

# The Social Challenges to the New Government of Taliban\*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the measures taken by the new Taliban\* Afghan government in social policy to get relative internal legitimacy and at the same time pursue a radical course aimed at the harsh Islamization of Afghan society. It is shown how the Taliban are implementing measures in serious social situation, and the contribution of the new Afghan authorities to the stabilization of the humanitarian situation is analyzed.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, social politics, humanitarian situation, natural disasters, women rights, Taliban\*

**Acknowledgments:** The article was prepared as part of an initiative project of the Center for the Study of Modern Afghanistan (Russia, Moscow)

**For citation:** Zimin I.A. The Social Challenges to the New Government of Taliban\*. Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue. 2023; 2(8): 171-182, [https://doi.org/10.53658/RW2023-3-2\(8\)-171-182](https://doi.org/10.53658/RW2023-3-2(8)-171-182)

## Introduction

The new government that came to power in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, consisting of members of the «Taliban»\* movement, faced acute problems. They are caused by the devastating earthquakes and mudflows of 2022, the lack of humanitarian and food supplies, cash, jobs, etc. According to some forecasts, Afghanistan will face a long drought in the coming years, which is likely to exacerbate the already plight of the

<sup>1</sup> \*The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

Afghans<sup>2</sup>. The strength of the new Afghan regime and its internal legitimacy depend on how these problems are resolved.

Now the social, economic and humanitarian situation is complicated by the fact that the financial assets of the Afghan government are “frozen” in European and US banks at the insistence of these countries<sup>3</sup>. In the provinces of Panjshir and Baghlan, hostilities unfolded against the new «Taliban»\* authorities with the participation of the so-called Afghan National Salvation Front led by Ahmad Massoud Jr. and Amrullah Saleh. The terrorist war against the new authorities of Afghanistan was launched by the Afghan branch of the Islamic State<sup>4</sup>, and the new «Taliban»\* government was unable to take measures to ensure security.

Thus, the new authorities of Afghanistan had to deal with complex socio-economic and natural challenges. Despite this, for more than a year the government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan continues to control most of the country and respond to these challenges, the collapse of the state did not happen. This article aims to analyze the efforts of the new government based on the «Taliban»\* movement to stabilize the domestic political situation.

The most dangerous challenges that potentially threaten the integrity and stability of Afghanistan are refugees (especially internally displaced persons), social dissatisfaction with the restriction of the fundamental rights of women and girls, and natural disasters. This article will examine the attitude of the «Taliban»\* government towards solving each of these problems.

Since this topic is new, the social policy of the «Taliban»\* has not yet received sufficient coverage in the scientific and journalistic literature; however, there are a number of articles that consider the policy of the «Taliban»\* in opposition [1]. The new period of «Taliban»\* rule (since 2021) is more correctly compared to the period 1996–2001. The features of the social policy of the last period of government are considered in Peter Marsden’s book “The «Taliban»\*. War and Religion in Afghanistan” [2], especially the policy of the «Taliban»\* to discriminate against women. Many aspects were covered in the fundamental work of R.R.Sikoev “«Taliban»\*. Religious and political portrait” [3], which has not lost its relevance. The phenomenon of the “howling «Taliban»\*” during the period of opposition is considered in the book of the Italian researcher Antonio Giustozzi [4].

<sup>2</sup> Assem Mayar. Global Warming and Afghanistan: Drought, hunger and thirst expected to worsen. Afghanistan Analyst Network. Available from: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/global-warming-and-afghanistan-drought-hunger-and-thirst-expected-to-worsen/>

<sup>3</sup> Goldbaum Christina. Biden’s Decision on Frozen Funds Stokes Anger Among Afghans. NY Times. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/world/asia/afghanistan-funds-biden.html>

<sup>4</sup> \*The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

## Materials and Methods

Three key problems that the «Taliban»\* government faced after coming to power are highlighted. The official rhetoric of the current Afghan government, statistical data and reports of international organizations, as well as oppositional Afghan media, are consistently analyzed. On the basis of these empirical materials, conclusions are drawn about the degree of vulnerability of the «Taliban»\* regime and its prospects. As a methodological basis, the following were used: the principle of historicism, which consists in the study of phenomena in their development, the principle of objectivity, that is, the consideration of phenomena in relationships with a wide range of factors.

The source base for the study were: statistical and analytical data from the UN and the World Bank, reports from the official news agency of the Afghan government Bakhtar, as well as press conferences of the media center under the government of Afghanistan, materials from online media in Persian, English and Pashto (including those opposed to the «Taliban»\* government), operational data of non-governmental organizations working in Afghanistan and some other sources.

## Results

### Refugees

According to the UN, the number of Afghan refugees who left the country by 2022 is 2.2 million people. The number of internally displaced persons reaches 3.5 million<sup>5</sup>, which is about 10% of the total population of Afghanistan<sup>6</sup>. The Ministry of Refugees and Returnees, which worked before the «Taliban»\* came to power, was headed by a prominent functionary of the «Taliban»\*, a figure in its radical part of the Haqqani network, Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani<sup>7</sup>, included in the UN sanctions list for financing terrorist activities<sup>8</sup>.

Regular posts on the ministry's Twitter account report on business trips of its head to various problem areas. It also publishes reports on the financial and food assistance provided to families of internally displaced persons, the return of refugees from Iran and Pakistan.

In general, Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani does not appear in public as often as other «Taliban»\* functionaries, which is possibly due to his sanctioned status. For the same reason, the head of the Haqqani clan, the nephew of Khalil ur-Rahman and at the same time the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Sirajuddin, hid his face in public for a

<sup>5</sup> Afghanistan situation. UNHCR. Available from: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistansituation>

<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan population. Worldometer. Available from: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/afghanistan-population/>

<sup>7</sup> Khabargozari-ye Tasnim, 16.06.1400. Available from: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1400/06/16/2567767/>

<sup>8</sup> KHALIL AHMED HAQQANI. UN Security Council. Available from: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1988/materials/summaries/individual/khalil-ahmed-haqqani>

long time<sup>9</sup>. The fears of a number of «Taliban»\* leaders are well founded after the alleged elimination of the leader of «Al-Qaeda»<sup>\*10</sup>, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who allegedly took refuge in Afghanistan, and was destroyed by an American drone on August 31, 2022<sup>11</sup>. A little later, on September 7, a rumor spread about the death of Khalil ur-Rahman during a similar attack, which, however, was refuted<sup>12</sup>.

The Ministry of Refugees is also represented at a conference within the framework of a program of accountability to the people, which the «Taliban»\* launched in the summer of 2022, coinciding with its opening to coincide with the anniversary of being in power<sup>13</sup>. Deputy Minister, Arsala Haroti, listed the main achievements of the department for the year. They opened representative offices in all provinces of Afghanistan, as well as in Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. About 622,000 Afghans were returned to their homeland following the results of the work of the ministry in cooperation with international organizations. At the largest border crossings (for example, Islam-Kala on the border with Iran or Torkham, Spin-Buldak on the border with Pakistan), accommodation and assistance centers for refugees were opened. Also, according to the Deputy Minister, about 78 thousand families from among internally displaced persons were returned home, about 86 thousand families from among internally displaced persons regularly receive food, medical assistance, as well as assistance in rebuilding their homes<sup>14</sup>. However, these figures do not allow us to understand the role of the Afghan ministry in achieving these results.

At the same time, during the year of the rule of the «Taliban»\* regime, there has been a positive trend in relation to refugees and internally displaced persons: their number has been steadily declining. If until 2021 the number of internally displaced persons and refugees steadily increased by 380 thousand per year, then by June 2022 the number of new (since the summer of 2021) internally displaced persons amounted to 7.4 thousand people<sup>15</sup>. The main reason for migration, including internal migration, was unemployment and poverty, lack of access to healthcare and education. The social insecurity of internal refugees leads to the spread of such phenomena as forced child labor, the sale of children, forced marriages, including with children, and begging. This turns refugees into a social base for the formation of supporters of radical organizations that oppose the new authorities, for example, the Islamic State in Khorasan (IS-Khorasan – banned in the Russian Federation)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Fararu, 14.12.1400. Available from: <https://fararu.com/fa/news/537300/>

<sup>10</sup> \*The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

<sup>11</sup> Iktisad News, 11.05.1401. Available from: <https://www.eghtesadnews.com/-512325/61>

<sup>12</sup> Arja Press, 5.09.2022. Available from: <https://ariapress.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Herat-Times, Telegram Chanel 1.08.2022. Available from: <https://t.me/HeratTimes/75066>

<sup>14</sup> Kanfrance-e habari-ye vasarat-e amur-e mohajerin va 'udat-konendagan, 23.05.1401. GMIC Afghanistan, 13.09.2022. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAgqof2PfMA>

<sup>15</sup> One year on: the «Taliban»\* takeover and Afghanistan's changing displacement crisis. ReliefWeb Available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/one-year-taliban-takeover-and-afghanistans-changing-displacement-crisis>

<sup>16</sup> Protection Analysis Update. Afghanistan. Q1, 2022. Global Protection Cluster. Available from: <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/old/wp-content/uploads/Protection-Analysis-Update-PAU-Q1-2022-fv.pdf>

## Natural Cataclysm

Afghanistan is located in a seismological active zone and is periodically subjected to devastating earthquakes. The average number of deaths per year from the consequences of earthquakes is 560 people<sup>17</sup>. On June 22, 2022, the largest earthquake in 20 years with a magnitude of 5.9 occurred in Khost province, during which more than 1,000 people were killed and more than 1,500 people were injured, many people were left homeless, entire villages were destroyed<sup>18</sup>. On the same day, the official resources of the «Taliban»\* published an appeal for help to the international community of the leader of the movement<sup>19</sup>. According to official data, helicopters provided by the Ministry of Defense were used to evacuate from the devastated areas<sup>20</sup>, and Mohammad Hassan Akhund, the chairman of the «Taliban»\* government, ordered the provision of 1 billion afghani<sup>21</sup> for financial assistance to the victims<sup>22</sup>, later reports on the distribution of funds were published on the official pages of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the «Taliban»\*<sup>23</sup>.

Soon after the earthquake (July–August 2022), floods began in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan after heavy rains. According to the «Taliban»\* Disaster Management Commission<sup>24</sup>, were destroyed: 12 thousand houses, many dams, and canals necessary for agriculture, millions of fruit trees, about 50 thousand heads of small and large cattle, also 1.7 million hectares of agricultural crops were flooded, 1057 people died, and the damage is estimated at \$2 billion. About 18 thousand families were also evacuated from their places of residence, which are unlikely to be able to return and restore their housing and life in the near future, thereby replenishing the number of internally displaced persons.

During the disaster relief efforts, the «Taliban»\* distributed about 100,000 tents, 350,000 blankets, 100,000 medical kits, 160,000 food kits and \$2 million in cash. Agriculture suffered the most damage, with the relevant departments (Ministry of Rural Revival and the Ministry of Agriculture) estimating the urgent cost of restoring infrastructure at \$200 million and \$60 million, respectively. Realizing the scale of the disaster, the «Taliban»\* requested financial and humanitarian assistance from the world community<sup>25</sup>.

Natural disasters do not add strength to the «Taliban»\* regime, but their internal legitimacy depends on how well they manage to cope with their consequences. So

17 2022 Afghanistan Earthquake. Center for Disaster Philanthropy. Available from: <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2022-afghanistan-earthquake/>

18 Al Jazeera, 22.06.2022. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/22/afghanistan-live-news-earthquake-kills-at-least-920-people>

19 Bakhtar, 1.04.1401. Available from: <https://bakhtarnews.af/>

20 Bakhtar, 1.04.1401. Available from: <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/mod-helicopters-medical-teams-arrived-south-to-assist-earthquake-victims/>

21 Afghani is the currency of Afghanistan since 1926

22 Bakhtar, 1.04.1401. Available from: <https://bakhtarnews.af/>

23 Safar-e mo'in-e mali va idari va sarparast-e vazarat-e davlat dar amur-e rasidagi ba havadis ba paktika; komak-hai nokdi barai madzhruhini va varesa shohadai zalzala ahir tavzi' shod. Ministry of Emergency Situations of the IEA, 9.07.2022. Available from: <https://www.andma.gov.af/dr/>

24 Kanfrans-e habari-je vazarat-e amur-e mohadzherin va 'udat-konendagan, 23.05.1401. GMIC Afghanistan, 13.09.2022. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUqjVozOYNk&t=58s>

25 Haama Press, 1.09.2022. Available from: <https://www.khaama.com/persian/archives/103009>

far, international organizations have been playing a leading role in overcoming the consequences, which has been saving Afghanistan from a humanitarian catastrophe for more than a year.

## Women's Question

The infringement of the fundamental rights of women and girls by the «Taliban»\* determined their reputation as savages even in the first period of being in power in Afghanistan (1996–2001). However, in 2021, when they were in power for the second time, the movement's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, at the first conference of the «Taliban»\* stated that women's rights would be preserved, including the right to education, including in universities<sup>26</sup>. The movement urged women to observe the hijab, but this was not a mandatory requirement. Thus, the world community has hope for preserving at least those rights of women that were in the republican period (2001–2022). This is the right to receive education, including higher education, and the right to work, including doing business<sup>27</sup>.

The relevance of this issue in the region in 2021–2022 has only increased. The problem of restricting women's rights and excessive strictness in the mandatory observance of the Islamic dress code was among the key factors contributing to the Iranian protest in September–October 2022. Residents of Afghan cities dissatisfied with their unclear situation (approximately 25% of the total<sup>28</sup>) repeatedly went out to protest, in solidarity with the Iranians<sup>29</sup>. Despite protests, many educational organizations in Iran offered various educational opportunities for Afghan women, including online education<sup>30</sup>.

Experts consider the “right to education”, including for girls, the most striking indicator of the “adequacy” of the new Afghan regime. The possibility of educating children is one of the main issues that potential Afghan repatriates are thinking about (2:105–106). Some Afghan theologians insist on opening schools for girls<sup>31</sup>: there are about 3 million schoolgirls in the country and about 100 thousand women employed in the field of education, who work in a semi-legal position.

The issue of resuming women's education in Afghanistan has become an object of close attention from the world community. It became one of the conditions for diplomatic recognition of the «Taliban»\* regime<sup>32</sup>. Since September 2021, schools for girls over the 6th grade have remained closed for some “technical reasons”; boys of this age went to schools<sup>33</sup>. The

26 Afghanistan Satellite, 17.08.2021. Available from: <https://af.sputniknews.com/20210817/.html>

27 Tolo-news, 13.06.1400. Available from: <https://tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan-174753>

28 Urban population (% of total population) – Afghanistan. WorldBank. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=AF>

29 Afghanistan International, 29.04.1401. Available from: <https://www.afintl.com/202209200185>

30 Salamat-news, 5.10.1401. Available from: <https://www.salamatnews.com/news/349489/>

31 Afghanistan International, 11.04.1401. Available from: <https://www.afintl.com/202205013553>

32 «Taliban»\* Seek Recognition But Offer Few Concessions to International Concerns. United States Institute of Peace. Available from: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/taliban-seek-recognition-offer-few-concessions-international-concerns>

33 «Taliban»\* ban girls from secondary education in Afghanistan. The Guardian. Available from:

ban on education cannot be justified by Islamic values<sup>34</sup>, therefore, in the future, in connection with the ban on education for girls, the «Taliban»'s rhetoric will remain “ambiguous wording”, and for example, they will talk about the need to create an “Islamic environment”<sup>35</sup>. It should be noted that in some provinces (Balkh, Kunduz, Sari Pul, Bamiyan, Herat), secondary and high schools for girls (some temporarily) were still opened in the fall of 2021<sup>36</sup>.

Many hoped girls' schools would open at the end of March 2022<sup>37</sup>. The US Special Representative for Afghanistan said in early 2022 that if the «Taliban»\* opened schools for girls in March, the US would take the cost of teachers' salaries<sup>38</sup>. However, the hope did not come true and on March 23, 2022, schools for girls remained closed until a special “Islamic program” and “school uniform” were developed<sup>39</sup>, which greatly undermined the credibility of the «Taliban»\* regime and pushed back its recognition indefinitely. The preservation of women's rights to education for the world community was a kind of “litmus test” for the recognition of the «Taliban»\* regime, since, unlike other requirements (for example, to reduce the level of terrorist and drug threats), they were able to ensure women's rights, at least declaratively.

The solution to the problem of women's education was delayed. On December 20, the Emir of the «Taliban»\* issued a decree that schools remain closed until further notice. In an interview, Minister of Higher Education Sheikh Mohammad Neda Nadeem justified the decree with the following reasons<sup>40</sup>: 1) girls for education should not go to other provinces without a mahram<sup>41</sup>; 2) most of the girls do not observe the “full hijab”, however, the «Taliban»\* did not provide its sample; 3) in most educational institutions it is not possible to organize separate education for girls and boys; 4) girls should not study specialties that are not appropriate for them to teach, according to Afghan traditions, such as engineering.

This ban, together with a further ban on women working in non-governmental organizations, led the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to suspend the very same cash assistance to Afghanistan's central bank<sup>42</sup>. However, already on January 14, 2023, the Central Bank of Afghanistan announced the next tranche of financial assistance<sup>43</sup>. This can obviously be connected with the permission of the «Taliban»\* for medical and office

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/taliban-ban-girls-from-secondary-education-in-afghanistan>

34 Sahih al-Bukhari. The Book of Knowledge (Hadith 59-134). Available from: <https://isnad.link/book/sahih-al-bukhari/3-kniga-znaniya/35-glava>

35 Killid Group. 15.07.1400. Available from: <https://tkg.af/pashto/2021/10/07/>

36 TOLO News. 17.07.1400. Available from: <https://tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan-174966>

37 On March 21 (in a leap year March 22), according to the solar Hijra, the New Year (“Nowruz”) begins in Afghanistan, after which a new academic year begins, respectively.

38 TOLO News. Twitter. Available from: <https://twitter.com/tolonews/status/1484443647303389187?lang=en>

39 Bakhtar. Twitter. Available from: <https://twitter.com/bakhtarna/status/1506479246625103872?lang=en>

40 Ter amrisani puri d unaso d pohantuno d bandedo py ara d lvaro zdak Sponsored by Minister Sara Dzangera Maraka. RTA Pashto. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJ0MtZL5wkE>

41 Mahram is a close male relative with whom women are allowed to go outside in Afghanistan by decree of the «Taliban»\* government.

42 Da Afghanistan Bank – Afghanistan. Twitter. Available from: <https://twitter.com/afgcentralbank/status/1602948874859151362?s=46&t=K4XpA8fXCWH7Yy5oqhBqpg>

43 Da Afghanistan Bank – Afghanistan. Twitter. Available from: [https://twitter.com/afgcentralbank/status/1614212925635559430?s=46&t=\\_DitbIVdD6\\_ecGOsGXRVCa](https://twitter.com/afgcentralbank/status/1614212925635559430?s=46&t=_DitbIVdD6_ecGOsGXRVCa)

workers of non-governmental organizations (International Rescue Committee<sup>44</sup>, Save the Children) continue your work. Thus, the women of Afghanistan and their position become the subject of political bargaining between the «Taliban»\* and the world community, which causes dissatisfaction among the urban and emigrant stratum of Afghans.

## Conclusions

With the coming to power of the «Taliban»\* movement, Afghanistan continues to face numerous social problems. In order not to lose at least relative internal legitimacy, the «Taliban»\* have to solve these problems. The «Taliban»\* takeover had a positive impact on the situation of internally displaced persons, whose numbers have declined for the first time in a long time of the Afghan civil conflict. At the same time, the «Taliban»\* lack their own internal resources (financial and managerial) for a comprehensive and deep solution of social problems, which is well understood by international humanitarian organizations that aim to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan and respond to social challenges. At the same time, the work of humanitarian projects in the country is complicated by the sanctions imposed on the «Taliban»\*, as a result of which, for example, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is forced to bring money into Afghanistan in cash for subsequent distribution to the population as part of humanitarian assistance<sup>45</sup>.

A separate problem is the women's issue, in the solution of which the conservative-radical line of the «Taliban»\*'s policy prevailed. The current status quo is associated with the inability of the public stratum of the top of the «Taliban»\*, which is represented by such functionaries as Abdul Ghani Barodar, Mullah Yakub, Sirajuddin Haqqani and some others, to agree with the West on the diplomatic recognition of the Islamic Emirate or on at least partial lifting of sanctions.

Thus, it can be stated that in the near future the established balance will be preserved: the West will continue to provide significant humanitarian support to the new Afghan government, while the «Taliban»\* government will look for options to modernize its policy. At the same time, a tough policy towards women has already led to a reduction in the volume of assistance, and as a result, a deterioration in the social situation of the population of Afghanistan.

44 Operational Note: Update on IRC's Operations in Afghanistan as of January 13 / International Rescue Committee Available from: <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/operational-note-update-ircs-operations-afghanistan-january-13>

45 Satellite Afghanistan, 07.12.2022. Telegram Channel. Available from: <https://t.me/sputnikaf/17544>

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## Contribution of the author

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

## Article info

Received: March 2, 2023. Approved after peer review: May 1, 2023. Accepted for publication: May 15, 2023. Published: June 25, 2023.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

## Peer review info

«Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue» thanks the anonymous reviewer(s) for their contribution to the peer review of this work.