

# Features of Afghanistan Governance in the Period 2021–2024

Mohammad Omar Nessar✉

Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia  
[nessar@yandex.ru](mailto:nessar@yandex.ru), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4236-0886>

**Abstract.** Stability in Afghanistan depends on many factors, including external ones. The article analyzes the development of the situation in the country after the Taliban<sup>1</sup> came to power. Considering the development of the security situation, in the humanitarian field, and the social policy of the current authorities, the author assesses the internal situation in the country and identifies the main factors that determine the level of risks and challenges emanating from the territory of Afghanistan. According to the estimates given in the article, after the Taliban came to power, with the relative stabilization of the situation within the country, instability arises in the direction of Pakistan and Iran. The author has established the dependence of social sustainability in the country on the volume of external assistance. The author predicts a worsening of the situation in Afghanistan in the event of a reduction in foreign aid.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Taliban<sup>2</sup>, security, humanitarian situation, social sustainability  
**For citation:** Nessar M.O. Features of Afghanistan Governance in the Period 2021–2024. Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue. 2024; 3(13): 78–89, [doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3\(13\)-78-89](https://doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3(13)-78-89)

## Introduction

Three years have passed since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that the Afghan problem has found itself on the periphery of “big world politics” against the backdrop of current international processes, the situation in this country is in the field of view of the international community, including being analyzed in Russia. Despite the existence of problems in the humanitarian and security spheres, the Taliban continue to

control the country, concentrating real power in their hands. Therefore, external actors are forced to interact with the authorities in Kabul.

## Materials and Methods

The methodological basis for understanding the military-political and socio-economic situation in Afghanistan was laid in the works of both leading domestic Afghanists, including V.G.Korgun [1], R.R.Sikoev [7], V.S.Kristoforov [8], U.V.Okimbekov [5] and others, and foreign researchers, including V.A.Mozhda [2], A.Rashid [6], R.Bannet [9], etc. Some aspects of the modern problems of Afghanistan were covered in the works of the author [3, 4]. Since the subject of the study is the analysis of the current situation, materials from domestic and foreign periodicals were also used in preparing the article.

The purpose of this article is to identify the features of the Taliban’s governance of the country from August 2021 to 2024. During the study, reports of international organizations, official documents of the authorities of the Russian Federation and statements by officials of foreign states were analyzed. The author used well-known scientific methods such as systems analysis, synthesis, comparative analysis and data comparison.

## Results

### Crisis of legitimacy

During the Taliban rule (August 2021 – February 2024), contacts between the Taliban government and the world community have developed. According to the Taliban government, there are diplomatic missions of at least 10 neighboring states in the Afghan capital: Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan. There is also a group of diplomats from India in Kabul. But the Taliban government has not been able to achieve official recognition from any state. Legalization is difficult for a number of reasons.

Firstly, in a number of countries the Taliban movement <sup>3</sup>is recognized as terrorist (including in the Russian Federation).

Secondly, a number of the Taliban’s actions contradict the principles of the UN, legal norms and morality. For example, the decision to ban school education for girls, which is condemned, among other things, in Muslim countries.

Thirdly, the level of trust in the Taliban government on the part of foreign countries and international institutions is low. In practice, the Taliban government has proven inconsistent in implementing a number of conditions for recognition, including respect

1 Признана террористической организацией в России.  
2 Признана террористической организацией в России.

3 In Russia it is recognized as a terrorist organization.

for the rights and freedoms of all groups of citizens and the formation of an inclusive government.

Moscow’s position on the issue of recognizing the Taliban was outlined in January of this year by the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Sergei Lavrov: “There are Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazaras in the Taliban government, but they are all politically Taliban. We are talking about ensuring not only ethno-confessional inclusivity, but also political inclusivity”<sup>4</sup>.

The main directions of the Taliban’s social policy

The social policy of the Taliban allows us to understand possible options for the development of the situation in the medium and long term. During the two and a half years of the Taliban’s rule, one of the priority tasks of their government has been to strengthen rural religious institutions: including the legalization of rural madrassas and religious centers: objects previously under the control of the movement are receiving legal status. The transformation of educational centers into madrassas and “jihadist centers” continues. The rural population of the country makes up almost three quarters of its number. Mosques and prayer rooms are opening in state institutions. It is necessary to note the growing role of the Ministry of Prevention of Sin and Encouragement of Good; suffice it to say that it has an instrument of coercion in the form of paramilitary formations. In parallel, the clergy is penetrating the structure of the state and the Sharia judicial bodies.

The greatest resonance is caused by the Taliban’s steps aimed at limiting the rights of women, especially the ban on their education and subsequent employment. Gender-discriminatory initiatives put the Taliban elite in a difficult position, they do not find understanding even among individual leaders of the movement. Most members of the cabinet in Kabul are against the introduction of such restrictions. In addition, this policy has been condemned even by a number of Muslim countries.

In 2022, the international community drew attention to the Taliban’s Pashtun-centric policies towards national minorities<sup>5</sup>. In the context of this trend, one can also consider the Taliban leadership’s attempts to displace the Persian language, which should affect relations with neighboring Iran.

Measures aimed at traditionalizing society include opposition to elements of secularism, for example, dress code requirements that apply not only to women but also to men, as well as the negative attitude of certain Taliban leaders to secular university education as such.

However, in conditions where there is no confidence in the successful completion of the Taliban’s plans to reform Afghan society, the attention of external actors, especially

4 Speech and answers to media questions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V.Lavrov. MFA of the Russian Federation, 24.01.2024. Available from: [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1927568/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1927568/).

5 The Taliban’s governance systems in Afghanistan are unstable, Patrushev said. RIA Novosti. 30.09.2022. Available from: <https://ria.ru/20220930/afghanistan-1820508414.html>.

countries in the region, is focused on current processes: the security situation, the humanitarian situation, economic projects, etc.

Security

Ensuring security is considered by international experts as a multifaceted process. The analysis below relates more to the security of the territory and society. In general, after August 15, 2021, there has been a decrease in the intensity of hostilities and clashes on the territory of Afghanistan, which is logical, since before that, a significant proportion of attacks that caused harm to the civilian population were carried out by the Taliban themselves. Thus, in the first six months of the Taliban’s rule (from August 15, 2021 to February 15, 2022), the UN mission in Afghanistan recorded a total of 1,153 clashes, in which 397 people were killed and 756 wounded among the civilian population alone, not militants<sup>6</sup>. The figures show a decrease in civilian casualties in Afghanistan compared to the same period last year. Since 2022, the UN Office in Afghanistan has stopped publishing annual reports on Afghan civilian casualties due to armed conflict, but quarterly reports to the UN Secretary-General confirm that the number of incidents involving weapons is decreasing (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of incidents involving the use of weapons in the period 16.05.2021 – 22.10.2023, quarterly

|                                                                       | 16.05.2021 – 18.07.2021 | 19.08.2021 – 31.12.2021 | 01.01.2022 – 21.05.2022 | 22.05.2022 – 16.08.2022 | 17.08.2022 – 13.11.2022 | 14.01.2022 – 31.01.2023 | 01.02.2023 – 20.05.2023 | 21.05.2023 – 31.07.2023 | 01.08.2023 – 22.10.2023 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Security related incidents                                            | 6302                    | 985                     | 2105                    | 1642                    | 1587                    | 1201                    | 1650                    | 1259                    | 1414                    |
| ISIS-X attacks <sup>7</sup>                                           | 88                      | 152                     | 82                      | 48                      | 30                      | 16                      | 11                      | 5                       | 8                       |
| Geography of ISIS-X operations <sup>15</sup><br>(number of provinces) | –                       | 16                      | 11                      | 11                      | 6                       | 4                       | 5                       | 3                       | 3                       |

Source: The table was compiled by the author based on the analysis of quarterly reports of the UN Security Council monitoring group

The level of threats and security risks emanating from the territory of Afghanistan are determined by a complex of factors.

6 Interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner’s report on Afghanistan. UN, 7.03.2022. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/03/interactive-dialogue-high-commissioners-report-afghanistan?LangID=E&NewsID=28218>.

7 The organization is banned in Russia.

Firstly, the continuing activity of non-Afghan groups present in the country and pursuing their own interests is of particular concern. Close attention is paid to the activities of ISIS-Kh<sup>8</sup>, which, during 2023, managed to carry out a number of high-profile terrorist attacks, which killed high-ranking Taliban officials and foreign citizens, including diplomats. One of the major recent terrorist attacks carried out by this group was the attack on October 13, 2023, in the city of Pul-i-Khumri near a Shiite mosque, which took the lives of about 20 people. In January 2024, as a result of a terrorist attack, for which the ISIS-Kh group claimed responsibility<sup>9</sup>, about a dozen people were killed in the Shiite district of Kabul (Dasht-i-Barchi).

Secondly, the Taliban's unconditional victory has inspired jihadist movements operating in other countries. After the Taliban came to power in Kabul, Western intelligence agencies and regional experts warned that this had emboldened terrorists around the world. A real change in the situation can be seen in neighboring Pakistan. The change of power in Kabul prompted the Pakistani Taliban, represented by Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, to withdraw from the ceasefire agreement with official Islamabad in November 2022. In the year since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, a record increase in terrorist attacks has been recorded on the territory of Pakistan itself [9].

The Taliban's challenge to the countries of the region was their refusal to sever ties with foreign groups considered terrorist. A report was presented to the UN Security Council, which spoke about the Taliban's close ties with the Al-Qaeda group<sup>10</sup>. According to the document, the notorious terrorist group has managed to establish eight new training camps and weapons storage bases across Afghanistan, including in the provinces of Ghazni, Laghman, Parwan, Uruzgan and Panjshir. The Taliban has denied any links to al-Qaeda<sup>11</sup>, the accusations against them appear justified after the alleged liquidation of the leader of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan<sup>12</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, carried out with the help of a US drone in August 2022<sup>13</sup>.

Geopolitical conditions and the above factors play an important role in shaping the policies of the countries of the region towards Afghanistan, considering the Taliban government as a source of threats and risks. In particular, Russia, Tajikistan and Pakistan have repeatedly drawn attention to the alarming situation in the country during the Taliban's rule. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu focused on the presence of ISIS<sup>14</sup> in Afghanistan, calling the group's goal the spread of radical ideology and subversive activities in the region<sup>15</sup>.

8 ISIS-Khorasan – Afghan branch of the structure. The organization is banned in Russia.  
9 The organization is banned in Russia.  
10 The organization is banned in Russia.  
11 The organization is banned in Russia.  
12 The organization is banned in Russia.  
13 The Taliban\* vowed to cut ties with al Qaeda, but the terror group appears to be growing in Afghanistan. CBS News, 01.02.2024. Available from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-al-qaeda-growing/>.

\*In Russia it is recognized as a terrorist organization.  
14 The organization is banned in Russia.  
15 A meeting of the Russian Defense Ministry Board was held in Moscow. Official website of the Russian Defense Ministry, 27.02.2024. Available from: [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12502300@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12502300@egNews).

New challenges

While the number of security incidents has decreased since August 2021, new challenges have been identified that could cause long-term destabilization of the region. First, these are regular armed border clashes between the Taliban and the military of Pakistan and Iran, and shelling of the border zone of several Central Asian countries. From August 2021 to October 2023, the UN recorded at least 80 armed clashes, including 59 incidents on the Afghan-Pakistani border, 16 on the Afghan-Iranian border, 3 on the Afghan-Tajik border, and at least 1 incident on the Afghan-Uzbek border (Table 2). Border clashes are caused by various reasons, including attempts to illegally cross the border by refugees, smugglers, and armed groups, as well as mistaken and deliberate attempts by the Taliban to move the border line.

Table 2. Border armed clashes in the period 16.05.2021 – 22.10.2023

|                | 16.05.2021 – 18.07.2021 | 19.08.2021 – 31.12.2021 | 01.01.2022 – 21.05.2022 | 22.05.2022 – 16.08.2022 | 17.08.2022 – 13.11.2022 | 14.01.2022 – 31.01.2023 | 01.02.2023 – 20.05.2023 | 21.05.2023 – 31.07.2023 | 01.08.2023 – 22.10.2023 |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Border clashes | Pakistan                | 1                       | 2                       | 2                       | 14                      | 19                      | 14                      | 5                       | 3                       |
|                | Iran                    | 2                       | 2                       | 3                       | 1                       | 1                       | 6                       | 1                       |                         |
|                | Tajikistan              | 1                       | 1                       |                         |                         |                         |                         | 1                       |                         |
|                | Uzbekistan              |                         | 1                       |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
|                | Turkmenistan            |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |

Source: The table was compiled by the author based on the analysis of quarterly reports of the UN Security Council monitoring group

Secondly, this is the aggravation of the migration crisis in the region, which is putting a strain on the socio-economic systems of neighboring countries. Data on the outflow of refugees from the country after the Taliban came to power varies, but an analysis of reports from the International Organization for Migration suggests a significant increase in the outflow of population to Iran and Pakistan. The number of Afghan refugees who arrived in the Islamic Republic of Iran during the two years of Taliban rule reached 1.5 million people per year. At the same time, the total number of Afghan refugees in this country, including illegal refugees, is estimated by Iranian authorities at 6 million people, which is about 7

percent of the country's population<sup>16</sup>. The total number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan in October 2023 was estimated by local authorities at 4.4 million people<sup>17</sup>.

Thirdly, this is the growth of tensions in relations with neighboring countries due to the joint use of water resources. After the Taliban came to power, tensions increased between the Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Iran due to the transboundary Helmand River, the use of whose waters became the subject of heated disputes in 2022–2023. If the new Afghan authorities treat transboundary rivers in the same way, then we can predict an increase in tensions with other neighbors, given that Afghanistan, in terms of the formation of water resources, is a "Upstream" country in relation to most of its neighbors. The construction of the Kush-Tepa canal on the Amu Darya River, which began almost immediately after the Taliban came to power, has already become a source of concern for Afghanistan's northern neighbors.

### Humanitarian sphere

After August 2021, the attention of the international community turned to the humanitarian situation. Not a single international meeting on Afghan issues is complete without discussing the situation in the humanitarian sphere. During the Taliban's second rule, the human rights situation, especially the situation of Afghan women, remains tense. After the ban on women's work was introduced, the unemployment rate in the country increased significantly. An additional blow to the socio-economic situation was the collapse of the banking system that followed the change of power in Kabul and the introduction of US sanctions against the Taliban government. If we illustrate the dynamics of the development of the socio-economic situation after the Taliban came to power based on reports coming from the country, it looks like this: in the period from August 2021 to February 2022, a negative trend emerged, but by the beginning of 2022, the situation leveled off, the main economic indicators became stable. Experts largely attributed this to the expansion of foreign aid, the volumes and parameters of which had been established, in particular, the flow of cash dollars had been improved. From February 2022 to the end of 2023, the country received between \$40 and 80 million weekly. In total, after the change of power in Kabul, more than \$2.9 billion in cash were delivered to Afghanistan through the UN. Humanitarian aid consists of contributions from Western countries, where the main share comes from the United States (for example: out of \$2.9 billion, \$2.6 comes from the United States). However, humanitarian aid includes more than just the supply of cash dollars in order to maintain humanitarian stability. A significant portion of the financial aid goes through the funding of non-governmental organizations and UN programs operating in Afghanistan and beyond. In April 2023, US Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John Sopko said that Washington had spent a total of \$8 billion

<sup>16</sup> Afghan refugees pose a major challenge in Iran, ex-lawmaker says. Iran International, 18.08.2023. Available from:

<sup>17</sup> Pakistan Orders Illegal Immigrants, Including 1.73 Million Afghans, to Leave. USnews, 3.10.2023. Available from: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-10-03/pakistan-orders-all-illegal-immigrants-to-leave-after-suicide-bombings>.

on aid to Afghanistan since the withdrawal of troops (over 20 months), including funds allocated to help Afghan refugees outside the country<sup>18</sup>. In September 2023, Bloomberg journalists collected data proving that the national currency of Afghanistan (Afghani), largely due to the influx of American cash dollars, retained its stability, becoming one of the world's stable currencies in the third quarter of 2023. As shown above, the socio-economic stability in the country largely depends on the volume of foreign aid. US spending on the war in Ukraine and the results of the presidential elections could cut the volume of aid to Afghanistan, which would worsen the humanitarian situation, among other things.

### Conclusions

An analysis of governance in Afghanistan from August 2021 to February 2024 shows that the most pessimistic forecasts regarding the development of the situation in this country have not come true. So far, there has been no explosion in the security and humanitarian situation. However, the most optimistic forecasts have not come true either. There are no tangible results in the implementation of regional economic projects related to the realization of Afghanistan's transit potential aimed at supplying energy resources from Central Asia to South Asia. This is hampered by the lack of legal status for the Taliban government and, as a result, trust in it.

An analysis of the social policy of the Taliban after their return to power allows us to conclude that the main goals and objectives of the Taliban have remained virtually unchanged for 20 years; they are still striving to establish the same order that they promoted in the past. But the lack of internal consensus, the influence of external factors and the profound changes that have occurred in Afghan society itself over 20 years are forcing the current authorities to be cautious. Against the background of relative progress in the security sphere within the country, the level of threats and risks emanating from the territory of Afghanistan remains high overall.

We can talk about the movement of instability to neighboring countries. Thus, in Pakistan, after the establishment of Taliban power, a sharp deterioration in the security situation was recorded, which is associated with the activation of the Taliban-allied group "Tahriki Taliban-e-Pakistan". The influx of a large number of Afghan refugees into the countries of the region, primarily Iran, creates a serious burden on the socio-economic system of neighboring countries.

The sharp increase in the number of Afghan migrants causes discontent among the local population, threatening to destabilize the domestic political situation. Afghanistan under the Taliban remains dependent on external financial aid, which serves as a stabilizer of the situation inside the country and social stability. Based on this, one can predict

<sup>18</sup> Haley O., Sami Y. U.S. taxpayers helping fund Afghanistan's Taliban? Aid workers say they're forced "to serve the Taliban first". CBS News, 21.04.2023. Available from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-tax-dollars-after-withdrawal/>.

a deterioration in the situation in the event of a reduction in the volume of external aid, primarily from Washington.

## References

1. Korgun V.G. History of Afghanistan. XX century. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2004:529 [In Russian].
2. Mozhdar V.A. Afghanistan and five years of the Taliban rule. Tehran, 2003:240 [In the Dari language].
3. Nessar O.M. Genesis and evolution of the Taliban movement. *Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue*. 2023; 2:20–31 [In Russian].
4. Nessar M.O., Topychkanov P.V. Kabul and Islamabad: myths and reality. *Rossiia v global'noj politike* [Russia in global politics]. 2023; Vol. 21. 5:219–233 [In Russian].
5. Okimbekov U.V. Women's issue in Afghanistan under the Taliban. *Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue*. 2023; 2:158–170 [In Russian].
6. Rashid A. Taliban. Islam, Oil, and the New Great Game in Central Asia / trans. from English by M. Povalyaeva. Moscow: Biblion – Russian Book, 2003:282 [In Russian].
7. Sikoev R.R. Taliban: Religioso-Political Portrait. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2004:204 [In Russian].
8. Khristoforov V.S. American Troops in Afghanistan (2001–2021): Can Neither be Left nor Taken Out. *Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue*. 2023; 2:55–65 [In Russian].
9. Rubin B. Afghanistan What Everyone Needs to Know. Oxford University Press, 2020:392 [In English].

## About the author

Mohammad Omar NESSAR. CandSc (Hist.). Senior Researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4236-0886>. Address: 12, Rozhdestvenka str/, Moscow, 107031, Russian Federation. [nessar@yandex.ru](mailto:nessar@yandex.ru)

## Contribution of the author

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

## Article info

Received: June 26, 2024. Approved after review: July 28, 2024. Accepted for publication: August 31, 2024. Published: September 23, 2024.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

## Peer review info

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