Deputy Minister of Culture and Arts. Earlier, China and UNESCO have also shown interest in preserving and

restoring Afghan cultural sites that have faced damage due to decades of war in the country.²⁶ At the local level, the local officials in Uruzgan have established a security force to protect the province's historical and cultural sites. In this regard, they have asked for the assistance of relevant departments to restore the sites that have been damaged either due to past conflict or natural disasters.²⁷ To promote tourism in the country, the Taliban have been taking various steps. In the Bamyan province, the Taliban are constructing roads to enable the access of tourists to reach areas that have so far been inaccessible.²⁸ Officials from the Ministry of Culture and Arts noted that in the last year, almost 9,000 foreign tourists visited Afghanistan's historical and cultural sites, leading to 48 million Afghani (AFN) revenue generation.²⁹

Moreover, authorities in Afghanistan are also making efforts to provide electricity to residents. In Bamyan, 4 megawatts of electricity are provided to nearly 4000 families using diesel and solar power. However, nearly 1000 other families in the province use small solar panels and batteries to light their homes. In this regard, the Chinese government has announced the construction of a 20-megawatt solar power plant in Bamyan, which uses 10 MW of batteries and 10 MW of solar energy.³⁰

Humanitarian Situation

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Afghanistan continues to experience an enduring humanitarian crisis characterized by many challenges. The WHO noted that the number of people needing humanitarian assistance increased from 18.4 million in 2021 to 23.7 million in 2024.³¹ Apart from this, the WHO Representative in Afghanistan, Edwin Ceniza Salvador, said in an interview that 33 percent of the Afghan population still lacks access to health services, as most of these people live in remote areas and are difficult to reach during winter.³²

As per OCHA, the winter of 2024-25 would be “colder and dryer than usual .” Faced with this situation, on September 9, 2024, the Inter-cluster Coordination Team (ICCT) devised a plan to focus on those marginal areas in winter where residents are confronted with acute compounding multi-sectoral vulnerabilities. In this regard, to prepare for the winter seasons, i.e., provision of blankets and warm clothes, the ICCT requires \$603.5 million on an urgent basis, and for the provision of livelihood assistance, it requires an additional \$104 million during the first quarter of 2025. Likewise, to prepare for the 2025 Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC), OCHA has started an annual

planning exercise in collaboration with the partners.³³

However, OCHA noted that by mid-October 2024, 2024 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) remained underfunded, as it received only \$961.7 million, i.e., only 31.4 percent of the original request. Thus, the Afghan Humanitarian Response is facing a total shortfall of \$2.09 billion, including a critical funding gap of \$1.09 billion.³⁴ This shortfall has occurred as humanitarian needs in Afghanistan continue to be alarmingly high, driven by persistent food insecurity and malnutrition, prolonged displacement, widespread contamination from explosive ordnance, frequent natural disasters, outbreaks of communicable diseases, the impacts of climate change, and the overarching political isolation of the country. Additionally, a growingly restrictive environment is creating obstacles for partners in reaching affected populations, especially women and girls, in turn limiting their access to essential services. Since August 2021, the Taliban have issued 392 directives, which have, in one or the other way, affected humanitarian operations across Afghanistan. The humanitarian crisis has been further exacerbated due to the return of Afghan refugees from neighboring countries, mainly Pakistan and Iran. From January 2024 till October 2024, a total of 1.1 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan

- 243,000 from Pakistan and 825,000 from Iran.³⁵

Nevertheless, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have collaborated to launch the Afghanistan Community Resilience Programme (ACRP). This two-year initiative, running from 2024 to 2026, aims to tackle the pressing challenges rural communities in Kandahar, Helmand, and Badghis provinces face. The program focuses on strengthening sustainable livelihoods, improving food security, and enhancing resilience to climate-related shocks. With a contribution of \$16.2 million from the European Union (EU), the ACRP will assist over 7,000 vulnerable households. The program focuses on several key areas, including boosting agricultural productivity, promoting diversified livelihoods, and strengthening market connections. By enhancing the production of staple crops, high-value agricultural products, and livestock, the ACRP aims to improve food and nutrition security while increasing household incomes.³⁶

In addition, several international donors have donated aid packages to Afghanistan. In November 2024, the World Food Program (WFP) announced that France had provided \$3.3 million in aid packages for

Afghanistan, which will be effectively utilized for students, pregnant women, and children.³⁷

Human Rights and Women's Rights

Despite numerous warnings from the international community, the Taliban have failed to adequately address concerns regarding women's and human rights. Although they initially promised to uphold women's rights by Islamic law and to support women's education and involvement in public life, the group did not take effective steps to abide by their commitments after taking power.

Women

In a report co-published by the UN Women, IOM, and UN Mission in Afghanistan, "voices and concerns" of women across the country were captured using a survey - conducted from July 17 to 29, 2024. The report mentioned that out of the 776 women consulted from across the country's 34 provinces, 79 percent said they were denied access to public spaces during the last 12 months. Likewise, 69 percent of the women responded that they feel unsafe while leaving their homes by themselves, which subsequently contributes to their social isolation and mental

health problems.³⁸ Moreover, 79 percent of the women said that they were experiencing a potential decrease in their access to any legal services - formal as well as informal - whereas 25 percent of the women showed their desire to utilize such services but were unable to do so due to lack of any access. In addition to this, many women stated that they have felt a shift in the normative attitude towards women's rights in Afghan society due to the fear of the Taliban. In this regard, 47 percent of the responding women said that they felt a decline in the support for girls' primary education, whereas 65 percent felt a decrease in the support for girls' secondary education.³⁹

However, in responding to the report, the Taliban said that the report is not based on information from within Afghanistan but instead on external propaganda sources. Responding to the report's findings, Afghan Spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid said: "We have many women in Afghanistan who are involved in business and other productive work, achieving progress in their fields. Women are also active in various sectors within the government framework."⁴⁰

Likewise, one of SIGAR's reports, which cited a UN projection that by 2026, mortality rates in Afghanistan could increase by 50 percent due to a lack of female education and a

shortage of female nurses in health facilities, was rebuked by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health, claiming that such projection is inaccurate. In this regard, the Ministry of Public Health spokesman, Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil, noted that as of November 2024, 26,000 midwives and 20,000 female nurses are working in the Ministry. Parallel to this, the head of the Afghanistan Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Najmu Sama Shefajo, said: "Only by training skilled health cadres and providing advanced facilities can we prevent women's mortality."⁴¹

Earlier, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had noted that every two hours, a mother dies in Afghanistan from a preventable pregnancy or childbirth-related complications. Synchronously, UNFPA's Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Pio Smith, noted that in the current year, the UNFPA has assisted 660,000 Afghans under 25 years, of which 80 percent include females.⁴²

In line with such efforts, various UN officials have called for an end to violence against Afghan women in the country. Given this, while calling for increased international support for Afghan women, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, noted that there is a need for "urgent action for justice to end violence against women and girls

in Afghanistan.” In light of these, the Afghan Spokesperson, Zabiullah Mujahid, noted that during the last three years, the Taliban have made efforts to secure women’s rights in the country. However, he realized that these efforts were not enough and, therefore, needed more work for improvement.⁴³

Moreover, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that for a European country to grant asylum to any Afghan woman, her gender and country are “sufficient.” The ruling came in response to Austria’s refusal to grant refugee status to two Afghan women who had applied for asylum in 2015 and 2020. As of October 2024, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark have granted refugee status to asylum-seeking Afghan women.⁴⁴

Media

At the time the Taliban came into power, there were 8,400 media employees across the country. However, due to the imposition of a ban on women’s work in media and the introduction of strict media laws, the number has reduced to 5,100.⁴⁵ In September 2024, during a meeting, officials of the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture announced that they had sent the mass media law to the Supreme Leader for a second time to get his approval. Additionally, the Deputy

Minister for Publications, Hayatullah Muhajir Farahi, said a plan has been finalized to establish a support fund for journalists that will serve as a centralized channel for anyone to support journalists, individuals, organizations, or governments.⁴⁶ Likewise, in September 2024, a joint meeting was organized between Afghan journalists and government spokespersons to increase coordination between the two and facilitate access to government information. During the meeting, journalists from Nangarhar and Herat provinces mentioned that access to information has improved compared to the past, but there is still a need for improvement.⁴⁷

In October 2024, the Afghan Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV) implemented a new law for the Afghan media aimed at preventing media channels from displaying pictures of living things (humans as well as animals) by deeming it un-Islamic and contrary to Sharia. This law was implemented by Article 17 of the set of laws originally published by the Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in August 2024. Acting upon the directions of the given law, on October 24, 2024, the Information Ministry of the Helmand Province announced the banning of broadcasting living things on media channels, upon which media channels in the Takhar, Maidan

Wardak and Kandahar provinces complied.⁴⁸ During their previous rule (1996-2001), the Taliban had introduced a similar set of laws that prohibited the use of Television or pictures of living things.⁴⁹

Similarly, the Afghan Information Ministry has also banned nearly 400 books in the country, as their content conflicted with Islamic and Afghan values. The authorities removed such books from bookstores and publishing houses, replacing them with religious texts like the Quran.⁵⁰

On November 2, 2024, marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, it was noted by the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) that over the past three years (from August 15, 2021, to August 15, 2024), 447 cases of violations of journalists and media workers' rights and 220 cases of arrests were reported. Drawing attention to this, the President of the Afghan Journalists' Union, Hafizullah Barakzai, stressed that there is an "urgent need for the public media law to be enacted and made available to the journalism community as soon as possible."⁵¹

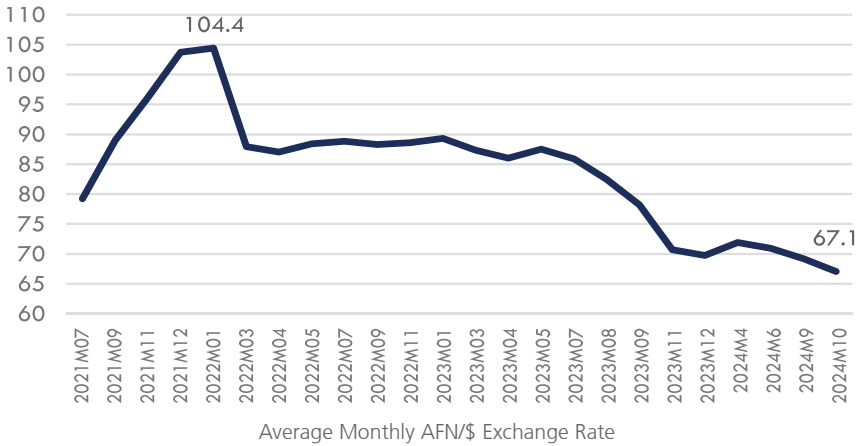
Economic Situation

Since August 2021, the Taliban have shifted their focus to economic matters, aiming to improve revenue

collection, stabilize and strengthen the Afghani currency, and foster trade relations with neighboring and regional countries. As noted by the World Bank, after two years of Taliban rule, the Afghan economy started showing signs of recovery in 2023-24. Despite this, the country continues to face various challenges - ranging from insufficient human capital to lack of food security - which in turn can cause economic instability in the long term.⁵²

Afghani and Revenue Collection

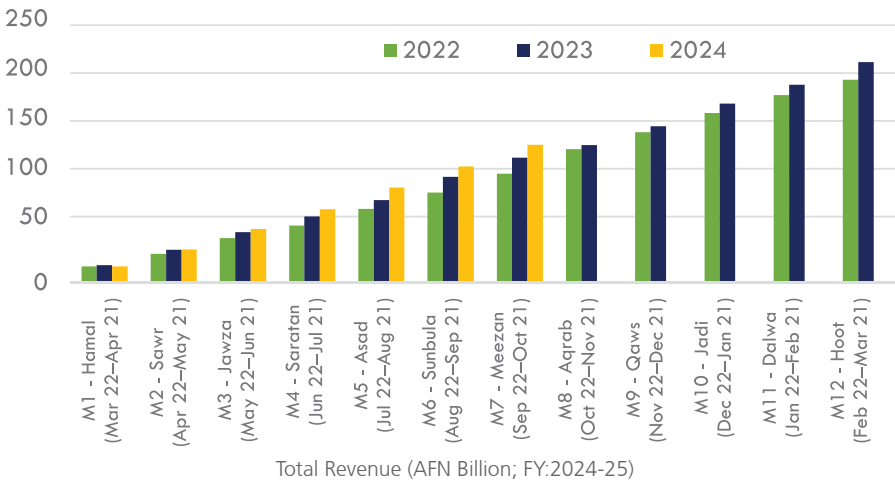
During the first ten months of 2024, the Afghan currency - the Afghani (AFN) - appreciated by 14.5 percent against the US dollar and reached an exchange rate of 67 AFN per US dollar. The Afghani also experienced an average appreciation of 15.5 percent against the currencies of the major trading partners. This potential appreciation in the Afghan currency is mainly attributed to several policy measures taken by the Taliban, such as banning the use of foreign currency to conduct domestic transactions, cracking down on the flight of capital, regulating informal hawala markets, as well as inflowing US dollars and increasing remittances, etc.⁵³



Source: World Bank⁵⁴

Similarly, during the first seven months of the fiscal year 2024-25 (March 22, 2024, to October 21, 2025), Afghanistan’s revenue collection reached \$2 billion (AFN 131.6 billion), equivalent to 10 percent of the annual GDP, and marking a 10 percent year-on-year increase. In reality, the revenue increased the targeted collection by 4 percent, mainly due to an increase in inland revenue collection

by 19 percent. Similarly, the Afghan Revenue Department (ARD) has surpassed its seven-month target by 3 percent, mainly due to a 24 percent increase in non-tax revenue collection. Significant factors contributing to this increase are income from mining, registration of vehicles, issuance of passports, transportation, and telecommunication services.⁵⁵

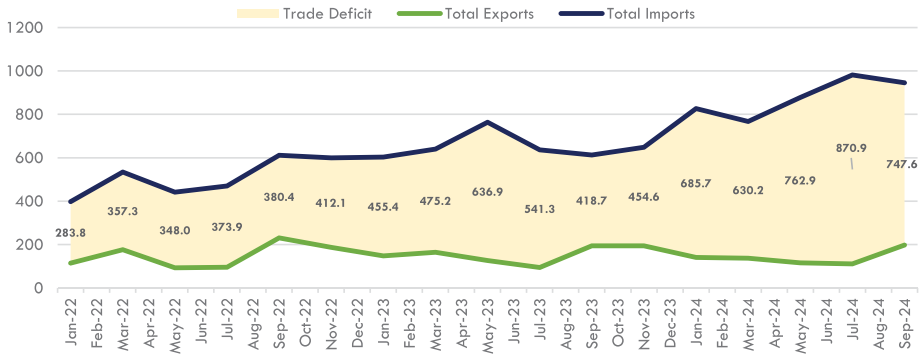


Source: Ministry of Finance⁵⁶

In addition, the Afghanistan Customs Department (ACD) noted an increase of 3 percent in revenue collection, surpassing its target by 5 percent after collecting \$1.01 billion. This increase is due to increasing trade ties between Afghanistan and Iran/Central Asia. Likewise, effective border management practices and tariff adjustments have also played a significant role in the sustained revenue collection. Despite these effective steps, the total revenue of Afghanistan experienced a decrease in the customs revenue's share by four percentage points.⁵⁷

Trade

In the first nine (09) months of 2024, Afghanistan's trade deficit increased by 43 percent, reaching \$6.3 billion compared to \$4.4 billion in the same period during 2023. This growth in deficit is usually attributed to rising imports, a stronger Afghani, and a shift in Pakistan's trade policies. Likewise, during the first nine months of 2024, Afghanistan's exports decreased to \$1.1 billion - a total drop of 12 percent. During this period, coal and food continued to be primary exports for Afghanistan, i.e., 73 percent of the country's total exports (during the same period of 2023, food and coal accounted for 81 percent of the total Afghan exports).⁵⁸

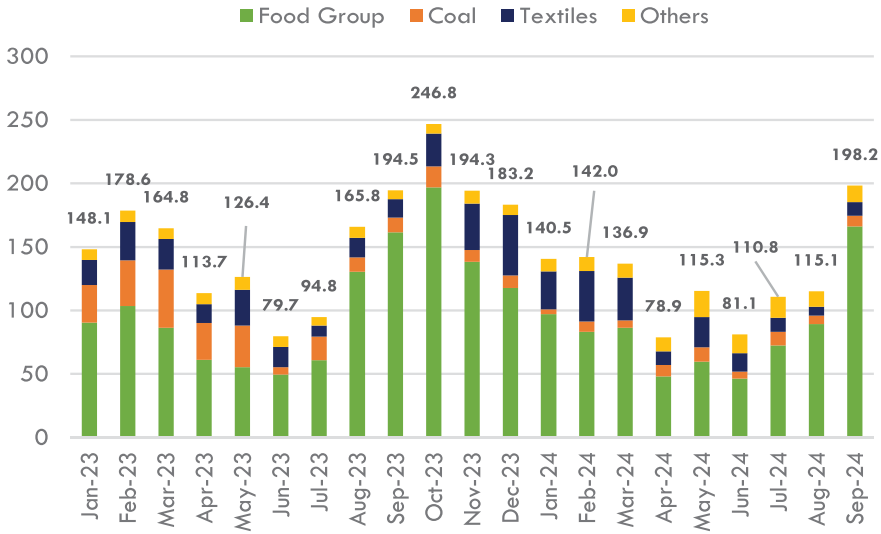


Afghanistan Trade Deficit (\$ Million)

Source: World Bank⁵⁹

More recently, the Afghan trade deficit shrank by 5.2 percent, from \$788.6 million in August 2024 to \$747.6 million in September 2024, mainly due to a rise in food and coal exports. In the same period, the net exports

increased by 72 percent, owing to seasonal demand for the country's agricultural products in Pakistan and India. Food exports increased by 86.2 percent, whereas coal exports surged by 26 percent in the two months.⁶⁰



Afghanistan's Exports (\$ Million): 2023-24

Source: World Bank⁶¹

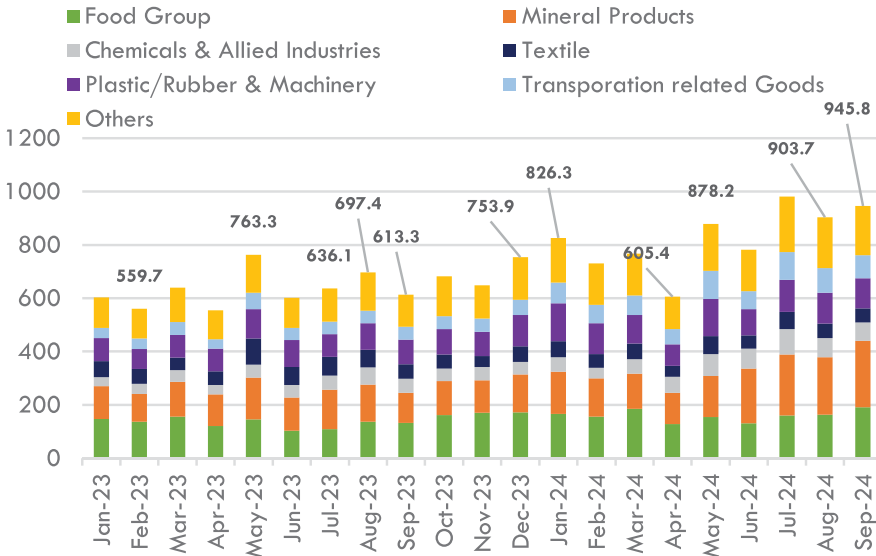
Moreover, Pakistan remains the largest export destination for Afghan products (47 percent), followed by India (30 percent). However, since September 2023, Iran (3 percent), Kazakhstan (3 percent), and Uzbekistan (3 percent) have been emerging as new export markets for Afghan products, mainly due to new trade routes and constant border closures with Pakistan.⁶²

Subsequently, during the first nine (09) months of 2024, Afghanistan's

imports increased to \$7.4 billion, showing a surge of 31 percent as compared to the same period of 2023. Minerals account for 22 percent of the total imports, whereas food and textiles comprise 19 percent and 7 percent, respectively. Moreover, on a year-on-year basis, from January to September 2024, transport-related goods' imports increased by 80 percent, machinery and equipment by 45 percent, and chemical products by 44 percent. In light of this, Iran was the largest import market for

Afghanistan, as it accounted for 30 percent of the total imports after experiencing an 83 percent year-on-year increase. Moreover, UAE,

Pakistan, and China accounted for 21 percent, 15 percent, and 7 percent of Afghanistan’s imports.⁶³



Afghanistan's Imports (\$ Million): 2023-24

Source: World Bank⁶⁴

Poppy Cultivation

Soon after coming into power, the Taliban imposed a ban on the cultivation of opium across the agricultural fields of the country, consequently leading to a reduction in opium production by 95 percent in April 2022. However, in its latest report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that in 2024, Afghanistan witnessed an increase in the cultivation of opium by 19 percent. Despite this surge, the cultivation area for poppy production

stands at 12,800 hectares, remaining significantly below the area utilized before the imposition of the ban by the Taliban, i.e., 573,284 hectares. The report also noted that the center of poppy production has shifted from previously southwestern regions to north-western areas of the country, where almost 60 percent of this year’s poppy cultivation occurred. Similarly, over 2023, the cultivation increased by 381 percent in these areas, mainly in Badakhshan. The report highlighted that due to the ban on poppy cultivation, the price of opium has

increased exponentially, i.e., reaching \$730 per kg as compared to \$100 per kg during the pre-ban times.⁶⁵

This same poppy cultivation ban has stripped many Afghan farmers of their source of sustenance. However, to provide alternatives to poppy production, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock has distributed seeds and plants to cultivate saffron, cotton, castor, etc., among Afghan farmers. Earlier, the Ministry had provided almost 100,000 tonnes of improved seeds and 200,000 tonnes of fertilizers to Afghan farmers with the help of local and international organizations.⁶⁶

Foreign Situation

Since seizing control of Kabul, the Taliban have been actively interacting with neighboring countries and the broader international community through a selection of differing avenues. Notwithstanding their lack of official status, the Taliban perceive themselves as equal players in global affairs. Their engagements include meetings with foreign diplomats in Afghanistan, hosting international delegations, traveling abroad, and participating in regional and global forums. In this regard, talking at the 6th Moscow Consultations Format, the Afghan Foreign Minister, Amir Muttaqi, noted that after the three years of the Taliban in

power, Afghanistan's interaction with regional countries has seen "considerable progress." He further said that the level and scope of the Taliban's interaction have been increasing over time and that he appreciated the efforts of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic to remove the name of the "Taliban Movement" from the list of banned groups.⁶⁷

Building on our previous point, the Taliban government has yet to receive diplomatic recognition worldwide. However, when talking to a news channel, Chinese envoy to Kabul Yue Xiaoyong said that his country's efforts have contributed to various countries' growing engagement with Afghanistan. Similarly, regarding the recognition issue, he said that realizing this would require China's consultations with neighboring and regional countries.⁶⁸ Additionally, some diplomatic strides were made, given the recognition of Taliban-appointed ambassadors to various regional countries. China was the first country to accept the credentials of the Taliban ambassador, followed by the acceptance of the Taliban ambassador's credentials in the UAE.⁶⁹ and Kazakhstan.⁷⁰ More recently, on October 9, 2024, the Taliban-appointed ambassador to Uzbekistan formally presented a copy of his credentials to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Mr. Bakhtiyor Saidov. In the future, the appointed ambassador is expected to present

his original credentials to the Uzbek President, Shavkat Mirziyoyev.⁷¹ Similarly, in October 2024, the Russian envoy to Kabul, Zamir Kamulov stated that Russia has taken a “principle decision” to remove the Taliban from its list of foreign terrorists. Russia has been gradually establishing relations with the Afghan Taliban, as in July 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the Taliban a “trusted ally.”⁷²

Earlier, on September 15, 2024, the Taliban announced that they had taken full control of Afghanistan’s diplomatic mission in Oman by enabling routine missions and providing consular services.⁷³ It is to be noted that as of September 2024, the Taliban control 39 Afghan embassies across the world.⁷⁴

Since their rise to power, the Taliban have participated in various regional and international forums. One such important global forum was the CoP 29 Summit, during which Matiul Haq Khalis led the country’s delegation. During the sidelines of the Summit, the Afghan delegation met with representatives from the United Nations Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the UK Foreign Office, and delegates from Bangladesh and Qatar. During his meeting with the representatives of CTCN, Khalid emphasized the

technical and financial cooperation needed for Afghanistan to overcome climate-induced challenges. Likewise, he requested the Green Climate Fund to resume its abandoned work on its currently halted projects. Similarly, while discussing with GEF, the Afghan delegation urged the approval of climate-related projects in Afghanistan.⁷⁵

However, the Taliban have yet to be invited to Iran as part of the Foreign Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) meeting. The meeting will take place from 3 to December 4, 2024, and will discuss intra-regional transportation, environmental, and tourism cooperation. Despite the relevant scope of discussion for Afghanistan, the ECO Secretariat has decided to refrain from inviting the Afghan participants.⁷⁶

Domestically, however, the Taliban have been meeting representatives of various foreign missions in Afghanistan. In September 2024, the Afghan Foreign Minister, Amir Muttaqi, arranged a dinner banquet for ambassadors of different countries in Kabul and representatives of multiple regional and international organizations. During his remarks, the Afghan Foreign Minister informed the guests about initiating multiple projects in Afghanistan, such as TAPI, Noori fiber optics network, etc., which led to a significant shift in

regional discourse from competition to cooperation. He further argued that the initiation of such projects would also contribute positively to regional prosperity and connectivity.⁷⁷

Security Situation

The security situation in Afghanistan has improved since the Taliban assumed control of the government, primarily because insurgent activities previously carried out by the Taliban have ceased. However, the Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Imangali Tasmagambetov, raised concerns about a “sufficient presence” of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Considering Afghanistan’s importance for Central Asia, he termed the situation “a very serious problem.” In this regard, he hinted that CSTO plans to approve a plan to strengthen Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan.⁷⁸

As per the United Nations Report of the Secretary-General, from May 16 to July 31, ISKP claimed four attacks in Afghanistan. In one of these attacks in Bamyan, the attackers targeted tourist vehicles, which resulted in the death of three Spanish tourists and wounded four tourists from Australia, Lithuania, Norway and Spain. In addition to these attacks, ISKP keeps on promoting propaganda against the Afghan Taliban. In this regard, on May 26, 2024, ISKP released a video

threatening foreigners and the UN in Afghanistan by ridiculing the Taliban’s claims of security in the country. Likewise, in a separate video message, ISKP announced all international or local NGOs working with the Afghan Taliban as legitimate targets for the terrorist group.⁷⁹

In addition to ISKP, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remains another transnational terrorist threat in Afghanistan. According to the UNSC 34th Monitoring Report, TTP has been trying to make acquaintances with Al-Qaida in a bid to carry out attacks inside Pakistan. In this regard, Al-Qaida and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar are collaborating to train suicide bombers for TTP in Kunar Province. Likewise, the Afghan Taliban are also supporting TTP leadership by sharing its workforce and providing training camps to TTP’s fighters. It is to be noted that Al-Qaida and the Afghan Taliban’s support of TTP, which is estimated to have between 6,000 to 6,500 fighters, could raise security concerns for Pakistan and other countries.⁸⁰

Opinion Corner

Afghanistan After the Taliban Came to Power: A Perspective from Tajikistan

By Dr. Rustam Azizi

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 represented a pivotal transformation in the region's political dynamics, carrying significant implications for both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors. This analytical review explores the socio-political landscape post-Taliban resurgence, with a particular emphasis on the viewpoint of Tajikistan. The paper examines the consolidation of Taliban power, its challenges, and the resulting regional security implications, particularly for Tajikistan. By analyzing domestic and regional developments, we underscore Tajikistan's concerns and priorities amid a rapidly changing security environment, emphasizing the need for coordinated regional efforts to ensure stability in Central Asia.

Varied Perspectives on the Taliban: Central Asian Experts' Views

The perception of the Taliban among experts in Central Asia, especially in

Tajikistan, is marked by a rich tapestry of diverse and nuanced viewpoints. Through expert interviews and analyses of scholarly articles, along with discussions at academic forums, several distinct perspectives on the Taliban's role and impact have emerged.

A significant portion of experts express deep skepticism about the Taliban's capability to deliver on its promises, especially concerning security and governance. This group articulates a belief that Afghanistan will likely remain a source of instability that could threaten the security of neighboring countries, emphasizing the historical complexities and challenges that have hindered effective governance in Afghanistan.

Conversely, another segment of experts perceives the Taliban's resurgence as an unavoidable outcome of Afghanistan's long-standing socio-political dynamics. They argue that, in contrast to more extremist groups such as ISIS-Khorasan, the Taliban may be seen as the "lesser evil." From this standpoint, there is a recognition that their governance might provide a modicum of stability, which could be strategically valuable. As such, this pragmatic school of thought advocates for engagement with the Taliban, believing that any semblance of stability could be a foundation for developing regional economic and infrastructure initiatives.

A more optimistic cohort of experts, termed transformation optimists, argue that governance pressures over time might lead the Taliban to moderate its stance. They suggest that the demands of governing a diverse population could push the group towards adapting into a more responsible political entity, thus opening pathways for a more constructive engagement with the international community.

In contrast, advocates of secular governance voice serious concerns regarding the implications of the Taliban's rise for the secular political frameworks that are predominant in Central Asia. They worry that the Taliban's ideological underpinnings may influence local political systems and promote the spread of fundamentalist narratives. This group emphasizes the potential risks associated with the Taliban's governance model, which they perceive as a direct threat to the secular values and stability of the region.

Furthermore, several analysts contend that the Taliban's consolidation of power in Afghanistan will reinforce the necessity for extensive securitization efforts within Central Asian states. They argue that these nations will require significant external support to bolster their stability and security in the aftermath of the Taliban's return to power.

Lastly, there exists a contingent of experts whose views are often shaped by their alignment with official government policies. This group maintains a relatively positive perspective on the Taliban, identifying certain opportunities for constructive engagement. They argue that under specific conditions, dialogue, and cooperation could lead to beneficial outcomes for Afghanistan and its neighbors, acknowledging the complex interplay of interests that define the region's geopolitical landscape.

Political Transformation and Regional Implications

The swift and dramatic takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in August 2021 marked not only a decisive military victory but also the result of years of intricate strategic planning heavily influenced by key global powers, notably the United States. The hasty withdrawal of American troops coincided with the swift collapse of the Afghan Republic, revealing a series of critical miscalculations that ultimately left Afghanistan under a regime notorious for its rigid fundamentalist ideology. This seismic political shift poses daunting challenges for Afghanistan's neighboring countries, particularly Tajikistan, which shares a 1,400-kilometer border with Afghanistan and boasts deep cultural, linguistic, and ethnic connections with Afghan Tajiks.

In the aftermath of the Taliban's resurgence, the already precarious stability within Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly, leading to the dissolution of the fragile political consensus that once supported the previous government. Tajikistan's environment has shifted to one of heightened alertness and vigilance along its borders. Authorities are increasingly concerned about the potential spillover of negative effects, such as a surge of refugees fleeing the chaos, the risk of extremist ideologies crossing over, and the rise of organized crime that may exploit the volatile situation.

Afghanistan's deeply rooted political culture, characterized by complex ethnic and tribal allegiances, adds an element of unpredictability that complicates efforts to secure regional stability. Afghanistan's intricate web of loyalties and rivalries makes its political future uncertain, further challenging neighboring countries striving to navigate the emerging landscape in the face of these new realities.

Tajikistan's Security Concerns and Strategic Responses

Tajikistan's geographical position places it at heightened risk from threats originating in Afghanistan. Recognizing this vulnerability, Tajikistan has established various

mechanisms to combat extremism and terrorism. The country's understanding of the socioeconomic, cultural, and political elements contributing to radicalization has guided its efforts. A key framework for these initiatives is the National Strategy of Tajikistan for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (2016–2020), which emphasizes the importance of cooperation among government bodies, civil society, and international partners. A similar strategy has also been developed for the years 2021 to 2025.

The return of the Taliban has led Tajikistan to adopt a non-recognition stance while simultaneously enhancing its defense capabilities. The border shared with Afghanistan serves as a potential route for various threats, including terrorism, human trafficking, and large-scale refugee movements. In response to these challenges, Tajikistan has focused on military readiness and fostering collaboration with international entities, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The resurgence of groups like ISIS-K and the remaining elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) can significantly threaten not only Afghanistan but also the overall stability of Central Asia.

The Influence of the “Taliban Factor” on Radicalization and Extremism in Central Asia

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan has profoundly influenced the landscape of radicalization in Central Asia, exacerbating the existing security risks in the region. Historically, Central Asia has been vulnerable to radical movements, primarily due to political instability and socioeconomic challenges that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The return of the Taliban has amplified these vulnerabilities, echoing the turmoil experienced during the bloody civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s, when widespread instability created a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root.

The military successes of the Taliban play a pivotal role in inspiring various radical groups, suggesting that power and influence can be achieved through armed struggle. This narrative resonates particularly with disillusioned individuals within the region, who find solace in the idea that military strength can lead to political legitimacy. The pervasive influence of social media and messaging platforms has further propelled the spread of these ideologies, making it easier for extremist groups to reach vulnerable and disenfranchised populations across Central Asia. The Taliban's propaganda machinery effectively

portrays their military achievements as a blueprint for the establishment of an Islamic state, capturing the interest of those in Central Asia who share historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan.

Moreover, the dynamics between the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan introduce an additional layer of complexity to the situation. The Taliban publicly positions itself as a staunch opponent of ISIS-K to secure legitimacy and garner support from the international community. However, the ambiguous nature of their relationship with ISIS-K allows the Taliban to exploit this perceived threat. By emphasizing the dangers posed by ISIS-K, the Taliban can leverage its position to negotiate concessions from international powers, such as the lifting of economic sanctions and the pursuit of political recognition. This duality not only underscores the strategic calculation behind the Taliban's rhetoric but also reflects the intricate geopolitical landscape that influences security and radicalization in Central Asia.

Diplomatic Stance and Engagement with the Taliban

A cautious strategy has marked Tajikistan's diplomatic approach toward Afghanistan. President Emomali Rahmon has consistently championed the idea of an inclusive

government in Kabul, one that safeguards the rights of all ethnic groups, particularly the Tajik minority. This principled stance has inevitably led to friction between Dushanbe and the ruling Taliban, as Rahmon's strong emphasis on minority rights stands in stark contrast to the Taliban's more rigid policies.

In contrast to other Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which have adopted a more pragmatic engagement strategy to ensure open communication channels for trade and security cooperation, Tajikistan has resolutely maintained its position of non-recognition towards the Taliban government. This cautious diplomatic posture reflects a deep-seated apprehension that recognizing the Taliban without significant reforms could jeopardize Tajikistan's secular governance model and threaten its national stability. The fear is that legitimizing the Taliban's rule could set a troubling precedent, potentially undermining the delicate socio-political balance within Tajikistan itself.

International Players and Regional Dynamics

The involvement of international actors such as Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union is pivotal in shaping the future

of Afghanistan and its neighbors. After the withdrawal of NATO forces, regional players like Tajikistan have shouldered much of the responsibility for regional security. Russia's military presence in Tajikistan serves as a critical deterrent against potential security threats from Afghanistan, with Moscow viewing Central Asia as a crucial buffer against extremism.

China's cautious involvement also plays a significant role. Beijing is concerned about instability spilling over into its Xinjiang province, where the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) remains a concern. China's collaboration with Tajikistan on border security reflects broader regional efforts to curb terrorism and separatism. These dynamics illustrate the balancing act that Central Asian nations must perform, leveraging international support while managing their security vulnerabilities.

Socio-Political and Economic Consequences for Tajikistan

The impact of the Taliban's return extends beyond immediate security concerns to include socio-political and economic dimensions. Internally, Tajikistan has increased military spending and imposed stringent security measures, which has led to reduced civil liberties and heightened internal dissatisfaction. The emphasis on national security

could inadvertently foster conditions that further drive radicalization as socioeconomic grievances remain unaddressed.

Economically, the instability in Afghanistan disrupts potential regional cooperation. The uncertainty over border security and the lack of a stable governance framework in Afghanistan hinder prospects for economic collaboration, including infrastructure projects that could benefit the broader region. This economic stagnation exacerbates existing challenges in Tajikistan, such as unemployment and limited market access.

Conclusion: Navigating an Uncertain Future

The situation in Afghanistan presents ongoing challenges for Tajikistan, characterized by significant uncertainty following the return of the Taliban. This development has altered security dynamics throughout Central Asia and has prompted neighboring countries to reevaluate their policies. Due to its proximity to Afghanistan, Tajikistan finds itself at the intersection of potential opportunities and substantial risks.

Key challenges for Tajikistan include border security, addressing the humanitarian impact of instability in Afghanistan, and negotiating a

complex geopolitical environment influenced by external powers. To protect its national interests, Tajikistan is focused on enhancing border defenses, promoting an inclusive Afghan government, and maintaining strategic relationships with countries such as Russia and China.

Despite these efforts, the unpredictable political landscape in Afghanistan necessitates that Tajikistan and the broader Central Asian region remain flexible and ready to confront emerging threats. Collaborative engagement with both regional and international partners is essential to foster stability in the area.

The influence of the Taliban has emerged as a critical element in discussions surrounding regional security, highlighting the need for comprehensive, multilateral strategies. These strategies must simultaneously address security concerns and promote socioeconomic development to effectively tackle the challenges of Afghanistan's shifting political situation and ensure long-term stability in Central Asia.

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Water abundance versus water scarcity – chances and challenges of Afghanistan water management

By Erzsébet N. Rózsa, Virág Novák-Varró

Afghanistan is one of the ten countries in the world where the effects of climate change are already being felt extraordinarily. While Afghanistan, in general terms, is not the worst-off country by water consumption data – its total water withdrawal per capita was 523.34 m³ in 2020 (in comparison, this was 482.12 m³ for Hungary), only 29% of the Afghan population has access to safe drinking water. According to the [UNOCHA](#) report, the numerous natural disasters and extreme weather events that have hit Afghanistan recently are a clear consequence of climate change. Renewable water resources have gradually fallen – by some 60% - in the past decades, and dams' storage capacity also fell by 40%. The country's geography is not very favorable; the central part of its territory is mountainous, while the north, south, and southwest are arid and deserted. In recent years, the prolonged drought, flash floods, and landslides caused by sudden rains have made water security an increasingly important issue for governments. Such

erosion of the natural environment further worsens the local population's living conditions. Also, decades of armed conflict have devastated the country's hydrological infrastructure, exacerbated by ongoing political instability and climate change. *"Afghanistan only uses thirty percent of the water produced annually in this country; seventy percent remains unused due to lack of infrastructure, water storage facilities, and water distribution systems," an [Afghan water management expert](#) pointed out.* Besides, some 30% of Afghanistan's freshwater reaches the country from neighboring states, thus providing not only exposure to others but also a direct threat.

It may have surprised many that the Taliban turned up at the [COP29 conference](#) (as an observer). Yet, these factors and the serious drought that struck the country before they took over – already the second time – resulted in the Taliban focusing on addressing water management as a key element of their governance strategy. Since regaining control in August 2021, several giant infrastructure projects have been started. Their appearance at the conference further signals, on the one hand, that they have confidently settled down in power to initiate serious government. On the other hand, it proves that by now, they have enjoyed a certain level of international acceptance, at least within their region.

Nevertheless, while the current government is trying to respond to the problem of water scarcity, the means they are using to do so are increasing tensions between the Taliban government and several neighboring countries.

Three great rivers transit through Afghanistan, i.e., originate from and leave for neighboring states: the Kabul, the Helmand, and the Amu Darya. In the absence of a comprehensive international legal framework on rivers, these rivers, while meaning the essence of life, also pose threats and challenges, as Afghanistan must coordinate with its neighbors, which may lead to both confrontations and eventual cooperation.

Relations between [Iran](#) and Afghanistan and [Uzbekistan](#), [Turkmenistan](#), and Afghanistan have recently become particularly tense over water. Although bilateral and multilateral agreements exist for the sharing of water from both the Helmand and the Amu Darya rivers between countries, in the case of Iran, the [1973 Convention](#) still needs to be ratified due to the turbulent period of the late 1970s. In the case of the Central Asian states, water sharing was governed by the regulations and conventions of the [Soviets](#), which, although contained sections on Afghanistan, the country was not part of these agreements. Given the increasing demand for freshwater

and the increasing frequency of droughts, the Taliban government has put forward measures for both rivers that would improve water supply for the population and agriculture on the Afghan side but could potentially increase tensions with neighboring states. Increasing the capacity of the [dams on the Helmand River](#) and developing the [Qosh Tepa canal](#) on the Amu Darya River are important steps for the development of the country's water infrastructure, but a 10-15% reduction in freshwater supplies in already drought-prone areas of the lower riparian countries and regions (South Khorasan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Karakalpakstan, Khorezm) could cause serious difficulties in the neighboring states. In the case of the [Kabul River](#), there has yet to be a formal agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan on water sharing. The conclusion of an agreement is of particular importance to Pakistan, which is afraid of constructing new reservoirs, canals, and dams on the river's upper reaches as part of the growing infrastructure projects on the Afghan side. In addition to the Kabul River, Afghanistan shares eight other rivers with Pakistan, so in the interests of sustainability and peaceful coexistence, the issue of water sharing between the two countries should be included in an international treaty as soon as possible - but the Taliban's lack of international recognition makes this impossible for the time being.

Afghanistan's water infrastructure has long been neglected and needs sufficient attention, even in 2001-2021. (Hungary's [Mid-Term Strategic Outlook](#) for the Stabilisation of Afghanistan (2010-2015) aimed to improve living standards and promote economic and social development. Projects have focused on the transfer of know-how, including in agriculture and water management. In addition to the Hungarian PRT's activities, civil sector actors were also involved in the realization of the above objective: e.g., the [Hungarian Interchurch Aid](#) has conducted 5 projects in Balkh, Baghlan, and Samangan provinces built a 370 meters long retaining wall, and two water dams with a capacity of 50,000 m3.)

Decades of lack of water management, the ravages of war, and the effects of climate change have also significantly eroded traditional irrigation systems such as the karez. Excessive water usage (wells drilled for agricultural irrigation and domestic consumption) has made traditional karez systems and natural water sources insufficient water supplies. It is therefore urgent to address the issue of water supply for Afghanistan, with its rapidly growing population.

Mati ul-Haq Khales, Director General of Afghanistan's National Environment Agency, spoke at COP-29 about "climate justice" and identified access to funds as his

country's "main expectation" from COP29: "Our Afghan people must have access" to climate finance.

Foreign support for projects can serve both as a confidence-building measure - despite the constant condemnation of the Taliban government by Central Asian (and Western) states for human rights violations and lack of inclusiveness - and as a way to develop common economic interests that reduce intra-regional rivalries. Furthermore, broader security cooperation could ease the concerns of states in the region about militant groups operating inside Afghanistan while alleviating Taliban concerns about insurgents receiving support from outside the country.

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Since the Taliban regained control, Afghanistan's media landscape has been severely restricted, with a drop in media employees from 8,400 to 5,100 due to bans on women's work and strict laws. In September 2024, the Ministry of Information and Culture proposed a new media law, while a support fund for journalists was finalized. The Taliban also implemented a ban on images of living beings and banned 400 books. Between 2021 and 2024, over 400 violations and 220 journalist arrests were reported.



Following the Taliban's 2022 ban on opium cultivation, production dropped by 95%, but in 2024, cultivation rose by 19%, shifting to north-western regions like Badakhshan. Despite the ban, opium prices skyrocketed to \$730 per kg. Many Afghan farmers have lost their primary livelihood source. To address this, the Ministry of Agriculture is promoting alternative crops, distributing improved seeds, and fertilizers, with support from local and international organizations.



Afghanistan's trade deficit increased by 43% in the first nine months of 2024, reaching \$6.3 billion, driven by rising imports, a stronger Afghani, and shifts in Pakistan's trade policies. Exports fell by 12%, with food and coal making up 73% of exports. However, food and coal exports rose in late 2024, narrowing the deficit by 5.2%. Imports grew by 31%, with key items including minerals, food, textiles, and transport goods. Iran became the largest import partner, accounting for 30%, followed by the UAE, Pakistan, and China.