

Focus
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Afghanistan's Interim Taliban Government

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Abstract

This research provides an overview of the Taliban, an Islamic militant group that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, and their recent return to power in 2021 following the US-led war in Afghanistan. The study explores the group's history, rise to power, and current governance, including reports of human rights abuses, repression of women's rights, economic instability, restrictions on freedom of speech and media, and the uncertainty of their economic plans. The Taliban's previous rule is discussed, with a focus on their restrictions on civil and political rights, particularly for women and minorities. The research highlights the complex and evolving situation in Afghanistan, which has far-reaching implications for the people of Afghanistan and the international community.

Keyword: *Afghanistan, Taliban, governance, human rights, women*

Introduction

The Taliban is a fundamentalist Islamic militant group that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. The group follows a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam and seeks to establish a society based on its understanding of Islamic law. The Taliban gained

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control of Afghanistan in 1996 and ruled the country until they were overthrown by a US-led coalition in 2001.¹

The group's rise to power was marked by a brutal campaign of violence and repression against ethnic and religious minorities, women, and political opponents. They enforced their extreme interpretation of Sharia law through public executions, amputations, and other forms of harsh punishments.² During their rule, the Taliban provided sanctuary to Al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, who was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban were driven from power and their leadership was forced into hiding.

This study explores the Taliban, their formation, and their return to power in 2021 following the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces. The paper discusses the implications of the Taliban's return to power for the people of Afghanistan and the international community, including concerns about bad governance, human rights abuses, economic instability, and restrictions on freedom of speech. Additionally, the paper explores the Taliban's economic plan, including their interests in natural resources and trade, as well as their history of restricting civil and political rights, particularly for women and minorities.

Formation of the Taliban

While the Taliban emerged in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, the group's roots can be traced back to the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Many of the Taliban's early members were educated in Islamic schools in

Pakistan and were part of the Pashtun tribal community, which is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.³

In 1994, the Taliban emerged as a political force in Afghanistan, capturing the city of Kandahar and gradually expanding their control over much of the country. The group's rise to power was facilitated by the disintegration of the Afghan government following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 and the subsequent civil war between rival factions.⁴

The Taliban imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law, with a particular emphasis on social and gender roles. Women were largely excluded from public life, and the group carried out public executions and amputations for crimes such as theft and adultery. The Taliban also provided a safe haven for international terrorists, most notably Al-Qaeda, which led to the group's downfall following the 9/11 attacks in the United States.⁵

Overall, the formation of the Taliban was the result of a complex set of historical, political, and cultural factors, including the aftermath of the Soviet occupation, the fractiousness of Afghan society, and the influence of Islamic fundamentalism.⁶

Taliban's Return to Power

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has been a rapid and chaotic process, following the withdrawal of US and NATO forces in 2021. The group had been gaining ground throughout the country since the start of the year, but their advance accelerated after the fall of the provincial capital of Kunduz in early August. Within a matter of weeks, the Taliban had taken control of major cities including Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, and on August 15, they entered the capital city of

Kabul, effectively bringing an end to the two-decade-long US-led war in Afghanistan.⁷

The return of the Taliban to power has raised concerns about the fate of human rights, particularly the status of women and girls in the country. Under the previous Taliban regime, women were largely excluded from public life and education and subjected to harsh punishments for perceived violations of strict Islamic law. The group has made some public statements indicating a willingness to respect human rights, including women's rights, but it remains to be seen how those promises will be put into practice.⁸

The Taliban's return to power has also led to a humanitarian crisis, with many Afghans attempting to flee the country to escape the group's rule.⁹ The situation has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the economic and political instability that has plagued the country for decades.

Overall, the Taliban's return to power is a complex and evolving situation, with far-reaching implications for the people of Afghanistan and the international community.

The Structure of the Taliban's Government

The Taliban's government structure is currently in the process of being established after their return to power in Afghanistan in 2021. While many details about the structure are still unclear, the group has announced that they will be establishing an Islamic Emirate, which is the same type of government they had when they were in power in the late 1990s.

The Taliban's previous government was characterized by a strict interpretation of Islamic law and a hierarchical structure that

was dominated by the group's top leaders. The group's supreme leader, referred to as *Amir al-Muminin*, was Mullah Omar until he died in 2013, after which he was succeeded by Mullah Akhundzada. Under the previous government, power was concentrated at the top, with little room for dissent or participation from lower-ranking officials or the general public.

It is still unclear how the Taliban's new governance structure will be organized, but they have announced that they will be establishing a new government that will be based on Islamic principles. The Taliban have appointed leaders to key positions, including Mullah Hasan Akhund as interim prime minister and Sirajuddin Haqqani as interior minister.¹⁰ It is also expected that the group will rely on a system of religious councils, or shuras, to guide on political and religious matters.

According to Taliban representatives, the current interim or acting (*Sarparast*) government has made significant progress, including putting an end to the country's long-running conflict, ensuring a significant increase in security, and establishing a stable, centralized rule over the entire country for the first time in more than 40 years.¹¹

However, the group has not yet provided much detail on the specifics of the government structure or how it will operate. There are concerns that the new government could be similar to the previous Taliban regime, which was characterized by strict social control, human rights abuses, and support for international terrorism.

Overall, the structure of the Taliban's new government remains largely unclear, and it is likely to be shaped by a range of internal and external factors in the coming months and years.

Following are the Supreme Leader, Acting Head of Ministers, Acting Ministers, and other administrative posts in the Taliban Interim Administration.¹²

COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL/AMIR AL-MU'MININ

Mawlawi Hibatullah
Akhunzada (Pashtun)

INTERIM GOVERNMENT**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

Mullah Abdul Ghani
Baradar (Pashtun)

PRIME MINISTER

Mullah Hassan
Akhund (Pashtun)

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Mawlawi Abdul Salam
Hanafi (Uzbek)

MINISTRIES

GOVERNOR OF Da AFGHANISTAN BANK Mawlawi Abdul Qahir/Haj Muhammad Idris (Pashtun)	HAJJ AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS Mawlawi Noor Muhammad Saqib (Pashtun)	AGRICULTURE, IRRIGATION AND LIVESTOCK Maulvi Abdul Rahman Rashid (Pashtun)
CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF Qari Fasihuddin (Tajik)	CHIEF JUSTIC Abdul Hakim Sharai (Pashtun)	EDUCATION Habibullah Agha (Pashtun)
DEFENSE Mawlawi Muhammad Yaqoob Mujahid s/o Mullah Omar (Pashtun)	BORDERS AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS Noorullah Noori (Tajik)	TRANSPORT AND CIVIL AVIATION Mullah Hameedullah Akhunzada (Pashtun)
DEPUTY DEFENSE Abdul Qayyum (Pashtun)	MINES AND PETROLEUM Mawlawi Shahabuddin Delawar (Pashtun)	FINANCE Mullah Hidayatullah Badri Zakir (Pashtun)/Gul Agha Ishaqzai
INTERIOR Sirajuddin Haqqani (Pashtun)	ENERGY AND WATER Abdul Latif Mansoor (Pashtun)	DAWAT-WAL-IRSHAD Sheikh Muhammad Khalid (Pashtun)
DEPUTY INTERIOR Mawlawi Noor Jalal (Pashtun)	HIGHER EDUCATION Mullah Neda Muhammad Nadeem (Pashtun)	PUBLIC WORK Mullah Abdul Manan Omari (Pashtun)
DEPUTY INTERIOR (NORCOTICS CONTROL) Mullah Abdul Haq Wasiq (Pashtun)	COMMUNICATIONS Najibullah Haqqani (Pashtun)	RURAL REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT Mullah Muhammad Younas Akhunzada (Pashtun)
FOREIGN AFFAIRS Amir Khan Muttaqi (Pashtun) Haqqani	REFUGEES Khalil ur Rahman (Pashtun)	HEAD OF ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS Ahmadjan Ahmadi(Pashtun)
INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE Haji Nooruddin Azizi (Pashtun)	DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE Abdul Haq Wasiq (Pashtun)	ECONOMY Qari Din Muhammad Hanif (Tajik)
INFORMATION AND CULTURE Mullah Khairullah Khairkha (Pashtun)	1ST DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE Mullah Taj Mir Jawad (Pashtun)	DEPUTY INFORMATION & CULTURE (SPOKESPERSON) Zabihullah Mujahid (Pashtun)

Bad Governance of the Taliban

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, there have been reports of bad governance and human rights abuses. Here are some examples:

1. **Repression of women's rights:** The Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law has led to widespread restrictions on women's rights and freedoms. Women are being excluded from public life, with many being forced to stay at home or wear full-body coverings. Girls' education has been severely curtailed, and women have been banned from working in some sectors.¹³
2. **Human rights abuses:** There have been reports of the Taliban carrying out summary executions, torture, and other forms of violence against civilians. There are also concerns about the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, as well as political dissidents and journalists.¹⁴
3. **Economic instability:** The Taliban's takeover has led to a significant economic downturn, with many businesses closing and people losing their jobs. This has resulted in widespread poverty and food insecurity, particularly in rural areas.¹⁵
4. **Restrictions on freedom of speech:** The Taliban have imposed restrictions on freedom of speech and the media, with many journalists and media outlets being targeted.¹⁶ The Taliban have closed and imposed restrictions on media sites during the past year, journalists were imprisoned and stricter rules were put in place for female reporters. But, media outlets are retaliating and coming up with creative ways to inform the Afghan population in a timely manner.¹⁷

5. International isolation: The Taliban's return to power has resulted in international isolation and condemnation, with many countries refusing to recognize their government. This has resulted in limited access to aid and other forms of assistance, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country.¹⁸

These are just a few examples of the bad governance and human rights abuses that have been reported since the Taliban's return to power in 2021. The situation in Afghanistan remains fluid, and the long-term consequences of the Taliban's rule remain uncertain.

Finances of the Taliban Government

The Taliban's economic plan for governing Afghanistan since their return to power in 2021 remains unclear and has been the subject of much speculation. However, there have been some indications of their economic policies and priorities, including the following:

1. Agriculture: The Taliban has emphasized the importance of the agriculture sector, which employs the majority of Afghans.¹⁹ The group has called for increased investment in agriculture and has pledged to improve irrigation systems and promote better crop yields.²⁰
2. Natural resources: Afghanistan is rich in natural resources, including minerals, oil, and gas. The Taliban has expressed interest in developing these resources and has called for increased investment in the mining sector.²¹ Investment in Afghanistan's mining is an investment in the Afghanistan's people.

3. Trade: The Taliban has expressed a desire to increase trade and economic ties with neighbouring countries, such as China, Iran, and Pakistan. The group has also said that it wants to establish a more business-friendly environment to attract foreign investment.²²
4. Anti-corruption: The Taliban has pledged to tackle corruption, which has been a major obstacle to economic development in Afghanistan. "*The Taliban have demonstrated the ability to greatly reduce corruption in Customs and at road checkpoints,*" William Byrd, a senior researcher at the U.S. Institute of Peace, told VOA.²³ The foreign aid and international operations that financed the majority of the corruption were stopped, the Taliban assert that government corruption has decreased.²⁴
5. Financial system: The Taliban has indicated that it plans to establish a Sharia-compliant financial system that is separate from the international banking system.²⁵ The group has also said that it will work to stabilize the Afghan currency and reduce inflation.²⁶

Overall, the Taliban's economic plan remains uncertain, and it is unclear how the group will balance its economic priorities with its social and religious policies. The situation in Afghanistan remains fluid, and the long-term consequences of the Taliban's rule on the country's economy remain uncertain.

Taliban's Rule: Afghans' Civil and Political Rights

The Taliban have a history of restricting civil and political rights, particularly for women and minorities. During their previous rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban

implemented a strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Shariah, which led to severe restrictions on personal freedoms and basic rights.²⁷

Under the Taliban's rule, women were prohibited from working outside the home, attending school or university, and leaving their homes without a male guardian. They were required to wear a burqa, a full-body covering that left only a mesh screen for their eyes. Women who violated these rules faced severe punishment, including physical violence and imprisonment.²⁸

Minorities, including the Shia Hazara and the Sunni Pashtun, also faced discrimination and violence under the Taliban's rule. The Taliban were known to target Shia Hazaras in particular, viewing them as heretics.²⁹

In terms of political rights, the Taliban did not allow any form of political opposition or dissent. They operated under a strict, authoritarian rule that did not allow for any form of freedom of expression or assembly. The Taliban also banned music and other forms of entertainment and punished those who violated these rules.

It remains to be seen how the Taliban will govern now that they have regained control of Afghanistan in 2021. They have made some promises to respect human rights, including the rights of women and minorities, but there are concerns that their interpretation of Sharia law may lead to similar restrictions on civil and political rights as in the past.

Suppression of Free Speech

During their previous rule, the Taliban banned music and other forms of entertainment, viewing them as un-Islamic. They

also banned television and restricted access to the internet, which was a relatively new technology at the time. Individuals who were caught watching television or using the internet faced severe punishment, including physical violence and imprisonment.

Journalists and human rights activists who spoke out against the Taliban were also subject to punishment, including imprisonment and physical violence. The Taliban did not allow any form of freedom of expression or assembly and operated under a strict, authoritarian rule.³⁰

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, there have been reports of journalists being targeted and attacked by the Taliban. The Taliban have also shut down several media outlets and have restricted access to the internet in some areas.³¹

It remains to be seen how the Taliban will govern now that they have regained control of Afghanistan, and whether they will continue to suppress free speech and other civil liberties as they did in the past.

Women's Rights under the Taliban

The Taliban enforced strict rules on women's behaviour, including their interactions with men who were not their relatives. Women were not allowed to shake hands with men or speak to them in public, and they were not allowed to be in the company of men who were not their close relatives. Furthermore, the Taliban regime banned women from participating in sports, music, and other forms of entertainment, viewing them as un-Islamic.³²

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, there have been reports of women being forced to stay at home and being denied access to education and employment. The

Taliban have said that women's rights will be respected within the framework of Islamic law,³³ but there are concerns that their interpretation of Sharia law will lead to the same restrictions on women's rights and freedoms as in the past.

It remains to be seen how the Taliban will govern now that they have regained control of Afghanistan, and whether they will truly respect women's rights and freedoms or continue to restrict them.

World's Response towards the Taliban Government

The world's response to the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has been mixed, with some countries expressing concern and condemnation, while others have taken a more cautious approach. Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, in particular, have been closely watching the situation and have taken various measures in response to the Taliban's takeover.³⁴

Iran, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, has expressed concern about the situation and has urged the Taliban to respect the rights of all Afghan citizens, including women and minorities. Iran has also closed its borders with Afghanistan and deployed additional troops to the border to prevent a potential influx of refugees.³⁵

Pakistan, which has historical ties with the Taliban and has been accused of supporting the group in the past, has taken a more measured approach. Pakistan has called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and has said that it will not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs.³⁶ Other neighbouring countries, such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have also expressed concern about the situation in Afghanistan and have taken steps to secure their borders.

The international community, including the United States and European countries, has expressed concern about the situation in Afghanistan and has called on the Taliban to respect human rights and uphold their commitments to the international community. The United States and its allies have also evacuated their citizens and Afghan allies from the country while continuing to provide humanitarian aid to those in need.³⁷

Overall, the response of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries and the international community to the Taliban's return to power has been mixed, with some expressing concern and taking action to address the situation, while others have taken a more cautious approach.

Sanctions and Aid

The international community has been discussing the possibility of imposing sanctions or providing aid to Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban's return to power. Some countries have already taken action in this regard.

The United States and European Union have frozen Afghanistan's assets and suspended development aid to the country in response to the Taliban's takeover. The US has also imposed sanctions on the Taliban and its leaders, including freezing their assets and banning them from entering the country. In addition, the US has pledged to provide \$64 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to address the ongoing crisis.³⁸

Other countries, such as Russia and China, have taken a more cautious approach and have not announced any immediate measures. Russia has said that it is prepared to provide aid to Afghanistan if the situation stabilizes,³⁹ while China has called for

the international community to engage with the Taliban constructively.⁴⁰

The United Nations has also been discussing the situation in Afghanistan and has called on the international community to provide aid to the country to address the humanitarian crisis. The UN has pledged to provide \$600 million in aid to Afghanistan but has said that the situation on the ground is making it difficult to deliver aid effectively.⁴¹

Overall, the international community's response to the situation in Afghanistan has been mixed, with some countries imposing sanctions or freezing assets, while others have called for aid and engagement with the Taliban. The situation remains fluid, and further measures will likely be taken in the coming weeks and months.

Threats to the Taliban from Other Groups

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has been met with a mix of reactions from various groups within and outside the country. While some groups have welcomed the Taliban's return, others have expressed opposition and posed threats to the group.

One of the main threats to the Taliban comes from the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), a regional branch of the Islamic State group. ISKP has been active in Afghanistan since 2015 and has carried out several deadly attacks, including several high-profile suicide bombings in Kabul. ISKP sees the Taliban as a rival and has criticized the group for its willingness to negotiate with the US and other foreign powers. The Taliban, in turn, has been cracking down on ISKP and has launched several military operations against the group.⁴²

Another potential threat to the Taliban comes from the Northern Alliance, a group of ethnic and political factions that fought against the Taliban in the 1990s and early 2000s. The Northern Alliance has a significant presence in northern Afghanistan and has expressed opposition to the Taliban's return to power. The group has not yet taken any significant military action against the Taliban, but tensions remain high.⁴³

There are also concerns that other regional powers, such as Iran and Pakistan, could pose a threat to the Taliban if the group fails to maintain stability in Afghanistan. Iran has expressed concern over the Taliban's treatment of Shia Muslims in the country,⁴⁴ while Pakistan has warned the Taliban against allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for anti-Pakistan militants.⁴⁵

Overall, the Taliban faces significant security challenges from a range of groups, including ISKP, the Northern Alliance, and potentially other regional powers. How the Taliban responds to these threats will be a key factor in determining the group's long-term success in maintaining power in Afghanistan.

Afghans' View of the Taliban

The Afghan people have a diverse range of views about the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. Some have welcomed the group's takeover, while others are fearful or opposed to the new government.

Many Afghans who lived through the Taliban's previous rule in the late 1990s are sceptical of the group's promises to respect human rights and allow for greater freedoms. They remember the strict social codes imposed by the Taliban, such as the requirement for women to wear the burqa and the ban on

music and other forms of entertainment. They fear that the group's return to power will mean a return to those repressive policies.⁴⁶

Others, particularly those who are more conservative or religious, are supportive of the Taliban's takeover. They see the group as a force for stability and order in a country that has been wracked by violence and political turmoil for decades. They may also be attracted to the Taliban's promises to combat corruption and improve public services.

There are also concerns among many Afghans about the Taliban's ability to govern effectively. The group has limited experience in managing a modern state, and its record in areas such as education and health care is mixed at best. There are also worries about the potential for infighting and power struggles within the Taliban itself, particularly as the group seeks to balance the demands of its various factions and allies.⁴⁷

Overall, the views of the Afghan people toward the Taliban's new government are complex and multifaceted. The coming months and years will likely see a range of reactions, as the Taliban attempts to consolidate its power and establish a new political order in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Taliban is a fundamentalist Islamic militant group that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. Their rise to power was facilitated by the disintegration of the Afghan government following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 and the subsequent civil war between rival factions. The group enforced their extreme interpretation of Sharia law through

public executions, amputations, and other forms of punishment, and provided sanctuary to Al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, who was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the United States. It led to widespread human rights violations, particularly against women and minorities. The Taliban's swift takeover of the country in 2021 has been marked by reports of violence against civilians, particularly those who worked with the previous government or foreign forces. It has led to bad governance, human rights abuses, economic instability, and restrictions on freedom of speech. The situation in Afghanistan remains fluid and the long-term consequences of the Taliban's rule on the country's economy and the people's civil and political rights remain uncertain. While the group has expressed interest in developing the country's natural resources and improving its economy, it is unclear how they will balance their economic priorities with their social and religious policies.

Furthermore, the Taliban's lack of experience in governing a modern state, combined with the ongoing economic and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, suggests that the group may struggle to provide basic services and meet the needs of the Afghan people. While the Taliban has made promises to respect human rights and uphold the rule of law, the group's past actions suggest that these commitments may not be fully realized. The Taliban's governance model is based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law, which may limit individual freedoms and impose strict social codes.

In light of these concerns, it is incumbent upon the international community to closely monitor the Taliban's actions and hold the group accountable for any violations of human rights

or democratic norms. The people of Afghanistan deserve a government that is responsive to their needs, respects their basic rights, and upholds the rule of law. It remains to be seen whether the Taliban can provide such a government, or whether its return to power will ultimately result in further instability, violence, and human suffering in Afghanistan.

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