

1. Recent developments

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: May 2024

1.1. The Taliban takeover⁵

In the period of 2001-2021, an armed conflict took place in Afghanistan involving the former government (the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), which was backed by the US and an international military coalition, and the Taliban. Moreover, 'multiple and overlapping non-international armed conflicts' involved the Taliban and other armed groups such as the ISKP. After signing a peace agreement with the Taliban in 2020, US forces were less involved in direct conflict in Afghanistan. The Taliban intensified their attacks against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), launching their final offensive on 1 May 2021, on the same day as international forces initiated their withdrawal. In the summer months that followed, the Taliban swept over Afghanistan and swiftly took control over the provincial capitals. On 15 August 2021, President Ashraf Ghani fled the country as Taliban forces entered the capital Kabul. Taliban leaders entered the presidential palace and declared the war to be over, while foreign countries organised emergency evacuations [[Security September 2021](#), 1.1.1., p. 11; 1.1.3., p. 14; [Security June 2021](#), 1.3., p. 57; [State structure](#) 1.1., pp. 13-14].

Since the Taliban takeover, several armed groups, including the NRF, have been resisting the Taliban by force. In addition, the ISKP remains active in Afghanistan, carrying out attacks against both Taliban and civilian targets [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1., p. 17; 2.2.1., p. 31]. Nevertheless, the levels of armed violence significantly dropped following the Taliban takeover in 2021 compared to the previous years of conflict [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1., p. 17; 2.1., pp. 29-30; 2.2.2., p. 32; [COI Update 2022](#), 3., pp. 10- 11; [Security 2022](#), 3.2., p. 64].

1.2. State building and political system

Soon after their takeover, the Taliban declared the re-establishment of the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan', which was previously in power in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and announced an *interim* government. As of December 2023, no state had recognised the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan or its *de facto* government, however, some diplomatic missions have maintained or re-established presence in Kabul and some neighbouring countries have accredited Taliban-appointed ambassadors at Afghan embassies [[COI Update 2024](#), 1., p. 2; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2., p. 18].

The Taliban have announced their intention to govern through 'a strong Islamic government', based on their principles, religion, and culture. Their interim government has been 'modelled on the same system' as in the 1990s, with both a spiritual leader and a prime minister heading the government, and with a decision-making structure that can be described as a religious theocracy. The Taliban have further stated that 'nothing should be against Islamic values' under their rule and have issued numerous instructions calling on people to observe Islamic law (*sharia*). Although consensus has been a key element of the movement's decision-making, the ultimate authority lies with the Supreme Leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada and his authority has

become increasingly notable. The human rights situation has gradually deteriorated, and sources have described Afghanistan as developing into a theocratic police state, which is ruled through an atmosphere of fear and abuse [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2., p. 21; 1.3., p. 17; [Country Focus 2022](#), 1.1.3., p. 17; [KSEI 2022](#), 1.1., p. 13].

The Taliban *de facto* government suspended the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's constitution and announced a review of the compliance of existing Afghan laws with *sharia* [[Security 2022](#), 1.2.3., p. 29]. However, as of December 2023, no formal legal framework has been enacted in Afghanistan. The Taliban have referred to *sharia* as the legal system to be enforced, but there are various interpretations of *sharia* which create legal uncertainties. Moreover, the Taliban have issued few instructions in writing, and have used various channels to communicate their directives, including on social media, and during public statements. The legal nature of such instructions is unclear, and sometimes they have been contradictory or not enforced [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.1., pp. 21-22].

Additionally, the Taliban have reopened courts across Afghanistan, replacing all former judges with male Taliban judges. There have been reported instances of public executions since the Taliban takeover, and verdicts that include floggings have seen an increase since 14 November 2022. On this date, the Taliban supreme leader ordered all judges to fully implement *sharia*, including *hudud* and *qisas* punishments that include execution, stoning, flogging and amputation [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.3., pp. 25-26; 4.1.6., p. 63].

The Taliban used the previous government's state structures but abolished ministries monitoring human rights and democratic institutions. Public servants of the previous administration were asked to return to work in August 2021, but many had already been evacuated or did not resume work due to non-payment of salaries [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.4.(a), p. 25; 1.1.4.(c), p. 26].

The *de facto* state administration has been operating in arbitrary and unpredictable ways with multiple repressive bodies such as the Taliban General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) and the Taliban Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV). Policy implementation has also varied across the country due to differences in the interpretation of decrees as well as the influence of local contexts and local stakeholders [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.1., pp. 21-22; 1.2.2., p. 24].

The Taliban have also started to build up formal security institutions and indicated plans to recruit 300 000 – 350 000 individuals to the *de facto* ministry of defence and the ministry of interior [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.1.1., p. 189].

1.3. Humanitarian situation

Already before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan faced an economic and humanitarian crisis due to multiple parameters, including drought, the COVID-19 pandemic and decreased international military spending. The crisis escalated after the Taliban takeover, as international aid and international trade were interrupted. Moreover, financial sanctions paralysed Afghanistan's economy, which entered a stage of 'free fall' with the collapsing of the banking system as well as public services – including the healthcare system. In January 2022, the UN launched the largest single country aid appeal in history, as 24.4 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased to 28.3 million people in 2023, while the funding for humanitarian assistance decreased [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.1., pp. 45-46; [Country Focus 2022](#), 3.4., p. 66; [COI Update 2022](#), 3., p. 13; [KSEI 2022](#), 1.1., pp. 14-16].

Aid delivery became increasingly complicated after the takeover, *inter alia* because Taliban individuals under UN sanctions held key *de facto* government positions. It was also impacted by increased costs and difficulties in transferring money into Afghanistan. The situation was further complicated when the Taliban banned women from working for NGOs and for UN offices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.1., p. 46].

The Afghan economy started to stabilise in mid-2022, but at a lower equilibrium than before. Living conditions marginally improved, although the situation continued to be dire. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world and, in April-June 2023, the World Bank estimated that 48.3 % of the Afghan population lived on assets below the poverty threshold, while monetary poverty was estimated to impact 70 % of the population [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.2., p. 45-47].

The situation continues to be vulnerable due to spillover effects from global and regional challenges, as well as disasters related to climate change. In 2024, Afghanistan entered its third consecutive year of drought, and on 7 October 2023, the province of Herat was hit by a powerful earthquake and at least 35 additional aftershocks. Reportedly, entire villages were destroyed, with almost all inhabitants being wiped out. Additionally, on 12 October 2023, a sandstorm destroyed hundreds of tents housing victims from the earthquake. [[COI Update 2024](#), 5., p. 8; [Country Focus 2023](#), 3.1., p. 46].

As of June 2023, Afghanistan was one of the most food insecure countries in the world; according to the WFP almost 90 % of the population experienced inadequate food consumption in the reference period. Food insecurity particularly impacted households headed by persons with lower education, persons with disabilities, and women. Moreover, since the Taliban takeover, the number of children under five being admitted into health facilities due to severe acute malnutrition has increased [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.3., pp. 50-52].

The already weak public health system was heavily impacted by the halt in aid flows. Multiple infectious diseases have spread, including heavy outbreaks of measles and acute watery diarrhoea. Main issues included the lack of skilled medical staff, shortages in supplies and medication, and harassment by the Taliban against staff members and women seeking care. Especially maternal and child healthcare have deteriorated, and mortality is expected to increase [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.5., pp. 53-54].

To cope with the dire humanitarian situation people have been forced into reducing the quality and quantity of food, getting into heavy debt, selling property, begging, marrying off girls, taking children out of school, child labour, and in extreme cases, organ trafficking [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.2., p. 49].

⁵ In this document the Afghan authorities operating under the Taliban (since August 2021) are described as the *de facto* authorities, as the announced state or *interim* government have not been internationally recognised.