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Taliban's progress in infrastructure, revenue & diplomacy is marred by repressive policies on women's rights & education, complicating Afghanistan's international standing & balancing fundamentalism with economic development.



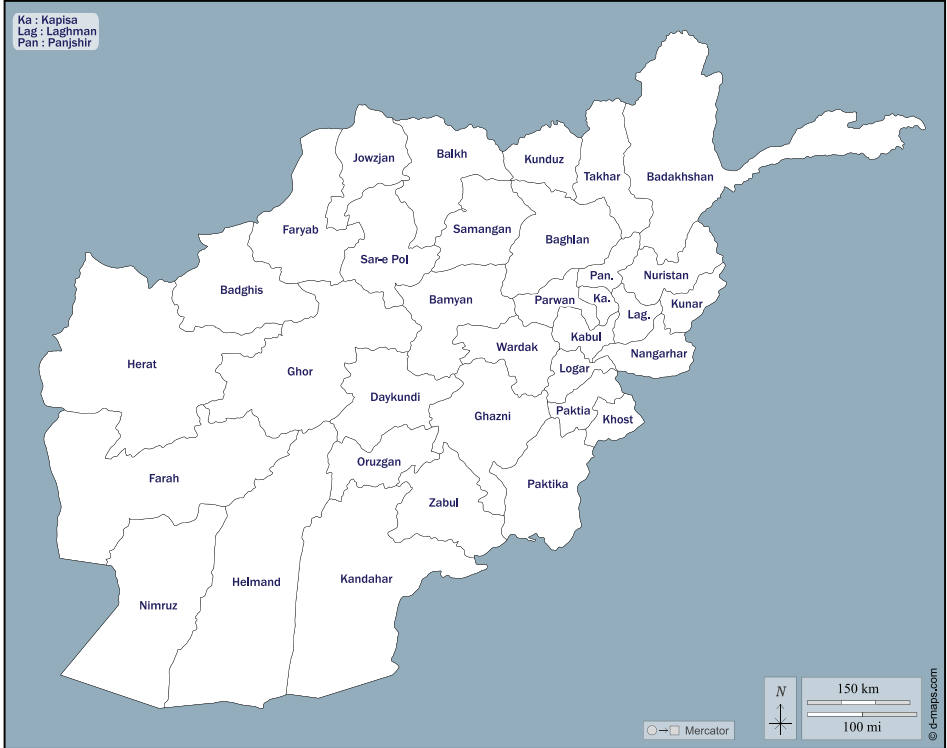
Afghanistan's security remains fragile, with ongoing efforts to combat transnational terrorist threats. Taliban's counterterrorism approach raises concerns, underscoring the need for clarity to ensure regional peace and stability.



Afghanistan faces dire crises: food insecurity, poor healthcare, climate change & refugee influx. Funding shortages exacerbate issues. An urgent international response is needed to prevent catastrophe and protect the fragile social fabric.

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Source: d-Maps

Acronyms

ACC	Afghan Citizenship Card
AFN	Afghani
AJSC	Afghan Journalists Safety Committee
AWD	Acute Watery Diarrhea
CoP	Conference of Parties
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
JA	Jamaat Ansarullah
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PoR	Proof of Registration
TJP	Tahreek-e-Jihad Pakistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

The Afghanistan Monitor, a periodic publication from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan, provides an in-depth analysis of Afghanistan's political, economic, security, and humanitarian conditions since the Taliban's return to power. This edition highlights key developments from June 2024 through August 2024, featuring expert analyses.

August 15, 2024, marked three years since the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' (IEA) assumed power as the de facto political authority in Afghanistan, though not de jure. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan has experienced ongoing shifts, as a result of which there has been increasing scrutiny of the Taliban's governing structure, which continues to be characterized by authoritarian policies with selective pragmatism.

Despite the Taliban's consolidation of control across the country, significant uncertainties persist regarding governance and the protection of women's and human rights under their rule. Additionally, there are concerns about security threats emerging from Afghanistan, mainly due to the presence of Islamic State in other transnational terrorist entities.

The Afghan economy presents a mixed picture. While some sectors show improvement, such as

increased revenue collection and a stronger Afghan currency (Afghani), ongoing challenges include reduced humanitarian aid, limited job opportunities, and the return of Afghan refugees, mainly from Pakistan, exacerbating pre-existing economic difficulties. To enhance their global standing, the Taliban have been seeking greater integration into the international community, significantly deviating from their previous isolation in the 1990s. They have increased their diplomatic outreach and enhanced trade with neighboring and regional countries.

However, at the same time, the group's performance has been open to much debate and criticism, mainly due to the IEA's inability or unwillingness to fulfill pledges of reform agreed to in the Doha agreement, issues specifically about human/women's rights, inclusivity, and counter-terrorism assurances. Restrictions on women's access to education and employment not only infringe on their fundamental rights but also diminish the international community's willingness to engage with the Taliban.

However, despite their establishment as the de facto rulers of Afghanistan, they have yet to gain formal international recognition. Another critical issue overshadowing the Taliban's claimed successes is the IEA's failure to achieve political and

social unity, particularly concerning inclusivity and the representation of ethnic minorities.

Although there have been improvements in Afghanistan's security situation, such as a reduction in terror attacks, the rising threats from transnational terrorist groups like Al-Qaida, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKAP), and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) continue to pose substantial risks to both Afghanistan and the wider region. These groups present significant challenges for the Taliban and contribute to concerns among neighboring countries.

Three years after seizing power, the Taliban continue to face obstacles in their pursuit for international recognition as Afghanistan's legitimate representatives, primarily due to their reluctance to uphold commitments concerning human and women's rights, adherence to global norms, and assurances regarding counter-terrorism. Despite assurances of reform, a palpable discrepancy persists between the Taliban's stated policies and their practical implementation.

Political Situation

The Taliban have been in control of Afghanistan since August of 2021, implementing a system of governance deeply rooted in their

interpretation of Sharia law. At the same time, it was initially unclear what form of government they would choose. However, the current interim structure mirrors elements of their 1990s rule, including a supreme leader, a prime minister, and the continuation of several ministries from the previous administration. One significant change is the replacement of the Women's Ministry with the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, while most previous ministries have been retained. Marking the group's three years of power in Kabul, the Taliban's Supreme Leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, claimed that with time, the group's system solidifies itself, as Sharia law is being implemented to ensure the rights of Muslims and further ordered the Taliban leaders to implement justice in Afghanistan in a bid to prolong the existence of their rule over the country.¹

While the Taliban have focused on specific priorities for their interim administration, such as improving governance under Sharia law and addressing economic issues, concerns persist as they operate without a formal legal structure, namely a constitution. Shortly after taking control, the Taliban suspended the 2004 Afghan constitution, which had previously served as the governing framework. They claim to be in the process of drafting a new constitution and legal framework based on Sharia principles.² Moreover, they abolished

national symbols, such as the national anthem associated with the previous regime and have yet to declare a new one.

The lack of an administrative framework creates uncertainties about the future governance structure and the legal framework in Afghanistan. In this regard, Abdul Karim Haidar, the Deputy Minister of Justice, declared that constitution-making is not an "ordinary matter" as it "requires a decree from Amir al-Mu'minin."³ However, in one of their responses to UNAMA, the Afghan Taliban wrote: "The decrees of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Supreme Leader (May Allah protect him) lay the foundation of the formal documents that are based on Islamic sources. It is a widely recognized principle in all common regimes that decrees and relevant legal documents are issued to reform society and should ensure their implementation."⁴

At the administrative level, the Taliban have been providing technical and management skills to government employees. According to the Technical and Vocation Education Authority officials, nearly 11,000 students have graduated from the Education Authority during the past year, and almost 60,000 students are still under training from the authority. The purpose of such vocational facilities is to increase the efficiency of the country's institutions by reducing their

weaknesses. To do so, 115 vocational and 73 core disciplines are currently being taught in such institutes.⁵ Aside from this, according to the head of finance and administration of the Ministry of Justice, Sayed Habib-ul-Habib, in 2023 alone, the Taliban drafted and revised more than a hundred documents concerning charters, decrees, orders, regulations, statutes, procedures, and bylaws. Subsequently, he noted that in this period, his department reclaimed the state-owned properties by recovering 43,945.66 acres of land, 23 houses, 25 shops, two inns, one clinic, and one water reservoir. Similarly, the Ministry has also evaluated the activities of over 400 aid organizations, issued permits to over 2,000 people for petition writing, and distributed activity permits to almost 1,600 defense lawyers. The Ministry of Finance also sent 47 laws to Kandahar for endorsement.⁶

Similarly, to ensure transparency in different institutions, the Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadim adjudicated that no one in the country is allowed to present fraudulent documents or imaginary students in the schools.⁷ He added that more than 130 curricula - based on religious and international standards - have been finalized and sent to the Supreme Leader for approval.⁸ Additionally, the spokesperson of the Ministry, Ziaullah Hashimi, reported that in various educational

institutions, 11 doctoral programs, 26 master's programs, 13 new faculties at the bachelor's level, and 86 new departments have been established. Moreover, 11 international scholars from different Islamic countries, including Iran, Turkiye, Egypt and others, have been recruited to provide specialized education for the Afghanistan International Islamic University students. Currently, 190,000 students are studying in the country's educational institutions.⁹

Similarly, the Afghan Defence Ministry has recruited 600 young individuals from the Panjshir province, aged between 18 and 21. Moreover, around 2,000 individuals from the province would soon be recruited under the Afghan Ministry of Interior framework.¹⁰ Earlier, from March to July 2024, the Ministry of Interior dismissed more than 600 police personnel on charges of misconduct. The individuals who were involved in misusing the name of the Ministry of Interior were subsequently referred to judicial authorities.¹¹

The inclusion of minority and ethnic groups in Afghanistan's current interim government is a demand shared by both the international community and many Afghans. While the current administration is predominantly male and Pashtun-led, the Taliban have appointed nine cabinet members from non-Pashtun ethnic communities, including Uzbek,

Tajik, and Hazara (including the IEA's chief of army staff Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat) from Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups. Moreover, under the IEA's Commission for Contact with Personalities, since August 2021, over 950 individuals, including former ministers, governors, and members of the previous parliament, have returned to the country.¹²

Additionally, in middle and lower-ranking public offices, the Taliban have retained over 500,000 individuals from the previous Afghan administration, including 513 former ministers, governors, and deputy governors.¹³ However, the exclusion of women and members of various ethnic, political, and civil societies from the policymaking process raises significant concerns about the Taliban's commitment to establishing an inclusive, transparent, and accountable government.¹⁴ In April, the Afghan Ministry of Justice banned the activities of political parties, effectively curtailing their right to political participation. The Ministry's spokesperson Barkatullah Rasouli, stated that the Justice Ministry has removed the directorate responsible for political parties from its structures and has been prosecuting individuals involved in any political activity.¹⁵ In this regard, two TV channels - Noor TV and Barya TV - were temporarily banned by the Taliban authorities due to their owners' affiliation with political parties.¹⁶

The Taliban have been introducing new laws, mostly based on the decrees issued by the Supreme Leader. In August, the Afghan Ministry for Justice announced the enforcement of a law related to the Ministry of Vice and Virtue after its ratification by the Supreme Leader, Mullah Haibatullah. The law, which consists of four chapters and thirty-five articles, addresses various issues, ranging from women's hijab to media regulations. For instance, in Article 13 of the law, women are instructed to cover their faces and must be accompanied by a male guardian while traveling. Additionally, women are barred from wearing thin and tight clothes, and their loud voices have been declared as an act of immodesty. Furthermore, Articles 17 and 22 deal with media regulations under the Islamic principles of Sharia. Subsequently, Article 22 also barred men from wearing ties, trimming their beards below a fist's length and making friendships with a non-believer.¹⁷ Given this, the acting Minister of Vice and Virtue, Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, asked the members of his Ministry to uphold and implement the laws endorsed by the Supreme Leader, as the implementation of Sharia and Hijab is a "red line" for the Islamic Emirate.¹⁸ According to the Justice Ministry, penalties for violations of the provisions of the law include "advice, warnings of divine punishment, verbal threats,

confiscation of property, detention for one hour to three days in public jails, and any other punishment deemed appropriate." It is to be noted that the law is the seventh set of codified laws related to property, financial issues, and prevention of begging.¹⁹

Ongoing Infrastructure Projects

Since assuming control, the Taliban have been actively seeking ways to stimulate economic growth and improve infrastructure in Afghanistan implemented through a combination of domestic initiatives and efforts to attract foreign investment. Additionally, the Taliban have been actively seeking cooperation in areas such as connectivity, trade, infrastructure, education, defense, vocational training, and healthcare with countries including China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, the UAE, Qatar, India, and Japan.²⁰

According to the Afghan Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Azizi, since August 2021, Afghanistan has witnessed an investment of \$7 billion, including \$500 million of assets in the country's industrial sector. He said that the de facto authority aims to sign contracts worth \$80 million soon, and nearly 80 percent of these projects will be directed to

support women's entrepreneurship. He noted that women entrepreneurs currently run 50,000 small businesses and own more than 9,000 companies in the country. Moreover, almost 50 Afghan companies are self-sufficient in different sectors.²¹ Since the Islamic Emirate regained power in the country, the Ministry of Economy has announced the inclusion of 227 domestic development projects in the fiscal year 2024 budget, many of these development projects have been funded by internal revenue.²² Of the 227 projects, 72 are new and 155 are ongoing projects, with a significant portion allocated to the infrastructure sector. Projects funded by this year's budget include 88 construction projects, 50 service projects, 33 infrastructure projects, 38 technical and 18 development projects.²³

Earlier, at the start of this year, Afghanistan's National Procurement Commission, under the Ministry of Economic Affairs, approved 24 new projects across the country. With a combined value of nearly 10 billion Afghanis, most of these projects are linked to the Ministries of Interior Affairs, National Defense, and Public Health. Key initiatives include the construction of the Paranda Panjshir micro-hydroelectric dam, completing the Tori dam in Zabul province, and developing nationwide road, electricity, and communication networks.²⁴ Another significant

project is the Qosh Tepa Canal. In February 2024, construction began on the second phase of the 285 km (177 miles) long canal. This phase stretches from the Dawlat Abad district in Balkh province to the Andkhoi district in the Faryab province. The first phase, which spanned approximately 108 km, was completed in October 2023. The second phase, covering 177 km (110 miles), is expected to be completed this year.²⁵

Most recently, in September 2024, a Taliban delegation visited Turkmenistan. During their visit, the Turkman Foreign Minister, Rashid Meredov, urged the regional partners and the Asian Development Bank to invest in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, following which, on September 11, 2024, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan resumed the work on the completion of TAPI.²⁶ In this regard, the Afghan Prime Minister, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, traveled to the neighboring country and attended the inauguration ceremony of one of the key sections of the pipeline. The TAPI project, estimated at \$10 billion, aims to transport up to 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Turkmenistan's southeastern Galkynysh field via a proposed 1,800-kilometer pipeline through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.²⁷

Moreover, in the health sector, the Taliban are taking various measures to establish a range of healthcare facilities. The Ministry of Public Health has established 400 health centers in different parts of the country in the last three years.²⁸ Similarly, the Afghan Food and Drug Administration stated that as of August 2024, over 100 pharmaceutical factories are active in the country. According to Javid Hajir, the Food and Drug Administration spokesperson, the production capacity of these factories has multiplied from around 220 products to 650 products. It is to be noted that earlier 95 percent of drugs were imported from other countries; however, in the last two years, these imports have decreased to 80 percent.²⁹

Currently, Afghanistan remains one of only two countries in the world that are still reporting polio cases. Therefore, on July 8, 2024, a four-day polio campaign was initiated in different Afghan provinces with the aim of providing vaccines to nearly 8 million children in the country.³⁰ Although the Taliban have been making such efforts since coming into power, polio teams have reported incidents where various families refused to cooperate with them by refusing vaccination for their children based on "some false beliefs." In 2023, a total of 6 cases of polio were reported in Afghanistan; however, by July 2024, not a single case of polio

was reported in the country. Despite this, health officials in Herat province have warned against the spread of the disease due to detected samples of the poliovirus in the city's sewage. Given these warnings, the Herat health department launched a four-day polio vaccination campaign in the region to vaccinate 758,000 children under five.³¹

Additionally, the Taliban have taken various measures in an effort to curb drug addiction among their people. While commemorating the International Day Against Drug Abuse on June 26, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health heralded that since coming into power, more than 54,000 drug addicts in the country have been treated. According to Abdul Wali Haqqani, Deputy Minister of Public Health, 61 treatment centers in the country can treat 30,800 patients annually. Similarly, according to the Afghan Deputy Ministry for Counter Narcotics, it gathered 33,226 drug abusers from the beginning of the solar year 1402 to the start of the solar year 1403 from different parts of the country. Subsequently, in this period, 1810 drug addicts were treated as they graduated after receiving technical training.³² Moreover, in July 2024, several university professors presented their findings at a gathering in Balkh, noting that since August 2021, the number of drug abusers has decreased by 10 percent; however, there are still 4

million people in Afghanistan who are addicted to drugs.³³

Other than the health sector, the Taliban are also focusing on the restoration of archeological sites in a bid to preserve and promote the history and culture of Afghanistan. In this regard, the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture has recently discovered and registered 668 archeological sites after conducting excavations across the country in the past three years. Currently, there are 5,600 historical sites registered with the Archeological Department of the Ministry, and these sites serve as a source of tourism in Afghanistan.³⁴ Moreover, the Ministry is also working to register some historical sites on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Cultural Heritage list. Given its efforts, the Ministry has so far registered 9 historical sites on the Heritage list, including the Cities of Zuhak and Gholghola, the Minaret of Jam in Ghor, and the Kakrak Valley.³⁵ Through these efforts, the National Museum of Afghanistan has seen a surge in the number of visitors. As per the museum sources, since the start of the current solar year (1403), more than 5000 tourists have visited the museum, with most of the visitors being foreigners and students, causing the revenue of the National Museum to surge to 111,000 Afghani (AFN).³⁶

The Taliban are also planning to build 150 houses for families of cave dwellers living in Bamyan, a plan still waiting for approval from the supreme leader.³⁷ In addition to this, the Taliban have initiated the construction of 40 shelters for refugees from Pakistan and Iran, the construction of which has been undertaken in the Sholgara district of Balkh province with the assistance of a Turkish aid organization. The head of the Department of Refugees and Repatriation in Balkh said that the building of each shelter will cost 2,000 USD, and will be completed by October 2024.³⁸ Since such a small number of these houses are unable to accommodate the returning Afghan refugees, the Taliban have urged international organizations to assist those returning.

Moreover, in a bid to provide electricity services to the residents of the Bamyan province, the Taliban are planning to resume work on the 220 kV Bamyan-Dushi power line, having a total capacity of 300 MW. The project was originally initiated in 2018 with 70 percent work completed by 2021. However, since then, the project had remained suspended. With the demand of local residents of the seven districts of the province, the Afghan Ministry of Energy and Water is planning to complete the remaining 30 percent work of the power line. Most of the households in these districts - almost

90 percent - do not have electricity, and many of them use solar panels to meet the power demand.³⁹ On July 18, the Afghan Minister of Energy and Water signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to implement three power-generating projects in Uruzgan, Paktika, and Farah provinces. The projects, with the capacity of producing 8 MW of solar power, are estimated to benefit 5,000 families and will cost \$ 25 million. Under the Taliban's rule, Afghanistan has seen the production of 400 MW of electricity using domestic sources.⁴⁰

Another particularly significant project that has been initiated is the development of the Qosh Tapa Canal project, a 177 km long (110 miles) canal that extends from the Dawlat Abad district of Balkh province to the Andkhoy district of Faryab province, the second phase of which's construction got underway in February of 2024

The construction of the Wakhan-China road has also been set in motion. The decision to construct the 50-km road was taken during the previous government set-up but was halted after the Taliban came into power. Later, in the previous year, the construction work resumed under Taliban rule, which aimed to complete the project before the winter season. The road connects Badakhshan to the Yarkand region of China and is estimated to cost 369 million Afghani

(AFN).⁴¹ Moreover, according to Mohammad Younus Akhundzada, the acting Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the World Bank has shown willingness to return to Afghanistan and resume its pending work on 20,000 projects nationwide.⁴²

Moreover, the Taliban have actively been pursuing cooperation in the fields of connectivity, trade, infrastructure, education, defense, vocational training, and healthcare with China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Turkiye, the UAE, Qatar, India, and Japan.

Humanitarian Situation

Despite numerous efforts and interventions, Afghanistan continues to struggle with a severe humanitarian crisis. Marking World Refugee Day on June 20, 2024, OCHA termed the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan as "extremely severe."⁴³ With a population of 43 million, the country is among those facing the most extreme humanitarian challenges worldwide. These challenges arise from a complex array of factors, including the prolonged impact of decades of war, widespread displacement, the return of refugees from neighboring countries, food and poverty insecurity, as well as natural disasters and climate change.

During her briefing to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, noted that in the past three years, over \$ 7 billion has been provided in humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, except \$ 4 billion, which were used to support basic needs in the country.⁴⁴ Despite this, the country faces "massive poverty," leaving it more vulnerable to natural disasters due to climate change. She emphasized that despite having zero contribution to carbon emission, Afghanistan is the sixth most vulnerable country to climate change, with the situation predicted to worsen, taken as it is the least prepared to deal with the climate crisis and is witnessing a decrease in the international assistance resources. As per the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in the year 2024, almost 23.7 million people - more than half the population of the country - will need humanitarian assistance. However, as of May 15, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 could receive only 16.2 percent of the required \$3.06 billion in funding to assist 17.3 million people.⁴⁵

Funding shortages have already prevented 3 million people from accessing primary and secondary healthcare services, left 1.3 million children under five years of age and 470,000 pregnant and lactating women without Blanket

Supplementary Feeding Services, and deprived 234,000 people of the necessary resources to respond to Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) and cholera. Due to these shortages, OCHA has extended the provision of long-term shelter support for thousands of Afghan households affected by earthquakes and floods and helped with a partial implementation of child protection services. Similarly, supply chains for six of the seven Clusters—Education, Food Security & Agriculture, Health, Nutrition, Protection, and Shelter—are also at imminent risk of disruption.⁴⁶

Additionally, the Afghani humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by the return of refugees from neighboring countries as part of Pakistan's announcement of its repatriation plan for illegal Afghan refugees in November of 2023. According to OCHA, from September 2023 until June 2024, nearly 679,000 Afghan refugees returned to their country from Pakistan. However, in July 2024, the Government of Pakistan announced an extension in the validity of the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards of 1.45 million Afghans residing in the country, as their cards had expired on June 30, 2024. Currently, nearly 3 million Afghans live in Pakistan. 1.5 million have UNHCR's PoR cards, and 800,000 are holders of the Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC).⁴⁷

Amidst the urgent need for climate adaptation in Afghanistan, OCHA suggested that it is crucial to focus on the varying impacts of the climate crisis on women, men, girls, and boys. Any response to climate-induced emergent needs must be tailored to align with the priorities of women and girls. At the upcoming 29th Conference of Parties (COP) in November 2024 in Azerbaijan, OCHA plans to spotlight Afghanistan as a unique and pressing case in its global advocacy for increasing climate finance in fragile contexts and for the implementation of the COP 28 Declaration on Relief, Recovery, and Peace.⁴⁸

Human Rights and Women's Rights

Despite repeated warnings from the international community then, the Taliban have not effectively addressed concerns about women's and human rights. Although they initially pledged to uphold women's rights according to Islamic law and to support women's education and participation in public life, the group swiftly backtracked on these commitments after seizing power.

Women

In August 2024, the Afghan Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad

Nadim, said that the conditions for opening girls' educational institutions still need to be met. He stated: "The research by scholars is ongoing. If scholars conclude in their research that educating females in this manner is permissible, it is believed that permission will then be granted."⁴⁹ However, while talking on the sidelines of the 50th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), Tarig Ali Bakhit, the Special Envoy of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for Afghanistan, has urged Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, to reconsider the group's decision concerning the women's education and work.⁵⁰

Despite these things, the group has also demonstrated some positives since coming into power. In August 2024, while presenting its annual performance report, the Afghan Ministry of Vice and Virtue announced that in the last year, 5,486 cases out of almost 9,808 cases were addressed, involving issues of providing inheritance to women, preventing violence against women, and thwarting the sale/purchase of women. Regarding these offences, over 7,000 individuals were detained for 24 hours, and 4,737 others were held for 72 hours for disciplinary punishments. In addition to this, the Ministry was able to prevent more than 300 cases of forced marriages and an equal number of cases involving

women who were to be sold. Similarly, apart from providing inheritance rights to women in more than 700 cases, the Ministry mediated to transform over 1,000 cases of enmity into friendship.⁵¹ More specifically, in the last three years, the Ministry provided inheritance to almost 4,600 cases, and the remaining cases were referred to a court.⁵²

Media

While presenting the annual achievements of the Taliban, Abdul Wasi Akhund, the head of the General Office of the Prime Minister, expressed the group's support for freedom of expression in line with Islamic values, arguing that the activities of media help ensure transparency, as they offer a bridge between people and the government.⁵³ Similarly, to strengthen the Afghan media, the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture pledged to improve the media by working on the media landscape in the country. In this regard, the spokesperson for the Ministry, Khobaib Ghufuran, noted that all the media outlets should work under the values of Islam, the culture of Afghanistan, and the policies of the Islamic Emirate. Given this, a number of media personnel and media rights activists have hoped for "ratification of the media law, access to information, and the support of the international community." Again,

the Ministry of Information and Culture stated that the Public Media Law would be finalized only after its ratification by the Supreme Leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada.⁵⁴

Earlier, in 2020, as noted by NAI – an Organization Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan - the number of female journalists had dropped from 2,500 in 2014 to 1,500.⁵⁵ Over 1,000 female Afghan journalists left the media industry during this period for various reasons.⁵⁶ However, in May 2024, the head of the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), Abdul Qadim Wyar, noted an increase of 17 and 10 percent in the presence of women and men in media as compared to the last year, respectively. Despite these positives, he also called attention to the ongoing challenges faced by Afghan journalists, as "journalists from various institutions are being arrested, which means that the Islamic Emirate does not respect them to the extent that they should be." Similarly, the head of the Tolo News, an Afghan media outlet, also noted the economic limitations of media, which, if left unattended, can close the doors of media houses, and many journalists will lose their jobs.⁵⁷

In June 2024, the Afghan Ministry of Justice ordered the closure of Tamadon TV in Kabul. In addition to this, Khatam-al-Nabieen Religious School and University were also barred from their activities on the

charges of being affiliated with the dissolved 'Islamic Movement of Afghanistan party'.⁵⁸ The Ministry noted that in Afghanistan, all the political parties have been dissolved, and consequently, all the media outlets affiliated with such parties have been thwarted from conducting their activities. In April, the country's Commission on Media Violation (CMV) temporarily closed two media outlets - Noor Television and Barya Television - due to their owners' engagement in anti-regime propaganda and non-compliance with the Commission's recommendations. Other than this, in the last three years, the Taliban have banned operations of more than 200 media outlets on various grounds.⁵⁹

Since August 2021, nearly 56 media outlets in Afghanistan have newly opened or have had their licenses renewed. According to the Ministry of Information and Culture, these outlets include 30 radio stations, 20 print media outlets, and 6 TV stations.⁶⁰

Economic Situation

Since August 2021, the Taliban have redirected their attention towards the economy, seeking to boost revenue collection, strengthen the market value of the Afghani currency, and enhance trade relations with neighboring and regional countries. Apart from generating revenues

coming from taxations, customs, and energy billings, the Taliban government has also rolled back its administrative expenses.⁶¹

During the past year, there have been some signs of recovery. According to the Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 2.7% in 2023, attributed to factors such as the expansion of exports and increased support for the private sector.⁶² Ministry spokesperson Abdul Rahman Habib reported that the agricultural sector rose to 34.3%, with a 2.1% growth rate. The industrial sector saw a 13.5% rise with 2.6% growth, the mining sector grew by 2.4%, and the water, electricity, and gas sector experienced a 2.8% increase, with a growth rate of 5%. However, despite these modest gains, the overall economic outlook remains highly uncertain as Afghanistan remains isolated from the global economy, with poverty levels remaining high and increasing restrictions on women's economic participation.⁶³

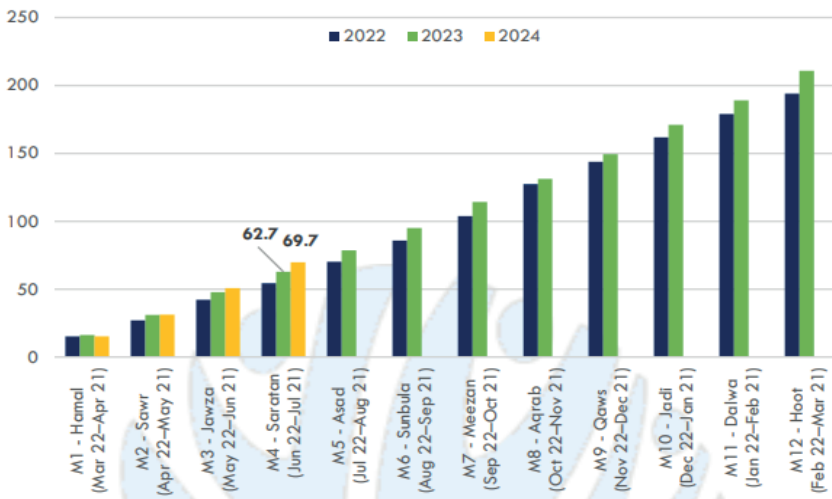
Despite this, the Taliban economic delegations have been participating in different investment forums. A delegation from the Islamic Emirate, led by Acting Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Abdul Manan Omari, attended the 27th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. During the forum, Omari also held meetings with Dagestan's Minister

of Economy and the President of the Chamber of Commerce, focusing on enhancing trade, strengthening economic ties, and facilitating visas for Afghan traders. Previously, the Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce had participated in the 15th Kazan Summit to attract investments and boost trade with Russia.⁶⁴

Afghani (AFN) and Revenue Collection

Since last year, consumer prices in Afghanistan have decreased due to a better supply of domestic and imported goods and services. In July 2024, on a year-on-year basis, the domestic prices shrunk by 5.9 percent, whereas food and non-food prices fell by 9.8 and 1.8 percent, respectively. Despite its trade deficit, Afghanistan's

Afghani (AFN) currency averaged 70.9 per dollar in the same month. Since the Taliban's rise to power, the AFN has maintained the appreciation of 21.3 percent. In addition to this, during the first four months of the fiscal year 2024-25 (March 22 to July 21, 2024), Afghanistan's revenue collection reached almost \$1 billion - nearly 5 percent of the total Afghan GDP. The revenue collection exceeded its target by 3 percent, experiencing an 11 percent increase compared to the same period of the fiscal year 2023-24. This rise in the revenue collection is mainly due to the effective performance of the Afghanistan Revenue Department (ARD), which witnessed a 29 percent rise in non-tax sources compared to the previous year, an increase in revenues, and vehicle registrations.⁶⁵



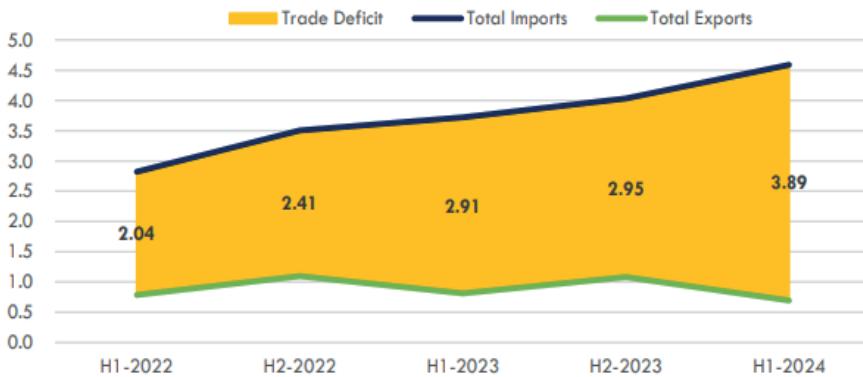
Afghanistan Revenue Collection for FY 2024-25 (AFN billions)

Source: Ministry of Finance

Trade

According to Nooruddin Azizi, Afghan Minister of Industry and Commerce, since August 2021, over \$7 billion has been invested in Afghanistan, of which 500 million pertained to the industrial sector. He noted that Afghanistan trades with more than 80 countries across the world.⁶⁶ Still, according to the World Bank, the

Afghan trade deficit has increased by 34 percent during the first 6 months of 2024, from U\$2.9 billion in the first half of 2023 to \$3.9 billion - 20 percent of Afghanistan's GDP. The widening trade deficit is mainly attributed to a shift in Pakistan's trade policy and the consistent appreciation of the Afghani (AFN) against the country's trading partners.⁶⁷



Afghanistan Trade Deficit (\$ billion)

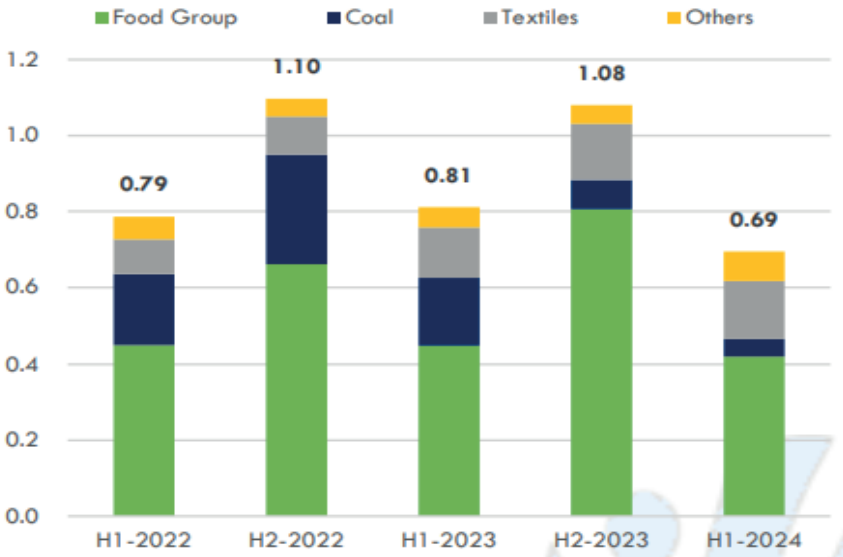
Source: ASYCUDA

In the first half of 2024, Afghanistan's exports witnessed a decrease of 14 percent as compared to the first half of 2023 and reached a culminated value of \$700 million. This was partially due to a transformation in Pakistan's trade policy, under which the country shifted all its imported coal-fired plants to local coal-fired plants in a bid to reduce its import bills. Consequently, Afghanistan's coal exports fell from \$179 million in April 2023 to \$43 million in June 2024, a

decline in coal exports of 76 percent. Similarly, Pakistan's withdrawal of custom concessions on fresh and dry fruits from Afghanistan further decreased its total exports. From \$446 million to \$421 million, Afghan food exports witnessed a decline of 5.6 percent. Despite this, 47 percent of Afghanistan's total exports to Pakistan remain the largest export destination for Afghan products, followed by India - at 28 percent.⁶⁸

Apart from declining coal and food exports, both of which make 67 percent of the total Afghan exports, the country has witnessed an increase in the export of textiles from \$133 million in the first half of 2023 to \$153 million during the first six months of 2024. The rise in this sector was witnessed due to the emergence of potential Iranian markets. Due to this,

the first half of 2024 witnessed an increase in Afghanistan's exports to Iran by 205 percent. Even though the share of Afghanistan's exports to Iran remains relatively low, with a recent rise in the exports of Afghan products to Iran, the share has surged from 1 percent in 2023 to 4 percent by June 2024.⁶⁹



Afghanistan's Exports 2022-2024 (\$ billion)

Source: ASYCUDA

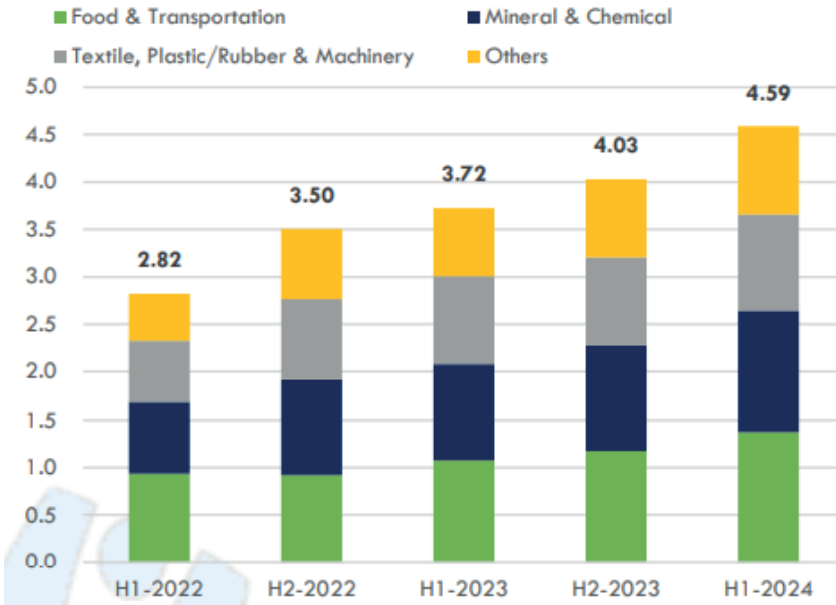
On the contrary, Afghanistan's imports have increased by 23 percent in the first half of 2024, reaching \$4.6 billion in contrast to the previous year, of which food accounts for 20 percent at \$921 million, minerals make up 20 percent at \$908 million, and textile 7 percent at \$332 million. In this regard, Iran remains the largest

import market for Afghans, as the former makes up 30 percent of the total imports, followed by the UAE, Pakistan, and China at 22, 17 and 7 percent, respectively.⁷⁰

In an effort to boost trade potential, the Islamic Emirate delegation headed by Acting Minister of Labor

and Social Affairs Abdul Manan Omari participated in the 27th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2024. On the forum’s sidelines, Abdul Manan Omari also met with the Minister of Economy and the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Dagestan, discussing the

development of trade, strengthening economic relations, and providing visa facilitation to Afghan traders. Prior to this, the acting Minister of Industry and Commerce had also participated in the 15th Kazan Summit to attract investments and increase trade with Russia.⁷¹



Afghanistan's Imports 2022-2024 (\$ billion)

Source: ASYCUDA

Poppy Cultivation

After coming into power, the Taliban cracked down on the cultivation of poppy and the distribution of drugs across Afghanistan. In the last two years, the group destroyed almost 1500 drug factories in different provinces of the country.⁷² In light of this, the UN Office on Drugs and

Crime noted in 2023 that poppy cultivation declined in almost all parts of Afghanistan. It noted that poppy production declined by almost 95% from 6200 tons in 2022 to 333 tons in 2023. This sharp decline is attributed mainly to the April 2022 order by the Taliban that banned the cultivation and production of opium across the country. Given this, there

was a sharp reduction in farmers' income by 92%, from nearly \$1360 million in 2022 to \$110 million in 2023.⁷³ Likewise, according to a study by, Alcis, a geospatial analytics firm, Afghanistan has been experiencing a decline in the cultivation of opium for the last two consecutive years. It noted that the 14 provinces of Afghanistan, which were responsible for the cultivation of nearly 92% of the country's poppy in 2022, with a total area of 202,000 hectares, fell to less than 4,000 hectares in 2024.⁷⁴

However, in addition to the Taliban's efforts to discourage the domestic cultivation of poppy fields inside Afghanistan, the Taliban needs a more coordinated effort at a regional level to thwart its cross-border smuggling as well. In this regard, Hamdullah Fitrat, the Deputy Spokesperson for the Taliban, urged the regional and international countries to work with the Afghan authorities in preventing drug trafficking.⁷⁵ Moreover, to provide alternate livelihoods to farmers against the cultivation of poppy fields, the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock has introduced a five-year cultivation plan in the direction of the Supreme Leader.⁷⁶ Per the Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 2.7% in 2023, citing the expansion of exports, support for the private sector, and other factors. According to Abdul Rahman Habib, the spokesperson of

the Ministry, Afghanistan's agriculture sector increased to 34.3% with a growth of 2.1%, the industrial sector saw an increase of 13.5% with a growth of 2.6%, the mining sector saw a 2.4% growth, whereas the water, electricity, and gas sector rose by 2.8% with a growth of 5%.⁷⁷

Foreign Situation

Since attaining power, the Taliban have been actively engaging with neighboring countries and the wider international community through various channels. Despite lacking official recognition, the Taliban continue to see themselves as equal and involved members of the global community. Their ongoing interactions include meetings with diplomatic representatives in Afghanistan, hosting foreign delegations, international travel, and participation in various regional and global forums. In this regard, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi, stated that the country's interaction with foreign countries and international institutions has made progress.⁷⁸

Currently, the interim government in Afghanistan has almost 40 active diplomatic missions across the world.⁷⁹ In a more recent development, on August 21, 2024, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) accepted the credentials of the Taliban ambassador,

Mawlawi Badreddin Haqqani.⁸⁰ This makes the UAE the only second country to formally accept the credentials of the Taliban-appointed ambassadors after China. In the UAE, which was one of the three countries to officially recognize the Taliban government during their first stint in the 1990s, the Taliban have already been in control of their embassy in Abu Dhabi and a consulate in Dubai since last year. However, many believe that the formal acceptance of the Afghan envoy will give confidence to the Taliban, whose government remains to be internationally recognized. Even before accepting the credentials of the Afghan envoy, the two countries enjoyed good relationships. It is obvious that since the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, GAAC Holdings - a UAE-based firm - has been managing the operations of different Afghan airports, including Kabul airport. Similarly, in July 2024, the Afghan interior Minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani - a "specially designated global terrorist" by the USA - met with the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi.⁸¹

Similarly, on August 21, 2024, another diplomatic breakthrough was achieved by the Taliban, as the Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry accepted the Taliban diplomat, Mohammad Rahman Rahmani, as the Chargé d'Affaires at the Afghan Embassy.⁸² Given these developments, the

Taliban's Deputy Spokesperson, Hamdullah Fitrar stated that the "diplomatic relations of the Islamic Emirate are expanding."⁸³

In this context, the Taliban have been engaging with officials from different European countries in a bid to convince them to re-open their embassies in Kabul. In a similar meeting in Qatar, in August 2024, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, Political Deputy of the Afghan Prime Minister, met with the officials of the UK, Canada, Italy, France, South Korea, Australia, Germany, and the US, where he requested them to "move their embassies and representations to Kabul and carry out their work from there."⁸⁴ As for those countries that do not have their embassies open in Kabul, they communicate with the Taliban via the group's political office in Doha.⁸⁵

However, in September 2024, authorities in the UK ordered the closure of the Afghan embassy in London by September 27, 2024. As per Zalmay Rassoul, the previous government appointed Afghanistan's ambassador to the UK, the "decision has been made based on the requirements of the host country's authorities." Before the announcement by the UK government, the Taliban government had declared different documents issued by 14 embassies (including the one in London) as invalid. It needs to be noted that nearly dozens of embassies

in Europe are being managed by diplomats, appointed by the previous Afghan government.⁸⁶ Likewise, the German authorities, responding to a letter sent by Taliban Foreign Minister, Amir Muttaqi, urged the Afghan embassy in Berlin to resolve its issue with the Taliban authorities. The informal response from the German authorities was the only reply that the Taliban received after they had sent letters to various European countries, questioning the legitimacy of councilor services provided by the previous government's appointed Afghan ambassadors.⁸⁷

Other than this, since August 2021, the Taliban have been hosting delegations from different countries. In the last three years, the group hosted over 40 high-level delegations.⁸⁸ More so recently, in August 2024, the Taliban hosted a trilateral meeting with representatives from Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in Kabul. The meeting among the three countries aimed at discussing regional cooperation, economic investment, and developing trade and transit.⁸⁹

Additionally, the Taliban have been participating in a number of regional and international meetings concerning Afghanistan. During 2023, the Taliban participated in almost 30 such meetings, including the fifth Moscow format, the Oslo meeting, and the second and third Doha meetings in Qatar.⁹⁰ The second Doha meeting,

held from February 18 to 19, was not attended by the Taliban, as the host authorities did not meet their set of conditions. However, the third Doha meeting, held from June 30 to July 1, 2024, witnessed the attendance of the Taliban's delegation, led by Zabiullah Mujahid. The meeting was attended by delegations from nearly 30 different countries, which assembled to discuss the future of Afghanistan, with a specific focus on the integration of the Taliban into the international community and their obligations towards human rights. Similarly, the Taliban joined the meeting with an agenda to discuss the financial restrictions on Afghanistan and the country's actions against drug trafficking.⁹¹ Though the third Doha meeting was lauded by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, who considered the meeting as a "good opportunity" to take all stakeholders on board vis-a-vis Afghanistan's humanitarian condition,⁹² Others criticized it. According to the Malala Fund, the absence of Afghan women and civil society from the meeting rendered its outcome "as hollow as the process itself."⁹³ Despite this, after the end of the third Doha meeting, Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amir Khan Muttaqi, met with the head of UNAMA, Roza Otunbayeva, and discussed matters about the removal of financial and banking restrictions as well as an alternative to the opium cultivation.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, in July 2024, the spokesperson for the Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid, declared UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, was banned from traveling to Afghanistan. The spokesperson accused Richard Bennett of spreading “propaganda in Afghanistan” and, therefore, not being trustworthy.⁹⁵ The decision was met with domestic as well as international condemnations and criticism. Richard Bennett called the Taliban’s decision a setback and urged the Afghan authorities to reverse the decision and allow him to travel to Afghanistan. Similarly, Rahmatullah Nabil, head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) of the previous government in Afghanistan, said the decision is a “blatant insult to human rights.” Moreover, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called the decision “shameful and unsurprising.”⁹⁶

Security Situation

While the security situation in Afghanistan has improved since the Taliban took control of the government, the most significant factor that continues to undermine the future of Afghanistan and the region are threats emanating from Transnational Terrorist Groups (TTG) such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Despite counter-terrorism assurances from the IEA, terrorist threats persist, undermining the Taliban’s credibility as a responsible stakeholder within the international community. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)’ report of April 2024, reiterates concerns already highlighted by the United Nations Security Council’s Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reports on Afghanistan about the Taliban’s tolerance towards terrorist groups like the TTP and Al-Qaeda. Furthermore, concerns persist over the unchecked movements and training activities of Al-Qaida personnel in the country. The report also noted that these terrorist groups have withstood any counter-terrorism efforts so far.⁹⁷

The report noted that ISKP is still the most serious threat in the region, as it is conducting its activities outside Afghanistan. In recent years, the strength of ISKP fighters has increased from 4,000 to 6,000 as per some member states, whereas other members argue that it remains between 2,000 and 3,500. This difference in accuracy is due to ISKP’s ability to embed covertly in the Al-Qaida affiliate groups.⁹⁸ Sanaulah Ghafari remains the group’s leader, and Abu Ahmad al-Madani manages its external operations from Kunar and Nuristan Provinces and Iran. Similarly, Qari Rafi Ullah is responsible

for the group's financial matters in Afghanistan. Moreover, the group has relocated its personnel from its core areas of Kunar and Nangarhar to the Badakhshan, Herat and Nimroz Provinces in a bid to resist the Afghan Taliban's pressure by adopting asymmetric warfare. In this regard, the ISKP has been using propaganda of a Pashtun-centric governance system against the Afghan Taliban to discredit them.⁹⁹

Strategically, in the short-term period, ISKP is trying to achieve battle-readiness, enhance financial resources, and recruit the disgruntled people of various terrorist groups and the Afghan Taliban. Regarding its mid-term goal, it may plan low-key attacks by targeting soft targets in a bid to humiliate the Taliban, whereas in the long-term, the ISKP would try to plunge Afghanistan into turmoil, take control of Afghanistan's territories, and expand to northern regional countries.

Likewise, Al-Qaida is showing strategic patience and is utilizing its ties with the Taliban. If it successfully establishes greater relations with TTP, the latter could potentially transform into an "extra-regional threat." The strength of Al-Qaida is dormant; yet the terrorist group remains hierarchical under the leadership of its de facto leader, Sayf al-Adl. Despite having a lack of capability to conduct any large-scale operation outside

Afghanistan, Al-Qaida is trying to forge relations with regional terrorist organizations, including ETIM, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and Jamaat Ansarullah (JA), in order to expand itself into Central Asia.¹⁰⁰

TTP is also making acquaintances with Al-Qaida to carry out attacks inside Pakistan. Reportedly, Al-Qaida, in collaboration with Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, is training suicide bombers for TTP in the Kunar Province. Similarly, alongside Al-Qaida, the Afghan Taliban are also supporting TTP leadership and fighters by sharing = manpower, providing training camps, and conducting under the banner of Tahreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP). This could place TTP in the role of umbrella organization, with a total strength of 6,000 to 6,500 fighters, for other organizations. This, in addition to Al-Qaida's support for TTP, could increase the degree of threat for Pakistan and, ultimately, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.¹⁰¹ The Taliban appears to have adopted a compartmentalized approach, particularly towards neighboring states, prioritizing the concerns of certain countries over others. While the Taliban have been taking steps to counter the ISKP, they have yet to implement the same approach towards the TTP, leading to heightened tensions with Pakistan. This approach is shortsighted as the threat level that regional countries face from terrorist groups in Afghanistan is uniformly distributed.

Conclusively, the Taliban will need to meet these basic yet pivotal expectations if they wish to be seen as a legitimate and recognized member of the international community.

Opinion Corner:

Evolution of the Taliban: Changes in behavior and strategy

By Islomkhon Gafarov

Taliban's recent internal reforms may suggest some fundamental transitions in the behavior of the group. Taliban government gradually appeared to be transforming from an "internally intimidating" and "externally blackmailing" entity into an increasingly rational and, at some point, predictable stakeholder. Therefore, some of the recent undertakings of the movement also show some efforts aimed at confidently leading the country. All these transformations might have a temporary characteristic intended to achieve some political gains both domestically and internationally. It seems that the incumbent Taliban is a more practical rather than an ideologically driven entity.

Ideological foundations

Evidently, the Taliban has revised its political strategy, although its ideology remains unchanged. The roots of the Taliban's ideology are traced back to the Deobandi school, a Hanafi movement within Islam. The

Deobandi school was founded on the revival of Islam based on Sharia law. A crucial component of Taliban ideology is Pashtunwali, the traditional code of conduct for Pashtuns in daily life.

In 2006, Taliban leader Mullah Omar published the book "Loyha," which became a guiding text for the Taliban movement. In 2016, the current leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, published his book based on the ideas of "Loyha." However, the method by which they run the country has drastically begun to change to become a more rational actor.

Taliban's War on Terror

For many years, the Taliban movement was associated with terrorist networks. This perception stems from the fact that during the first emirate (1996-2001), Afghanistan became a safe haven for the global terrorism networks. However, the incumbent government of the Taliban is showing changes in its approach to terrorism since it is actively fighting against Al-Qaeda and ISIS-Khorasan (ISKP); however, though it is said to be supporting terrorist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) by using it as leverage and a political tool rather than sympathizing for its ideology.

Furthermore, the Taliban's fight against ISKP and Al-Qaeda seems to be more about seeing them as political opponents rather than ideological

ones. Since ISKP is particularly growing in strength, some estimates account for the number of fighters, around 9,000.

Kush Tapa canal

Taliban's rather coercive foreign policy can also be observed in the construction of the Kush Tapa Canal in Northern Afghanistan. The canal is expected to be fully completed by the end of 2028, potentially reducing the water flow of the Amu Darya River by 30%. This development could significantly impact the water balance of the region.

Regional countries are urging Afghanistan to build the canal according to international standards, but the final decision rests on the Taliban government. Experts suggest that Kush Tapa might potentially be used as a tool for blackmailing the Central Asian countries, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Despite this development, current relations between Afghanistan and all regional countries remain positive. There have been no reported negative segments in Uzbek-Afghan or Turkmen-Afghan relations as the relationships have a pragmatic trend benefiting each party. The Kush Tapa Canal issue might be resolved diplomatically, given that Afghanistan is increasingly presenting itself as a diplomatic actor in the international arena.

Overall, Afghanistan strives to cooperate with Central Asian countries in a mutually beneficial way. For instance, there is no evidence of the export of radical ideas from Afghanistan to the region at least for now. This indicates that ideological issues have been taken to backstage when it comes to pragmatically driven foreign policy matters.

Diplomacy

The current government of the Taliban, despite its Deobandi ideology, which is generally unsympathetic to cooperation with non-Muslims and advocates for jihad, is engaged in active diplomacy with the non-Islamic world, grounded in principles of realpolitik in comparison to the previous Taliban regime. For example, proactive diplomacy is apparent about China, India and Russia. Meanwhile, the first emirate (1996-2001) relied primarily upon the Islamic world.

The perception of the Taliban is also gradually transitioning. While the Taliban has not yet gained official recognition, it has also not become a pariah state. For example, UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan received the acting Minister of the Interior, Sirajuddin Haqqani, in early June of this year. Despite Haqqani being on the UN terrorist list, the Taliban official was able to make his visit without hindrance.

Internal policy

Domestically, the Taliban is improving the bureaucratic system by slowly introducing meritocratic elements in governance. While the Taliban was previously characterized as a horizontal hierarchy, there appeared to be a transition towards a vertical power structure. The Taliban is actively developing the country's tax system. Regulating the tax sphere significantly impacts the stability and integration of the population under government control. Additionally, the Taliban is taking measures to combat corruption. By attracting qualified personnel to public service, the Taliban aims to strengthen its authority. For example, employees of the former Ashraf Ghani government, who have more experience in administrative matters, are being recruited into public service.

The country is also trying to demonstrate its commitment to fighting opium cultivation. This May, large poppy fields in Badakhshan were destroyed, causing mass unrest among the farming population. Notwithstanding the Taliban's actions were internally seen as intimidating, they have seemed to be carrying a message to the international community that the Taliban is against opium cultivation and ready to cooperate with the world.

Giant projects

Special attention is being given to agricultural development. Through the Kush Tepa Canal, the Taliban intends to enhance the irrigation system in northern Afghanistan, significantly impacting agricultural production. Additionally, efforts to implement major infrastructure projects such as the TAPI gas pipeline, CASA-1000 and the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway demonstrate the Taliban's commitment to developing the country's infrastructure and connecting all regions with socio-economic ties.

These initiatives are expected to yield the following results:

1. Improve the socio-economic life of the country.
2. Unify all regions of the country, a hallmark of centralized state governance.
3. Enhance the country's image in the eyes of the international community, potentially serving as a tool of foreign policy to gain recognition for the Taliban government.

These measures indicate the Taliban's relatively nascent undertakings that seek to develop a governance system.

Conclusion

The Taliban government has potentially revised its domestic and foreign policy strategies. Domestically, the Taliban might have a tendency to be more focused on rebranding itself through major projects aimed at improving socio-economic conditions in the country. Internationally however, the movement is attempting to demonstrate the elements of burgeoning predictability and pragmatic governance. These attempts are likely aimed at gaining international recognition.

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Rebuilding Afghanistan: The Role of Youth and Women in Achieving Sustainable Peace

By Safia Ibrahimkhel

Afghanistan is Pakistan's closest neighbor, but historically, maintaining stable bilateral relations has been difficult for both. The changing regimes, continuous conflict, and unrest in Afghanistan have added complexity to their relationship. Key issues, particularly terrorism, make cooperation and regular consultation imperative in their bilateral ties. The war in Afghanistan has profound connections with Pakistan, and Pakistan remains a crucial player in any solution to the Afghan crisis. However, other neighboring countries, such as the USSR, Iran, India, China, and Central Asia, also play vital roles in achieving stability in the region. While pursuing their own security strategies and viewing each other's actions with suspicion, these states and actors have significant national interests in Afghanistan's stability.

Ebbs and flows have marked Pakistan and Afghanistan's relationship, and it has rarely been smooth. Afghanistan has been at war for over 30 years. Governments come and go, but no clear vision has emerged to end the

conflict. The people of Afghanistan, especially women, girls, children, and young men, have endured immense suffering from decades of conflict and violence, primarily due to the persistent political instability in the country. Domestic violence and civil unrest are on the rise, alongside serious human rights violations, mass killings, deteriorating economic conditions, and one of the longest humanitarian crises in modern history.

These crises have been exacerbated by the actions of various actors, none of whom have successfully protected the civilian population from domination and oppressive political and social systems. At times, terror has been unleashed on certain ethnic groups simply because of their affiliation with opposing factions. As a result, many Afghans have fled to neighboring countries, seeking refuge from the hostile conditions.

The past 20 years were a golden period for Afghanistan's youth, especially for Afghan women and girls. They were integrated into policymaking and decision-making processes, with their dignity and rights respected. Women were meaningfully included at every level of discussion that impacted their lives and futures.

Afghan women made substantial contributions to the rebuilding and development of Afghanistan. The nexus between Women, Peace, Security, and humanitarian action is

critically important, as women and young people fleeing conflict are the most vulnerable to violence and abuse. They have the most to gain from peace and security and, thus, a significant stake in it.

However, the current political system under the Taliban casts a shadow over young people's capabilities and rights to freedom of expression and speech. Young people have been excluded from strategy-making processes, and women have been pushed back to the "stone age," with their fundamental rights being violated daily. Afghan women face significant challenges. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, they have issued more than 70 edicts, directives, and decrees that have severely curtailed women's and girls' rights. These include limiting girls to primary-level education, banning women from most professions, and prohibiting them from accessing parks, gyms, and other public spaces.

Education is a powerful tool that empowers young women, giving them the confidence to pursue their dreams and make decisions about their futures. Yet, the Taliban regime is the only political system actively restricting women from this empowerment. This raises the question: Why do the Taliban, or any extremist or conservative group, fear women's empowerment?

Since the Taliban takeover, human rights violations and gender discrimination have peaked. Young, educated people are now entirely excluded from rebuilding and progress. As a result, Afghan women's and youth's high expectations no longer align with current policies. Many young people still feel politically marginalized in Afghanistan. Extremist groups in remote areas are exploiting this growing frustration, making significant efforts to recruit disillusioned youth into their networks.

This situation highlights a dangerous irony: the very population that should be the driving force in rebuilding and stabilizing Afghanistan could instead become a threat. Young people often play prominent roles in political affairs and in preventing societal violence. The transformation and role of the "youth bulge" are intricately linked to the political system and ongoing crises.

Urgent action is needed to build a sustainable and peaceful Afghanistan. The inclusion of women in decision-making and providing them with learning opportunities are powerful tools for moving from exclusion to democratic decision-making, from gender inequality to gender justice, and from conflict and violence to sustainable, feminist peace.

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The Taliban have made progress in infrastructure projects, revenue collection, and diplomatic outreach. However, these advancements are overshadowed by their repressive policies towards women's rights and education, which have cast a long shadow over the nation's standing in the international community. As the group remains in a delicate balance between their fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law and the need for economic development in Afghanistan, the pattern of progress and regression since their rise to power has become increasingly complex.



The security situation in Afghanistan remains challenging, and efforts to combat transnational terrorist threats are ongoing. Despite the Taliban's efforts to project stability and progress, there are concerns about the coherence of their approach to counterterrorism. Addressing these concerns is crucial to ensuring a peaceful and stable future for Afghanistan and the region. of violence.



The nation is currently facing food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, the harsh realities of climate change, and the return of refugees from neighboring countries. These challenges are worsened by funding shortages for aid programs, further straining the country's already limited resources. This highlights the urgent need for an international response to prevent a looming catastrophe that threatens to tear apart the fragile social fabric of Afghanistan.