

New Government in Afghanistan

The Taliban recently announced its new interim government after numerous cancellations and delays. The world has been watching Afghanistan very closely since the Taliban overthrew the US backed regime in Kabul. The Taliban have been holding meetings with regional nations and the intelligence heads. With the capture of the Panjshir region and the defeat of National Resistance Front (NRF), the Taliban felt confident to finally announce its new interim government.

The Taliban's old guard dominates the interim government despite promises of an inclusive government. Of the 33 roles announced, 14 are former Taliban officials during their previous 1996-2001 rule; five are former Guantanamo detainees and the remaining 12 are officials from the second generation of the movement. The all-male cabinet will be led by Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, one of the movement's founders and former deputy PM and foreign minister during the Taliban's five year stint in power. Akhund is currently under UN sanctions for his role in the government during that period. Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is on an FBI most wanted list, will head the interior ministry. The Haqqani network was behind some of the deadliest attacks against American and coalition forces during the 20 year war.

Taliban founder Mullah Omar's son, Mullah Yaqoob, will act as defence minister and the foreign minister will be Amir Khan Muttaqi who is a senior leader. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, one of the Taliban's co-founders, will be one of two deputies to the PM. Baradar was previously head of the Taliban's political office, based in Doha and oversaw the signing of the peace deal with the US last year. Baradar was released from prison in 2018, after serving eight years, as part of a plan to facilitate the Peace Process. In 2020, Baradar became the first Taliban leader to communicate directly with a US president after having a telephone conversation with Donald Trump.

The Taliban find themselves facing immense challenges now that they have formed a government. They now need to transition from a guerrilla movement to a government. The Taliban now needs to provide government services, maintain infrastructure and generate public investment to support growth in Afghanistan's largely aid-dependent economy. According to a February 2021 report released by the US government's Afghan Study Group, the poverty rate in Afghanistan is now estimated to be as high as 72%, up from 55% in 2017.

The Taliban will need support from former regime officials, at least at lower levels, to ensure the smooth running of day to day governance. This has yet to be actualised despite the Taliban's outstretched hand. Officials who served in the Ghani regime have been asked to return to Afghanistan with PM Akhund promising the Taliban "will guarantee their security and safety." Amnesty has also been promised to anyone who worked alongside the US and former US-backed administrations following the 2001 invasion.

The Taliban have expressed their desire to seek international recognition and to establish diplomatic relations stating they want "*strong and healthy relations with our neighbours and all other countries based on mutual respect and interaction*" adding that they would respect international laws and treaties "*that are not in conflict with Islamic law and the country's national values.*"^[4] The international community, on the other hand, have been slow to reciprocate. The Taliban has placed China as its principle partner in the region. In this light, China announced \$31m of emergency aid that includes grain, winter supplies as well as three million Covid-19 vaccine doses.

There were no announcements regarding on policies and priorities of the new interim government especially in light of the fact that the country relies on foreign aid. Despite announcing its new government, the Taliban face immense challenges.

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