



Dimensions
for Strategic Studies

Analytical report



Understanding Afghanistan:

An Overview of Internal and External Dynamics
Two Years into Taliban Control

By: Ozair Khan

September 2023

www.dimensionscenter.net



Dimensions for Strategic Studies

Dimensions Centre for Strategic Studies (DCSS) is think tank, dedicated to the study of the Middle East and North Africa affairs, provides the Arab readers with a substantive insight on the region's political, economic and social issues and dynamics.

The DCSS was founded in the United Kingdom on January 1, 2020, and is headquartered in London.

Dimensions Center for Strategic Studies is interested in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) affairs in particular, addressing influences the region has and the effects of this region's interactions with the rest of the world.

We strive to provide an open and accessible space in order to inform relevant persons of experts and academic readers alike, in a simplified style far from the complexities brought by experts, technicians and academics.

We are keen to provide topics in an intensive manner that goes in line with the challenges of modern times and in brief way which can meet the needs of researchers and readers as well.

<https://dimensionscenter.net/>

All rights Reserved DCSS.2023
info@dimensionscenter.net



Contents

Contents:	3
Executive Summary:	4
Introduction:	5
Internal situation:	6
Treatment of Women:	6
Economy:	8
Security and presence of armed groups	9
Foreign Relations:	11
Relations with the US:	11
Relations with Pakistan:	13
Relations with Iran	15
Relations with China	17
Conclusion:	19

Ozair Khan¹

¹ Islamic movements researcher and expert, his LinkedIn account available from: [link](#)



Executive Summary:

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the internal and external dynamics in Afghanistan two years after Taliban control. It highlights key aspects of the country's situation, including the treatment of women, the economy, security, the presence of armed groups, and foreign relations.

Internally, Afghanistan's treatment of women has regressed to resemble conditions from two decades ago, with severe restrictions on female rights and education. The Taliban's leadership exhibits ideological divides, particularly between the Kandahari and more moderate factions, creating policy shifts and challenges.

Economically, Afghanistan faces significant challenges, with reduced international financial support and a reliance on the opium trade. The Taliban's efficient tax collection has reduced corruption but poses risks without viable alternatives.

Security has improved overall, but the presence of IS-K ((Islamic State Khorasan) remains a major concern. Foreign armed groups within Afghanistan raise questions about the Islamic Emirate's relationships with specific countries. Externally, the Islamic Emirate lacks international recognition, particularly from the United States. Recent US-Taliban interactions show some cooperation but remain limited.

Relations with neighboring countries are complex. Pakistan's historically supportive stance has been strained due to TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) attacks and alleged Taliban inaction. Iran's relationship is pragmatic, driven by shared interests and the need for engagement despite historical tensions. China's involvement is motivated by security concerns and investment opportunities, with recent mineral extraction contracts signed.

Afghanistan's situation is complicated, with a mix of positive and negative developments. The Taliban faces challenges in governance and international relations, particularly concerning armed groups on Afghan soil.

Keywords:

Afghanistan - Taliban control - Islamic Emirate - Women's rights - IS-K (Islamic State Khorasan) - US - Taliban relations.



INTRODUCTION

In the lead-up to the collapse of the Afghan Republic, various experts had postulated scenarios of political disintegration, yet the rapidity with which the Taliban assumed control took the international community by surprise. The U.S. withdrawal has been likened to the exit from Vietnam, and now, over two years since the establishment of the Taliban-led government—officially dubbed the Islamic Emirate—it is a fitting juncture to evaluate the state of affairs within Afghanistan. A focus on internal policies provides keen insights not only into the domestic situation but also into the Islamic Emirate's interaction with the global community, particularly its neighbors like Pakistan, Iran, and China. Drawing from this foundation, our analysis will begin by delving into the internal dynamics within the Islamic Emirate, extending our examination to encompass its relationships with both regional and international actors.



INTERNAL SITUATION

Several critical factors have significantly impacted Afghanistan's internal dynamics and have shaped the direction of the new government's policies. In the following sections, we will spotlight the most pivotal among them.

Treatment of women

When the Taliban is mentioned, it often evokes concerns about the situation of women in Afghanistan. During their first time in power from 1996 to 2001, women were severely restricted, unable to venture outside without their legal guardians, and girls were entirely barred from attending school. However, when the Taliban returned to power for the second time, there was a glimmer of hope for change. Initially, girls were allowed to attend school again, and women regained access to universities².

Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived, as the Taliban swiftly reverted to their previous policies. Today, the status of women in Afghanistan closely resembles the conditions of two decades ago. Furthermore, the Taliban imposed restrictions on female non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) workers operating within the country³. Despite these challenges, the Taliban has repeatedly promised to reopen schools and, in principle, claims to support girls' education. Their stance, however, emphasizes the importance of maintaining strict gender segregation in educational settings⁴.

² Afghanistan: Taliban ban women from universities amid condemnation. BBC News. 20 December 2022. Available from: [link](#)

³ UN says its female staffers banned from working in Afghanistan, Al Jazeera, 4 Apr 2023. Available from: [link](#)

⁴ GUL, Ayaz. Taliban Diplomat Defends Policies, Insists Afghan Women Education Ban Not "Permanent." VOA. 8 May 2023. Available from: [link](#)



There exist two prevailing theories explaining the abrupt political reversal in Afghanistan, particularly the closure of girls' educational facilities shortly after their reopening following the Taliban's takeover.

The first theory posits that Amir al Muminin, Haibatullah Akhunzadah, is motivated by frustration with the international community's response, viewing these restrictions as a form of "punishment" for their refusal to meet his primary demand: the recognition of the Islamic Emirate. In this perspective, it's seen as a means to exert pressure on international actors.

Conversely, the second theory suggests that Haibatullah Akhunzadah is guided by deep religious conviction, firmly believing in the necessity of imposing these various restrictions on women. According to this view, these actions are driven by a strict interpretation of religious principles⁵.

This clearly shows that the Taliban are not homogenous, so there are different tendencies. For example, the Haqqani family has always had strong ties with the Arab world, other Taliban rarely leave Kandahar, and others such as Stanikzai have spent years abroad, which broadened their horizons⁶. Regardless of the specific motivations behind recent policy shifts, it is evident that there exists a significant ideological divide within the ranks of the Taliban. This schism is particularly pronounced between two main factions.

On one side, we find the Taliban leadership based in Kandahar, the very birthplace of the movement. Led by Haibatullah Akhunzadah and his close advisors, this faction claims the highest authority. They assert their legitimacy based on their frontline roles during the conflicts with NATO forces in the 2000s and 2010s.

On the other side, a more moderate camp within the Taliban openly criticizes some of the leadership's decisions. This faction, represented by figures like Mohammed Abbas Stanikzai⁷, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Interior Minister, challenges the prevailing narrative.

⁵ GUL, Ayaz. Taliban Diplomat Defends Policies, Insists Afghan Women Education Ban Not "Permanent." VOA. 8 May 2023. Available from: [link](#)

⁶ From private discussions with religious scholars.

⁷ Deputy Foreign Minister Calls for Girls' Education. TOLONews. 22 May 2022. Available from: [link](#)



It's worth noting that Sirajuddin Haqqani carries a multi-million-dollar US bounty on his head and hails from a family known for promoting the use of suicide attacks. The Haqqanis are a clear example that nuance is crucial. Despite being the main allies of Al-Qaeda within the Taliban and promoters of suicide bombing as a tool of war, since the 80s' western officials have recognized that on social issues, the Haqqanis are known to be less rigid than the Kandaharis as the Americans developed special relations with his network during 80s⁸. Khalifa, one of Sirajuddin's aliases, has implicitly voiced criticism of the Taliban leadership on multiple occasions. For example, he once remarked that the "entire system has become monopolized"⁹. This highlights the fact that the Taliban is far from a monolithic entity; it comprises different factions and tendencies. For instance, the Haqqani family has longstanding ties with the Arab world, while other Taliban members seldom venture outside Kandahar. Some, like Stanikzai, have spent considerable time abroad, which has broadened their perspectives and potentially contributed to their more moderate stance.

Economy

The economic landscape of Afghanistan is currently marred by significant challenges, leading to an exacerbating humanitarian crisis. With the international gaze now largely shifted towards Ukraine and given the contentious decisions made by the Taliban, global benefactors have decided to reduce their financial support for Afghanistan¹⁰. However, amidst these adversities, the Taliban have demonstrated proficiency in certain economic domains.

⁸ Thomas Joscelyn, Jalaluddin Haqqani is dead. The terror network he created lives on, Washington Examiner, 1 October 2018, Available from: [link](#)

⁹ Sirajuddin Haqqani: Kabul Wants "Legitimate Interaction with the World." TOLONews. 11 February 2023. Available from: [link](#)

¹⁰ DAWI, Akmal. Taliban Edicts, Donation Decline Prompt \$1 Billion Cut in UN Aid to Afghanistan. VOA. 20 June 2023. Available from: [link](#)



They have mastered the art of tax collection and, notably, most of the revenue remains within state coffers as corruption has seen a significant decline under their Islamic governance¹¹. Indeed, one of the most profound critiques of the Afghan Republic was its endemic corruption. Over the past two decades, Afghanistan was the recipient of staggering financial aid intended for reconstruction; the U.S. alone allocated \$145 billion for this purpose.¹² Regrettably, despite these investments, instances of corruption were rife among the political elite, ensuring that the nation's progress remained far below potential.

The narcotics trade remains a pressing issue that continues to plague Afghanistan's economy. The country is a major hub for opium production, accounting for nearly 80% of the global heroin market¹³. This was a significant concern during the first Taliban government and persisted throughout the era of the Afghan Republic, despite international efforts to curtail poppy cultivation. In a move that initially garnered international praise, Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhunzadah issued a prohibition on poppy harvesting in February 2022.¹⁴ However, the absence of a viable alternative to this lucrative crop could potentially transform this policy into an economic disaster for Afghanistan. Crafting a sustainable solution will require ingenuity and collaborative efforts from the international community.

Security and presence of armed groups

The overall security situation in Afghanistan has witnessed a remarkable improvement under the Islamic Emirate's rule. People now have the ability to travel across regions, a development that was previously unimaginable during the past few decades.

¹¹ MANSFIELD, David. Changing the Rules of the Game: How the Taliban Regulated Cross-Border Trade and Upended Afghanistan's Political Economy. XCEPT, 2022.

BYRD, William. Taliban Are Collecting Revenue — But How Are They Spending It? United States Institute of Peace. 2 February 2022. Available from: [link](#)

¹² What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. 30 August 2021. Available from: [link](#)

¹³ Inside the Taliban's war on drugs - opium poppy crops slashed, BBC, 6 June 2022. Available from: [link](#)

¹⁴ BYRD, William. The Taliban's Successful Opium Ban is Bad for Afghans and the World. United States Institute of Peace. 8 June 2023. Available from: [link](#)



However, the primary security concern stems from the presence of the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), which is the regional branch of ISIS. IS-K has carried out significant operations, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives, with one of the most notable incidents being the devastating bombing at Kabul Airport in August 2022, claiming the lives of over 170 people.¹⁵ The Islamic Emirate has responded with successful counterattacks, resulting in the elimination of key IS-K members¹⁶. Nevertheless, recent reports indicate that this terrorist group still maintains a membership of around 4,000 individuals¹⁷.

It is also worth mentioning that IS-K is not the only armed group on the Afghan territory. According to several recent reports, most notably by the UN Security Council, many foreign armed groups ranging from al Qaeda, TTP, or even Uzbek factions have taken Afghanistan as a haven with the consent of the defacto Afghan authorities¹⁸.

This issue related to foreign armed groups clearly affects the Islamic Emirate's standing on the international scene and its relationship with specific countries.

¹⁵ WALSH, Joe. Pentagon Says Deadly Attack on U.S. Troops At Kabul Airport Was Staged by One Suicide Bomber—And No ISIS-K Gunmen. Forbes. 7 February 2022. Available from: [link](#)

¹⁶ ATWOOD, Natasha. ISIS-K leader behind deadly 2021 suicide bombing at Kabul airport killed by Taliban, White House says | CNN Politics. CNN. 25 April 2023. Available from: [link](#)

¹⁷ Fourteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2665 (2022) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan. New-York: United Nations Security Council, 2023. Available from: [link](#)

¹⁸ Ibid



FOREIGN RELATIONS

The central concern surrounding the new Afghan government revolves around its lack of international recognition. This underscores the importance of examining the government's interactions with a range of regional and international actors, which will be the focal point of the forthcoming paragraphs.

Relations with the US

The situation concerning the United States is, unsurprisingly, highly delicate and fraught with tension. The primary obstacle to international recognition of the Islamic Emirate lies in the United States' refusal to acknowledge its authority. Additionally, the de facto Afghan authorities harbor resentment towards President Joe Biden's administration due to its decision to freeze \$7 billion from the Afghan central bank. This sum is urgently needed by the Islamic Emirate to address the massive humanitarian crisis unfolding in the country.

The U.S. government has levied various accusations against the Islamic Emirate, citing concerns over perceived human rights violations and other issues. However, the primary source of contention with the United States stems from the reported presence of armed groups within Afghan territory, most notably Al Qaeda, as detailed in the reports mentioned earlier. The principal objective of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was to dismantle Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups.

Consequently, one of the central clauses of the Doha Agreement, which marked the end of the war in Afghanistan and was signed in Doha in 2020, stipulated that the Taliban should not provide safe haven to foreign armed groups.



This clause came into question when the U.S. announced the killing of Ayman al Zawahiri, the leader of Al Qaeda, on July 31, 2022, in Kabul¹⁹. The Taliban, especially the Haqqani network, have had a historical and complex relationship with Al Qaeda, dating back to the first Islamic Emirate, when Osama bin Laden was granted asylum. After the U.S. invasion, Al Qaeda played a pivotal role in assisting the Taliban in regaining their strength and continuing their struggle against NATO forces. Zawahiri's death was viewed by the U.S. as clear evidence of a violation of the Doha Agreement²⁰.

However, it's worth considering the possibility that the Taliban leadership may not have been aware of Zawahiri's presence, as the Haqqani network may have concealed this information from the rest of the group. This situation further underscores the power struggle between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions, as explained earlier²¹.

Nonetheless, there is a level of US-Taliban cooperation. The US keeps giving humanitarian aid. Also, in July 2023, there was a breakthrough in US-Taliban relations. There was a meeting between delegations from both countries, which was the highest form of public engagement between the two sides in a long time. Most notably, one of the American representatives mentioned the need to engage with the Taliban, which saddened opponents of the Taliban because interacting with the Islamic Emirate is a form of unwanted recognition.

Nonetheless, there exists a degree of cooperation between the United States and the Taliban. The U.S. continues to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan²². Furthermore, in a notable development in July 2023, there was a breakthrough in U.S.-Taliban relations. The two sides held a meeting with official delegations, marking one of the highest levels of public engagement between them in quite some time.

¹⁹ The Death of Ayman al-Zawahiri. United States Department of State. 1 August 2022. Available from: [link](#)

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ From private discussions with Pakistani religious scholars close to the Taliban

²² The United States Has Provided More Than \$1.1 Billion To Respond To Humanitarian Crisis In Afghanistan Since August 2021 | Press Release. U.S. Agency for International Development. 21 December 2022. Available from: [link](#)



What drew significant attention during this meeting was a statement by one of the American representatives. They emphasized the need to engage with the Taliban. This statement stirred mixed reactions, as it saddened opponents of the Taliban who view any form of interaction with the Islamic Emirate as an undesirable form of recognition²³.

Relations with Pakistan

Pakistan is arguably the foreign country most significantly impacted by the Taliban's ascension to power in Afghanistan. The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban can be characterized as a complex love-hate dynamic.

Pakistan has historically viewed the Taliban as a reliable option for ensuring that Afghan rulers align with Pakistani interests. This perception is rooted in the fact that many Taliban members resided and received education in Pakistan during and after the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets. As a result, Pakistan believed it could exert influence and control over the Taliban due to their historical ties and dependence on Pakistan.

Pakistan's preoccupation with controlling Afghanistan can be attributed to two primary reasons:

- **The Durand Line :**

This term refers to the border separating Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many Afghans do not acknowledge the legal validity of this border, as the treaty that established it was signed between the British Raj²⁴ and Afghanistan. They argue that this treaty has lost its relevance since the end of the British Raj. Furthermore, some Afghan Pashtun nationalists believe that the Pashtun territories within Pakistan should be integrated into Afghanistan. According to this perspective, all Pashtuns are inherently Afghans. Prior to the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets, the Durand Line was a significant point of contention between the two nations.

²³ US envoy faces backlash over direct engagement with the Taliban. KabulNow. 15 August 2023. Available from: [link](#)

²⁴ The term "British Raj" refers to British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, which lasted from 1858 to 1947. When this British colonization finally ended, this massive territory was separated into India and Pakistan (and later on Bangladesh).



- **India:**

One of Pakistan's foremost concerns is the prospect of Afghanistan forming a close alliance with India to the extent that Afghan authorities might permit Indian troops to launch attacks on Pakistan from Afghan territory in the event of an all-out conflict between India and Pakistan. Such a scenario would leave Pakistan vulnerable to simultaneous attacks from both its eastern and western borders.

Despite Pakistan's well-documented historical support for the Taliban, including offering refuge to many Taliban members on Pakistani soil after the U.S. assault on the Taliban in 2001, the Taliban have maintained a degree of independence and occasionally clashed with Pakistani interests. They have done so by questioning the legitimacy of the Durand Line²⁵ and even by challenging the Islamic credentials of Pakistan itself. However, since their takeover of Afghanistan, the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban has been strained, primarily due to Pakistan facing almost daily attacks from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban.

This group, founded in 2007, comprises Pakistani sympathizers of the Taliban's Jihad against NATO forces after the American intervention in 2001. Subsequently, these Pakistani nationals redirected their focus toward the Pakistani state, which they deemed unIslamic, largely because of Pakistan's alignment with the United States during the war on terror.

The Pakistani government contends that the TTP has found refuge in Afghanistan and that the Taliban are fully aware of this, yet they have not taken action to address it. This has led Pakistan to launch attacks on Afghan soil in pursuit of TTP elements²⁶. The Taliban has consistently denied these allegations and has recently issued a fatwa asserting that Jihad conducted without the authorization of Amir al Muminin Haibatullah Akhunzadah is null and void²⁷.

²⁵ TTP militants are Pakistan's responsibility, not ours, Afghan Taliban leader Suhail Shaheen says. Arab News PK. 10 July 2023. Available from: [link](#)

²⁶ Afghanistan death toll in "Pakistan strikes" rises to at least 47: officials. France 24. 17 April 2022. Available from: [link](#)

²⁷ GUL, Ayaz. Afghan Taliban Chief Deems Cross-Border Attacks on Pakistan Forbidden. VOA. 6 August 2023. Available from: [link](#)



Relations with Iran

Iran is the second-most affected country by the Taliban's takeover, given its geographical proximity to Afghanistan. The relationship between the two governments has been marked by tension and conflict. In fact, they came perilously close to war in 1998 following the killing of Iranian officials in Afghanistan.

Iran, a staunch advocate for the rights of Shia Muslims worldwide, had been a vocal critic of the Taliban's treatment of the Shia Hazara minority within Afghanistan. As a result, Iran provided financial support and training to the Northern Front, which opposed the Taliban. However, discreetly, Iran began establishing connections with the weakened Taliban after 2001, driven by concerns over the American presence in Afghanistan, which it viewed as unfavorable to its interests.

Since the Taliban's takeover, Iran has taken the remarkable step of entrusting control of Afghan consulates and its embassy on Iranian soil to the Taliban²⁸. Furthermore, Iran kept its embassy in Afghanistan operational throughout the takeover, demonstrating its readiness to engage with the newly established Islamic Emirate²⁹. In response, the Taliban have taken measures to cultivate a stronger relationship with Iran by including in their interim government and provisional Cabinet members who have long-standing ties with Iran.

²⁸ GUL, Ayaz. Iran Hands Over Afghan Embassy in Tehran to Taliban. VOA. 27 February 2023. Available from: [link](#)

²⁹ Iran says its embassy in Kabul remains open. Reuters. 17 August 2021. Available from: [link](#)



However, it is essential to note that despite these developments, the relationship between the Taliban and Iran is far from that of close allies. Iran frequently criticizes the Taliban for what it perceives as a lack of inclusivity³⁰. The Iran-Taliban relationship since the takeover appears to be rooted in pure pragmatism. This pragmatism arises from the recognition of shared interests and the need to engage with each other despite historical tensions and differences.

- After Pakistan, Iran welcomed the most Afghan refugees. It hosts 780,000 registered Afghan refugees and 2.6 million undocumented ones³¹.
- Afghanistan and Iran are important trading partners.
- Iran fears attacks from IS-K due to Shias being among IS' top targets.
- Last but not least, the water issue which has made the headlines over the last few months. Iran and the Taliban soldiers exchanged heavy gunfire on the border in May 2023³².

Both sides accused each other of shooting first. A dispute over the Helmand River caused this clash. It is a vital water source for both Iranians and Afghans for their agriculture and overall livelihood. It used to be one of the world's most extensive wetlands, but it has been drying up. Afghanistan and Iran signed the Helmand River Treaty — in 1973 to regulate the allocation of river water, but there have been disagreements since then about the implementation of this agreement.

³⁰ Tehran Advises Taliban Not To Dodge Intl. Responsibilities. Iran International. 3 September 2023. Available from: [link](#)

³¹ Iran | ACAPS. ACAPS. Available from: [link](#)

³² DAGRES, Holly. Iran and Afghanistan are feuding over the Helmand River. The water wars have no end in sight. Atlantic Council. 7 July 2023. Available from: [link](#)



Relations with China

China is one of the most potent actors on the international scene, so they were bound to be involved in Afghanistan.

It was among the first countries to develop a diplomatic channel with the Islamic Emirate. The Taliban especially appreciate the open criticism of the Chinese government against the US officials blaming them for the current humanitarian disaster.

Chinese involvement in Afghanistan is motivated by two factors:

- **Security:**

Afghanistan is the sanctuary for Uyghur independent armed groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Uyghur group that Beijing blames for unrest in its western Xinjiang Province³³. Moreover, China's Belt and Road Initiative projects also circumvent Afghan territory, so Chinese policymakers are wary of the instability in the US-withdrawal of Afghanistan.

- **Prospect of investment opportunities:**

The mining sector in Afghanistan is primarily untapped, and according to some studies, Afghanistan soil contains more than 1 trillion dollars' worth of minerals. For example, a considerable amount of Lithium can be extracted, a crucial component of large-capacity batteries for electric vehicles and clean-energy storage systems. Therefore, even during the previous Afghan Republic, China carried out a few auctions in 2008, which it won, to get the rights to extract copper in Logar for 3.4 billion dollars over 30 years³⁴.

33 SIDDIQUE, Abubakar. The Limits of China's Budding Relationship with Afghanistan's Taliban. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. 4 June 2023. Available from: [link](#)

34 BLUMENTHAL, Lilly and PURDY, Caitlin. Chinese investment in Afghanistan's lithium sector: A long shot in the short term. Brookings. 3 August 2022. Available from: [link](#)



Recently, in January 2023, the Taliban signed an oil extraction contract with a Chinese firm for mineral extraction. Under the deal, China's Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co is expected to invest up to \$150 million during the first year. After three years, the amount is predicted to increase to \$540 million. The Taliban claims the project will provide around 3,000 local jobs.³⁵

On paper, it looks promising, but signing a contract does not necessarily mean the project's aims will be achieved. China's projects in Afghanistan have a track record of being heavily delayed or stopped due to the country's weak institutions and overall internal situation. Therefore, China will be highly attentive to how the Taliban administrates the country. Also, we must remember that investing in Afghanistan to extract materials from the soil is a long-term investment that would only yield its fruits in 10 or 15 years. Moreover, that estimate does not consider the extraordinarily high reserve access cost. And even if minerals are extracted, transporting them would cost a lot of money since Afghanistan's transport infrastructure is almost non-existent³⁶.

³⁵ SIDDIQUE, Abubakar. The Limits of China's Budding Relationship with Afghanistan's Taliban. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. 4 June 2023. Available from: [link](#)

³⁶ BLUMENTHAL, Lilly and PURDY, Caitlin. Chinese investment in Afghanistan's lithium sector: A long shot in the short term. Brookings. 3 August 2022. Available from: [link](#)




CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the situation in Afghanistan after two years is highly complicated. The Taliban inherited a country riddled with corruption, and many competent people who could help Afghanistan have left. The Taliban's own decisions regarding women have also aggravated the situation by frustrating the international community, which has chosen to reduce aid. Nonetheless, there have been positive developments. The Taliban are much more competent in running the country compared to 20 years ago, which can be seen by their capacity to collect taxes and prevent mass corruption or even by banning opium. Also, a sign of hope is that many Taliban are unhappy about some of the leadership's decisions, such as closing girls' schools. But the elephant in the room is the presence of armed groups on Afghan soil. Unless the Taliban admit there are armed groups and deal with them appropriately, the Islamic Emirate's relationship with foreign actors will keep being poisoned. But the Taliban are somewhat stuck. By selling out these groups, their reputation as a true Islamic Emirate will greatly decrease, and many foreign fighters on Afghan soil might join the IS-K ranks.



Dimensions

for Strategic Studies

-  \DimensionsCTR
-  \DimensionsCTR
-  \dimensionscenter
-  \dimensionscenter

info@dimensionscenter.net