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Движение «Талибан» в управлении Афганистаном: оценка и перспективы

Аннотация. В данной статье приводится оценка внутренней и внешней политики движения «Талибан» в период первых четырех лет его правления в Афганистане. Талибы консолидировали власть в стране посредством политической централизации, экономического восстановления и усилий по борьбе с терроризмом. Афганское правительство приняло прагматичную дипломатическую стратегию, направленную на выход из международной изоляции. Автор рассматривает взаимодействие талибов с региональными державами — Россией, Китаем, Пакистаном и Ираном — анализируя как достижения, так и конфликтные моменты, одновременно уделяя внимание ограниченному взаимодействию афганских властей с западными странами. Хотя правительство талибов добилось определенных успехов в стабилизации внутренних условий и расширении своего дипломатического пространства, оно сталкивается с проблемами в вопросах внутреннего единства, экономического развития, а также в выполнении обязательств по борьбе с терроризмом и соблюдению прав человека. По мнению автора, данные проблемы могут серьезно ограничивать будущую стабильность и развитие Исламского Эмирата Афганистан.

Ключевые слова: движение «Талибан», Афганистан, управление, региональная дипломатия, внешняя политика, экономическая реконструкция, борьба с терроризмом, международное признание.

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Taliban's Governance of Afghanistan: Assessment and Outlook

Abstract. This paper comprehensively assesses the Taliban-led Afghan government's domestic and foreign policy landscape during its four-year governance and analyzes its future trajectory. Domestically, the Afghan government has consolidated power through political centralization, economic reconstruction, and counter-terrorism efforts. Externally, it has adopted pragmatic diplomatic strategies to break international isolation. It specifically examines the Afghan government's interactions with regional powers — Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran — highlighting both achievements and conflicts, alongside its limited engagement with Western countries. While the Afghan government has achieved some success in stabilizing domestic conditions and expanding its diplomatic space, it faces deep-seated challenges in internal unity, economic development, counter-terrorism commitments, and human rights records. These issues will severely constrain the future stability and development of the Afghan government.

Keywords: Taliban, Afghanistan, governance, regional diplomacy, foreign policy, economic reconstruction, counterterrorism, international recognition.

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On August 15, 2025, marking the fourth anniversary of the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada declared the provisional status of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's cabinet concluded, removing the “acting” prefix from all government department heads' titles. This signifies the Taliban authorities' formal transition from an armed group to an interim government and ultimately to a formal government. Since returning to power, the Afghan government has focused internally on consolidating power, addressing economic and humanitarian crises, and combating anti-Taliban forces such as the Islamic State —Khorasan Province (ISKP)¹. Externally, it has engaged extensively with the international community, seeking diplomatic breakthroughs. Overall, Afghanistan's domestic and international predicaments have somewhat eased, yet significant crisis risks remain. This article attempts to conduct an in-depth assessment of Afghanistan's reconstruction landscape since the Taliban's return to power, and based on this analysis, make corresponding projections about its future trajectory.

I. Domestic Situation Under the Taliban: Stability with Underlying Concerns

Over more than four years in power, the Afghan government have concentrated on consolidating power and exploring an independent development path, achieving considerable progress in reconstruction across political, economic, and security domains. While seeking to shed its past image of extremism and radicalism, the Taliban remains committed to conservative ideology and governance principles, sparking widespread domestic and international concern.

1. Implementing Centralization Policies to Consolidate Authority

Afghanistan's current political landscape features a “dual structure” with Kandahar as the power center and Kabul as the executive hub. Virtually all major decrees, policies, and personnel decisions originate from Supreme Leader Akhundzada and his inner circle in Kandahar, with Kabul responsible for implementation. To consolidate his authority, Akhundzada has implemented a series of power-centralizing measures. First, he has strengthened control over core power institutions, and established a vertical religious management system. A “parallel government” was formed in Kandahar, employing various oversight mechanisms to ensure the loyalty of senior Taliban officials, the military, and intelligence agencies to Akhundzada personally. Frequent decrees and official reshuffles demonstrate his grip on governance [Zhu and Hu, 2025]. He rapidly refined the local governance system, initiating the establishment of “Ulema Shura” at all national levels. Provincial councils, whose members are appointed by the supreme leader of the Taliban, oversee provincial governors' administration and mediate disputes

¹ Recognized as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation.

[Lin, 2025]. Second, gradually seize military and financial power. In November 2024, Akhundzada issued an order stipulating that weapon allocations by the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and Directorate of Intelligence must be personally approved by him. He also demanded these three departments submit inventories detailing their weapon and equipment stockpiles. Additionally, he entrusted the Registration and Oversight Directorate to oversee the registration and distribution of all weapons, thereby strengthening direct control over military supplies [Afghanistan International, 2024]. In August 2025, Akhundzada signed a new decree establishing a “Financial Office” in Kandahar to oversee the finances of all public institutions, thereby firmly securing control over national fiscal resources. Third, implementing multiple measures to strengthen control over remote regions. Currently, government officials appointed at all levels in Afghanistan are severely disconnected from the country's ethnic composition, sparking strong discontent among minority groups. In remote provinces like Takhar, Panjshir, and Badakhshan, the Afghan government has established effective control by weakening local warlords and strongmen, installing new governors loyal to the Taliban but lacking local roots; deploying minority ethnic officials from within the Taliban to these areas; and co-opting local social elites and their networks [Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2024].

2. Unify National Ideology and Tighten Social Control

The Taliban's supreme leader, Akhundzada, adheres to the concept of Islamic rule of law and advocates establishing a religiously-dominated social order. The Afghan government's ideology blends elements from the Deobandi school, Pashtun supremacism, and political Islam, aiming to impose Islamization on the state, society, and lifestyles through a top-down approach based on a narrow interpretation of Sharia law. In August 2024, the Afghan government enacted the “Moral Law,” formally titled the “Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.” This legislation systematized numerous restrictive decrees issued since the Taliban's return to power, imposing stringent constraints on the personal lives and behavioral norms of Afghan citizens. It grants moral inspectors broad authority to act as “moral police,” imposing severe punishments on citizens deemed non-compliant with Sharia law. To strengthen ideological and social control, the Afghan government has vigorously expanded religious schools in recent years, positioning them as foundational institutions for cultivating loyal cadres. Driven by the government's radical conservative policies, Afghanistan has experienced severe setbacks in areas such as women's rights and media freedom. The UN Human Rights Council stated that the Taliban authorities systematically deprive Afghan women and girls of their rights, including prohibiting girls from attending school beyond sixth grade; requiring women to be accompanied by a male guardian in public; and barring women from most occupations.

3. Economic Recovery Shows Signs, but Prospects Remain Dim

The World Bank's latest report indicates Afghanistan's economy is gradually recovering, with two consecutive years of low-level growth. In 2024, Afghanistan's GDP grew by 2.5 %, primarily driven by sectors including agriculture, mining, and construction [World Bank, 2025a]. The Afghan government is striving to learn from modern state economic governance practices. Through formulating economic

development plans, promoting infrastructure construction, and engaging in foreign economic cooperation, it is committed to achieving its stated goal of economic self-sufficiency. In August 2025, the Afghan government released the National Five-Year Development Strategy. The document outlines the nation's development vision, primary objectives, and priorities for the next five years, emphasizing the establishment of a unified framework for managing national development affairs to achieve efficient resource allocation [Afghanistan International, 2025]. To stimulate investment and economic growth, the Afghan government has prioritized water resource projects, railway construction, and other major infrastructure initiatives, achieving a series of positive developments. Currently, Afghanistan is accelerating construction of the Qosh Tepa Canal, which is projected to divert 20 % of the Amu Darya's flow upon completion, thereby alleviating water scarcity issues. In July 2025, the foreign ministers of Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan formally signed the Tripartite Framework Agreement on the Feasibility Study for the Trans-Afghanistan Railway Project in Kabul [Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office of the Chinese Embassy in Uzbekistan, 2025], marking the entry of the Trans-Afghanistan Railway construction into a substantive advancement phase. Construction of the Afghan segment of the TAPI gas pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) is also advancing steadily. Taliban officials stated that upon completion, the pipeline could generate up to \$400 million in annual revenue for Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's economic vulnerability has intensified due to sharply reduced foreign aid, refugee influxes, and export barriers. Following the Trump administration's major overhaul of foreign aid policies, international assistance to Afghanistan has been cut by nearly 50 % for 2025, leaving two-thirds of Afghans barely scraping by [UN News, 2025]. To address the aid shortfall, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reprioritized 2025 assistance to Afghanistan, reducing the target beneficiary population from 16.8 million to 12.5 million [Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2025b]. Moreover, Over the past two years, more than 2 million Afghans have been repatriated from Iran and Pakistan, resulting in a loss of approximately \$1 billion in remittances for Afghanistan. The influx of refugees has boosted domestic demand, while border conflicts with Pakistan have impacted bilateral trade. Afghanistan's trade deficit increased by 19 % from June 2024 to June 2025, reaching \$800 million [World Bank, 2025b, P. 3]. In the long term, weak economic growth, poverty, high unemployment, and food shortages remain Afghanistan's primary challenges. The Afghan government faces a long road ahead in transitioning from an aid-dependent economic model to achieving self-reliance.

4. Security Threats Have Diminished, and the Situation is Improving

Since the Taliban takeover, security conditions have generally improved across Afghanistan, with a marked decrease in civilian casualties from armed conflicts and airstrikes. The Afghan government has vigorously suppressed the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), capturing several of its senior leaders and destroying key strongholds, leading to a significant decline in domestic terrorist attacks. Although the Afghan government claims to have eradicated the group, the UN Sanctions Monitoring Team reports indicate that ISKP remains resilient and adaptive, currently maintaining

approximately 2,000 operational fighters. The group has actively shifted its strategy, focusing on external operations in Afghanistan's surrounding regions and globally [UN Security Council, 2025, p. 17]. The Afghan government continues to provide sanctuary for Al-Qaeda¹ and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Al-Qaeda maintains a core presence of 30 to 60 members in Afghanistan, including at least 12 senior leaders. The TTP, meanwhile, commands approximately 6,000 to 6,500 fighters, primarily concentrated in eastern Afghanistan. The TTP aims to gain territorial control in Pakistan's northwestern regions and targets Pakistani police and security forces. Due to the Taliban's inadequate restraint over the TTP, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have escalated, resulting in several severe border clashes. Additionally, opposition armed groups — the National Resistance Front and the Afghan Freedom Front — continue their resistance, claiming to have launched 125 attacks against the Taliban over the past six months [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2025, p. 27]. However, due to limited capabilities and weak support bases, they do not pose a serious threat to the Afghan government.

II. Expanding Scope for External Cooperation

Over more than four years in power, the Afghan government has actively sought to break out of its international isolation. Its diplomatic strategy has demonstrated a marked shift toward pragmatism, with core objectives centered on securing formal international recognition, alleviating economic hardship, and integrating into regional economic cooperation. Compared to its previous rule in the 1990s, the Taliban now enjoys significantly greater diplomatic maneuverability on the global stage. Afghan government spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid stated that as of February 2025, the government had established diplomatic contacts with 40 countries [Amu TV, 2025]. It also dispatched delegations to multilateral conferences such as the UN International Conference on Afghanistan and the 29th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, signaling its willingness to engage with the international community.

1. Substantial Progress in Relations with Regional Countries

The Afghan government prioritizes neighborhood diplomacy and economic diplomacy in its foreign cooperation efforts to advance domestic stability and economic recovery while creating conditions for improving the external environment. Regional countries generally adopt pragmatic engagement strategies toward the Afghan government, committed to stabilizing and assisting Afghanistan through multilateral strategic coordination and bilateral cooperation.

At the multilateral level, regional countries build consensus through multiple cooperation mechanisms to jointly influence and shape the situation in Afghanistan. Beyond existing frameworks like the Moscow Format consultations, the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, and the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Meeting, regional countries have established the Afghanistan Neighbors Foreign

¹ Recognized as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation.

Ministers' Meeting, revived the informal China-Russia-Pakistan-Iran Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Afghanistan, and engaged in close consultations and coordination through mechanisms such as the “C5+1” format with Central Asian states. These cooperative mechanisms complement each other, playing a vital role in enabling all parties to pool their efforts and advance Afghanistan's reconstruction. The Afghan government has actively supported multilateral mechanisms led by regional countries, including participating in the “Afghanistan's Neighbors Plus Afghanistan” Foreign Ministers' Dialogue and becoming a formal member of the “Moscow Format” consultations.

Currently, regional countries have reached several key consensus points on Afghanistan-related issues. First, they uphold the principle of “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned,” emphasizing respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and supporting the Afghan people's right to independently determine their nation's future. Second, they jointly oppose external interference and call on the United States to assume primary responsibility for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Regional countries widely view the United States and its allies as the originators of Afghanistan's problems, holding them more accountable than any other country to provide economic, livelihood, and humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. All parties oppose any country deploying military infrastructure in Afghanistan or its neighboring states, and strongly urge the United States and other Western nations to lift unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan and return frozen Afghan assets held overseas. Third, they focus on pragmatic cooperation and maintaining stability to prevent chaos. The urgent interest of regional countries is to prevent the spillover of security threats from Afghanistan, urging the Taliban to sever ties with all extremist and terrorist forces. All parties hope to enhance Afghanistan's self-sustaining capacity and integrate it into the regional economy through practical cooperation in trade, investment, connectivity, energy, and mineral resources.

At the bilateral level, regional countries maintain varying degrees of engagement with Afghanistan based on geopolitical and strategic considerations.

China, as Afghanistan's important neighbor, has played a positive and constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction. China pursues a friendly policy toward all Afghan people and has consistently led major world powers and neighboring countries in developing relations with Afghanistan. China supports the Afghan government in governing steadily, focusing on development, resolutely combating terrorism, fostering friendly relations with neighbors, and achieving lasting stability and security [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025]. In July 2021, Abdul Ghani Baradar, then head of the Taliban's Political Commission, led a delegation to China, opening formal communication channels between the two sides. In March 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Afghanistan and held talks with Baradar, acting Deputy Prime Minister of the Afghan government, and Amir Khan Muttaqi, acting Foreign Minister, becoming the first high-ranking official from a major country to visit after the Taliban took power. In March 2022, China hosted the Third Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries. The meeting adopted the Tunxi Initiative, which outlines concrete solutions for supporting Afghanistan's economic reconstruction and practical cooperation among its neighboring

countries. In April 2023, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released its “China’s Position on the Afghan Issue,” comprehensively outlining China's policy stance on Afghanistan, which included upholding the “three respects” and “three never” principles, supporting Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction, and assisting in its early achievement of self-reliance and sustainable development [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023]. In May 2025, Afghan Interim Foreign Minister Muttaqi visited China, where both sides signed several agreements, advancing cooperation across multiple sectors. In August, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Afghanistan, with both parties pledging to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in economic and trade, agriculture, poverty alleviation, water resources, connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges. China also actively promotes reconciliation among neighboring countries within broader regional security frameworks, such as facilitating the easing of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations through the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue. Under China's mediation, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to fully restore ambassadorial-level diplomatic relations.

Security remains the core concern of China's Afghanistan policy. China has explicitly demanded that the Taliban authorities fulfill their commitments, sever ties with all terrorist organizations—especially cracking down on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)¹, a listed terrorist organization—and ensure that Afghan territory is not used to threaten China's security”. In the 2023 China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Tripartite Joint Statement, the Afghan government made its first written and explicit commitment to combat the “East Turkestan Islamic Movement” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2023], marking a key advancement for China. China-Afghanistan economic cooperation is also advancing steadily. To promote Afghanistan's economic development, China has announced it will grant Afghanistan zero-tariff treatment on 100 % of tariff lines. Although progress on large-scale cooperative projects has been slow, at the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Meeting in May 2025, China reiterated its support for extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, signaling broad prospects for future cooperation between the two sides.

Russia has formally normalized relations with Afghanistan by recognizing the legitimacy of the Afghan government in July 2025. As early as April, Russian authorities removed the Taliban from its list of “terrorist organizations” and elevated Afghanistan's diplomatic mission in Russia to ambassadorial level. From Russia's perspective, cooperation with the Taliban is crucial for safeguarding its own security. Particularly following the 2024 terrorist attacks near Moscow, Russia views the Afghan government as an ally in countering terrorism, hoping to leverage its capabilities to jointly combat terrorist organizations like the ISKP. Economic cooperation also remains a key focus of bilateral collaboration. Bilateral trade between Russia and Afghanistan has surged rapidly, rising from \$170 million in 2022 to \$1 billion in 2024. Afghanistan has become a significant export destination for Russian natural gas, oil, flour, and other products. Between 2024 and 2025, Afghanistan also imported over 275,000 metric tons of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from Russia, valued at \$132 million [Observer Research

¹ Recognized as an extremist organization and banned in the Russian Federation.

Foundation, 2025]. Additionally, Russia supports developing transit routes through Afghanistan, such as the Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan transport corridor.

Pakistan has long been a strong ally of the Taliban, but as the Taliban's strategic autonomy continues to grow, the tug-of-war between control and counter-control between Pakistan and Afghanistan is intensifying. In the early days of the Taliban's rule, Pakistan actively promoted the formation of an inclusive government and engaged closely with the Afghan government through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. The core demand of Pakistan's policy has always been security, particularly the requirement that the Taliban completely sever ties with the TTP. However, Pakistan's demands for a tough stance against the TTP were largely ignored. Pakistan repeatedly accused the Taliban of tolerating or even supporting terrorist groups like the TTP operating within its territory, leading to a surge in attacks against Pakistani civilians and security personnel. Both countries also harbor doubts about the legitimacy of the 2,000-kilometer-long Durand Line, with Afghanistan not fully recognizing this border, resulting in frequent border clashes. In October 2025, the two countries witnessed their most intense border clashes in four years, plunging bilateral relations into heightened tension. Furthermore, India's growing proximity to Afghanistan added another layer of strain. In a joint statement issued in October 2024, the Taliban expressed support for India's stance on Kashmir, directly infringing upon Pakistan's core interests and prompting a stern protest from Pakistan. In October 2025, Afghan Foreign Minister Muttaqi visited India, where New Delhi announced the upgrading of its technical mission in Kabul to an embassy, marking the restoration of full diplomatic relations between the two nations. Against this backdrop, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations faced severe challenges, with Pakistan's efforts to maintain its strategic depth by influencing the Taliban encountering significant obstacles. However, Afghanistan's landlocked position leaves it heavily reliant on Pakistan for transit and trade routes, and millions of Afghan refugees continue residing in Pakistani cities. While the likelihood of large-scale conflict between the two countries remains low, complex and intractable contradictions will persistently influence bilateral relations.

Iran maintains pragmatic cooperation with Afghanistan. Following the Taliban's rise to power, while Iran explicitly stated that discussing recognition of the regime was “premature,” it has consistently maintained close engagement. In January 2025, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Afghanistan, becoming the first senior Iranian official to do so in a decade. The two sides held consultations on water resource allocation and cross-border cooperation [Kabul Now, 2025]. Iran has also hosted intra-Afghan dialogue sessions, attempting to facilitate reconciliation between the Taliban and opposition groups. It actively organized the second meeting of foreign ministers from Afghanistan's neighboring countries, striving to play a significant role in regional coordination. Iran serves as a vital trade partner and energy supplier for Afghanistan. At the Afghan government's request, Iran swiftly resumed fuel exports to Afghanistan after the Taliban took power, securing tariff exemptions that proved crucial for stabilizing Afghanistan's economy. In September 2025, Iran's Minister of Industry led a delegation to Afghanistan. Both sides set a goal to increase bilateral trade from \$3.5 billion to \$10 billion and explored infrastructure cooperation in railways and ports

[Radio Television of Afghanistan, 2025]. However, irreconcilable conflicts persist. The Afghan government's conservative Sharia rule clashes with Iran's modernization aspirations. The allocation of water rights in the Helmand River remains a longstanding core dispute. The bilateral treaty signed in 1973 failed to resolve water distribution issues, with Iran claiming it has consistently failed to receive its stipulated water quota, leading to recurring conflicts. Iran also accuses the Afghan government of failing to effectively restrain militants operating on its territory who target Iran. Furthermore, Iran's large-scale expulsion of Afghan refugees has further eroded mutual trust between the two nations.

Central Asian nations pursue a “differentiated engagement” approach with Afghanistan. Central Asian states view Afghanistan's active participation in regional relations as crucial for promoting stability, leading them to adopt pragmatic cooperation with Kabul. By late 2023, Kazakhstan removed the Taliban from its list of banned organizations operating within its borders. In June 2024, Kazakhstan President Kassym Tokayev stated at the Collective Security Treaty Organization meeting that the Taliban's rule represents a “long-term reality” for regional nations. Kyrgyzstan removed the Taliban from its terrorist list in 2024. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been the most active in cooperating with the Taliban. In August 2024, during Uzbekistan Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov's visit to Afghanistan, Tashkent and Kabul signed 35 memoranda of understanding worth \$2.5 billion [Intellinews, 2025]. Turkmenistan seeks to advance the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project to expand energy exports to South Asia. In contrast, Tajikistan maintains a hostile stance toward the Afghan government and engages with the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front. Concerned about the infiltration of extremist Islamic ideology and terrorist forces, President Emomali Rahmon has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of constructing a security belt around Afghanistan. Central Asian nations are Afghanistan's primary suppliers of energy and electricity, with over 70 % of the country's power relying on imports from neighboring states. Despite the Afghan government facing repayment difficulties due to sanctions, asset freezes, and reduced foreign aid, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan continue to supply energy to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Central Asian nations actively pursue cooperation with Afghanistan in mineral development and connectivity projects, striving to open southern trade routes and advance economic integration between Central and South Asia.

2. Limited Engagement with Western Countries

Although the United States has not recognized the legitimacy of the Afghan government to date, it does not rule out technical engagement with the Taliban. Former U. S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West has held multiple face-to-face meetings with Taliban representatives in third countries such as Qatar to discuss issues including sanctions, economic conditions, and human rights situations. Since the 2021 withdrawal, the United States has provided nearly \$3.71 billion in aid to Afghanistan. Of this, 64.2 % has flowed to Afghanistan through UN agencies, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund [Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2025a]. Since Trump's return to office, U. S. policy toward Afghanistan has undergone partial adjustments marked by a distinct

transactional approach. On one hand, through low-cost diplomatic maneuvers such as lifting bounties on some senior Taliban representatives, the administration secured a prisoner exchange with the Taliban. In March 2025, the Trump administration abruptly removed \$10 million bounties on three Taliban members, including military leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, who served as interior minister in the interim government. Simultaneously, the Taliban announced the release of George Glezzmann, an American citizen held captive for over two years. U. S. Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Adam Boehler visited Kabul twice within months to negotiate hostage exchanges and other matters with the Taliban. On the other hand, the administration applied high-pressure tactics by suspending aid to compel the Taliban to concede on issues like ceding military bases and counter-terrorism cooperation. In January 2025, President Trump issued an executive order halting all U. S.-funded aid programs pending a 90-day review. Most projects in Afghanistan were deemed “inconsistent with the administration's foreign policy objectives” [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2025, P. 5]. On April 8, the U. S. Department of State announced it had cut all aid to the World Food Programme in Afghanistan, totaling \$567 million. On April 30, all United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs in Afghanistan—including humanitarian projects (\$765 million) and basic services programs (\$1 billion)—were terminated, leaving only two small-scale education initiatives [Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2025b]. These actions have caused irreversible setbacks in Afghanistan's reconstruction process. Beyond “America First” policy considerations, the Trump administration also pursued geopolitical calculations. Since taking office, Trump repeatedly declared intentions to reoccupy Bagram Air Base, seeking to maintain maximum U. S. influence in Afghanistan and its periphery at minimal cost. Currently, the Taliban remains firmly opposed, presenting significant obstacles to a U. S. military return to Afghanistan.

The European Union has prioritized addressing Afghanistan's imminent humanitarian crisis. Against the backdrop of U. S. aid cuts, the EU continues to increase assistance to Afghanistan through the United Nations and international agencies. In June 2025, the European Commission announced 161 million in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan to meet the most urgent needs of Afghan refugees. Simultaneously, the EU convened meetings with representatives from Gulf states, the G7, the UN, and the World Bank, emphasizing a coordinated approach to ensure humanitarian access and stabilize Afghanistan [European Union External Action, 2025]. The EU has been cautious regarding recognizing the legitimacy of the Afghan government. It previously outlined five criteria for enhanced engagement with the Taliban, including refraining from exporting terrorism to other countries, respecting human rights and the rule of law, forming an inclusive government, permitting unimpeded humanitarian access, and allowing foreign nationals and those wishing to leave to depart Afghanistan [Anadolu Agency, 2021]. However, divisions have emerged among EU member states over time. In July 2025, the German government authorized two diplomats from the Afghan government to take up posts at the Afghan embassy in Germany, setting a precedent among EU nations. Afghan diplomatic missions in European countries including Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria also maintained contacts with the Afghan government [Amu TV, 2025].

III. Challenges and Prospects Facing the Afghan Government

Since returning to power, the Taliban-led Afghan government has strived to stabilize domestic conditions, actively promoted economic reconstruction, and continuously opened new fronts in diplomacy. However, its governance approach faces numerous issues, leading to the manifestation of internal conflicts and intensifying societal conservatism. The United States' attempts to reclaim military bases further escalate the strategic competition among major powers in the region. These factors collectively pose new challenges to the Taliban's next phase of governance.

1. Intensifying Internal Strife Among Taliban Leadership Threatens Policy Stability

Longstanding factional disputes within the Taliban have historically maintained a “divided but not fractured” dynamic. Since the Taliban's return to power, conflicts have evolved from power struggles into disputes over governing philosophies and strategic directions [Zhu and Hu, 2025]. The Kandahar faction led by supreme leader Akhundzada advocates a more closed and conservative governance model, insisting on establishing “Sharia rule” in Afghanistan. The pragmatic faction, however, argues that a degree of external engagement and flexible policies are necessary to secure international recognition and space for the government. This faction is primarily represented by members of the “Doha Negotiation Group,” including Deputy Prime Minister Baradar and Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Stanikzai. Even the “hardliners,” represented by the Haqqani Network, express dissatisfaction with Akhundzada's radical conservative policies and support lifting restrictions on women in areas such as education. The Kandahar faction systematically weakened rivals by installing loyalists and stripping other factions' ministers of authority to distribute weapons and equipment, thereby concentrating power. These actions further deepened divisions within the Taliban. In December 2024, Khalil Haqqani, acting minister of refugee and repatriation affairs, was killed in a suicide attack. In January 2025, acting Deputy Foreign Minister Stanikzai left for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after sharply criticizing Akhundzada and did not return. Shortly thereafter, acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani also “disappeared” after traveling to the UAE, only reappearing domestically in March [Lin, 2025]. Currently, all factions appear to be exercising limited restraint, likely maintaining a state of “fighting without breaking.” However, these core ideological differences will erode unity and mutual trust within the Taliban. The tug-of-war between factions will lead to policy vacillation or reversal, while simultaneously increasing the risk of potential conflict.

2. Economic Governance Capabilities are Deficient, Constraining Long-term Development

As an organization transitioning from a military group to a governing authority, the Taliban remains entrenched in wartime economic thinking and lacks mature economic management experience. Key economic sectors are primarily led by military or religious figures without specialized backgrounds, rendering them ill-equipped to navigate complex economic realities. Since taking power, the Afghan government has increased fiscal revenue through customs duties and exports of minerals and other primary commodities. However, it has heavily skewed expenditures toward security forces and

religious education, allocating an extremely low proportion of funds to public welfare and development. Despite domestic conditions stabilizing and improving, the Taliban continues to massively expand security forces at the expense of other urgently needed sectors [Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2023]. Faced with a significant reduction in international aid, the Afghan government are aggressively promoting infrastructure development and resource exploitation as a shortcut to economic self-sufficiency. However, constraints such as a weak fiscal foundation, lagging technological development, and insufficient human capital are hampering their progress. Additionally, concerns over security conditions and the investment environment have made external capital cautious about entering Afghanistan.

The Afghan government's counter-narcotics policy also reveals its short-sightedness. Over the past four years, the Afghan government has achieved significant success in banning poppy cultivation. David Mansfield, an expert who has long monitored Afghanistan's drug problem, stated that in 2025, cultivation across Afghanistan will remain at historically low levels [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2025, P. 32]. However, the government failed to provide rural populations with viable and sustainable livelihood alternatives. The most immediate impact of the counter-narcotics policy was a precipitous decline in farmers' incomes, plunging many rural households into poverty and food shortages. In 2024, large-scale protests erupted in Badakhshan Province, northern part of Afghanistan, over poppy eradication efforts. If farmers' economic hardships remain unaddressed long-term, social tensions may further escalate.

3. Regional Terrorist Forces are Showing Signs of Coordination and Convergence

While Afghanistan's domestic security situation has improved, the regional security environment continues to deteriorate, negatively impacting cooperation between the Afghan government and neighboring countries. The ISKP is actively expanding in northern Afghan provinces to challenge the Taliban's legitimacy, recruiting personnel from Central Asian nations—particularly Tajikistan—and posing a serious threat to Central Asia and the broader region [UN Security Council, 2025, pp. 17–18]. The Taliban's return to power after years has also greatly emboldened terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, TTP, and Baloch separatists. Al-Qaeda's South Asian branch has progressively shifted its focus toward the Kashmir region. The TTP aspires to emulate the Taliban by establishing a similar theocratic regime in Pakistan's northwest. Due to deep historical and ideological ties with the TTP, certain factions within the Taliban have adopted a tolerant stance toward the group, leading to a surge in terrorist attacks targeting Pakistan. Reports indicate the TTP maintains tactical-level ties with the ISKP and collaborates closely with the Balochistan Liberation Army in southern Afghanistan [UN Security Council, 2025, pp. 17–18]. This intricate web of terrorist networks, interacting with the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan, has further complicated regional security dynamics and cast a shadow over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) development.

4. Achieving a Diplomatic Breakthrough Remains Hindered by Certain Obstacles

Over the past four years, the Afghan government has gained partial “de facto recognition” internationally, significantly expanding its diplomatic engagements.

However, due to the Taliban's unwillingness to compromise on issues like human rights, it continues to face substantial barriers in securing formal legal recognition and sanctions relief. While the United States has attempted to maintain influence through sanctions and re-establishing military bases, its overall strategic retrenchment remains unchanged. European engagement with the Afghan government largely stems from pragmatic needs like migrant repatriation and humanitarian considerations. Against the backdrop of the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict, Europe's focus on Afghanistan remains relatively limited. This implies that the Afghan government must still rely on effective cooperation from regional countries to achieve a breakthrough. However, regional countries have not followed Russia's lead in hastily recognizing the Afghan government. A key consideration is the perception that the Afghan government has failed to adequately address their security concerns. Although the Afghan government has pledged to regional countries that it will not allow terrorist organizations to operate from its territory, it has not cracked down on them. Instead, it has taken symbolic measures to control them, such as relocating foreign fighters from the border to the Taliban's central areas for enhanced supervision and establishing so-called “refugee camps” to house fighters and their families [Crisis Group, 2022]. According to the UN Sanctions Monitoring Team report, the Taliban employs fighters from terrorist organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan¹ (IMU) and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) within its law enforcement and military forces to maintain domestic security, particularly in northern Afghanistan. In March 2025, ETIM released a new strategic plan and charter, seeking to accelerate its “armed struggle for independence” and strengthen cooperation with both the Taliban and the Syrian Sham Liberation Organization [UN Security Council, 2025, pp. 17–18]. In this context, regional states may continue leveraging formal diplomatic recognition as leverage to pressure the Afghan government into making concessions on counter-terrorism. Should the Afghan government meet regional security demands, it stands to gain expanded economic cooperation and connectivity opportunities.

IV. Conclusion

Since regaining power in 2021, the Taliban in Afghanistan has completed its transition from an “interim” government to a “formal” government in its fourth year—a milestone in consolidating its rule. Over the past four years, the Afghan government has largely established its domestic authority by strengthening centralization, suppressing internal dissent, and unifying national ideology. Simultaneously, it has sought breakthroughs in the international arena through economic recovery and pragmatic diplomacy, significantly improving its diplomatic standing compared to its first rule in the 1990s.

Yet beneath this surface stability lie profound crises. Domestically, entrenched factional conflicts within the Taliban leadership are escalating from power struggles into ideological disputes, threatening policy stability and continuity. Its radical conservative social policies—particularly the systematic suppression of women's rights—have not only

¹ Recognized as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation.

exacerbated humanitarian crises but also constitute the primary obstacle to gaining international legitimacy. Economically, while signs of recovery are visible, deep dependence on external aid, weak endogenous capacity for self-sustaining growth, and short-sighted governance models make the goal of “self-reliance” a long and arduous journey. Externally, despite substantive progress in relations with regional countries, the Afghan government's ambiguous stance and differential approach to counter-terrorism fail to address the most core security concerns of neighboring nations, thereby limiting its prospects for broader diplomatic recognition.

Looking ahead, the Afghan government stands at a new crossroads. On the one hand, it seeks to project a more mature and stable governance image to the international community; on the other, its inherent conservative tendencies and governance limitations leave it struggling to navigate complex internal challenges and external pressures. Whether Afghanistan can achieve lasting peace and genuine development depends not only on whether the Taliban can make substantive changes in internal unity, economic governance, and counter-terrorism commitments, but also on whether it can find a realistic path to coexistence and cooperation with the regional and international community. This road is bound to be fraught with thorns, and Afghanistan's future continues to swing precariously between challenge and hope.

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