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Taliban's Amnesty An Assessment

Vishal Chandra



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	-	Afghan National Army
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CIA	-	Central Intelligence Agency
DABS	-	Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat
DHS	-	Department of Homeland Security
EU	-	European Union
HCNR	-	High Council for National Reconciliation
KCC	-	Khawar Construction Company
KPF	-	Khost Protection Force
NDS	-	National Directorate of Security
NRC	-	National Resistance Council
RTA	-	Radio Television of Afghanistan
TPS	-	Temporary Protected Status
UAE	-	United Arab Emirates
UN	-	United Nations
UK	-	United Kingdom
US	-	United States

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*A system is not built only with clerics, and I repeat, if my elders and I are mistaken that the system can be built only with the likes of me, the jihadists and talibs, then that mistake is theirs to celebrate, and we do not agree with it.**

- MOHAMMAD NABI OMARI

TALIBAN DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR AFFAIRS

APRIL 2024

*What should I return to? The Taliban did not even allow me to enter my workplace where I served for more than 12 years. Will Taliban leaders like Muttaqi, Haqqani and others sit with us, women, to discuss our problems?****

- ASILA WARDAK

FORMER AFGHAN WOMAN DIPLOMAT

JUNE 2022

* Mohammad Yousuf Hanif, "System of Only Jihadists and Talibs is a Mistake, Says Omari", *Tolo News*, 15 April 2024, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-188317> (Accessed 16 April 2024).

** Akmal Dawi, "Taliban Welcome, Others Criticize Return of Former Afghan Officials", *Voice of America*, 8 June 2022, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-welcome-others-criticize-return-of-former-afghan-officials/6609042.html> (Accessed 2 May 2025).

TALIBAN'S AMNESTY

On 17 August 2021, two days after taking over capital Kabul, the Taliban announced a 'general amnesty' for former Afghan government officials, including members of the Afghan armed forces. Seven months later, on 16 March 2022, the Taliban interim cabinet announced the formation of the 'Commission for Contact with Afghan Personalities and Their Return to the Country'.¹ However, it was formally launched two months later on 21 May 2022, with the mandate to contact former Afghan political figures and senior government officials, who left the country as the Taliban swept to power, and facilitate their safe return and dignified stay in the country.

The commission claims to have facilitated the return of more than 1,000 members associated with the previous Afghan regime, including a few women members, over the past three years.² The commission also claims to have issued immunity cards (often also referred to as the

¹ "Cabinet Approves Formation of Commission for Liaison and Repatriation of Afghan Personalities", Al Emarah, 16 March 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/cabinet-approves-formation-of-commission-for-liaison-and-repatriation-of-afghan-personalities/> (Accessed 9 May 2023); "Commission Formed to Facilitate Return of Political Leaders", *Tolo News*, 17 March 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177149> (Accessed 20 March 2022).

² Hijratullah Kakar, "1,044 Afghan Personalities Return From Abroad in 3 Years", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 3 February 2025, at <https://pajhwok.com/2025/02/03/1044-afghan-personalities-return-from-abroad-in-3-years/> (Accessed 16 March 2025).

security card) to those who have returned through its mediation and facilitation, as well as those who have given up their opposition to the ‘emirate’ and are based inside the country, which is supposed to serve as an assurance and a guarantee against any arbitrary detention and legal prosecution on the basis of past actions and associations.

The Contact Commission, which works under the supervision of the Taliban’s Political Commission, is apparently a part of the Taliban’s overall scheme of things to project its ‘emirate’ as a conciliatory, inclusive and legitimate state entity with a growing appeal. It represents Taliban’s pushback against the criticism of its regime for lacking domestic legitimacy and social inclusivity in its power structures. It is noteworthy that the Taliban until taking over power often stated that their objective was not to seek monopoly of power but to establish an inclusive Islamic system in the country. Taliban Chief Hibatullah Akhundzada in his first Eid message issued in July 2016 had stated:

Our clear message is that, that we do not want monopoly of power. All Afghan tribes and races need each other. Even evolution of Islamic system, independence and strength is entwined with the unity and harmony of the Afghans. Islam teaches us Islamic brotherhood, integrity and to assign responsibilities on the basis of merit. Everyone has the right to benefit from all rights and privileges of life and his/her political and social stature is determined as per his/her qualification and piety.³

Here it is important to note that granting amnesty to members of the former regime does not automatically imply co-option or integration into the Taliban structures. While the Taliban had mostly stated what the world wanted to hear but it remained ambiguous in terms of

³ “Message of Felicitation of Amir-ul-Momineen, Sheikh Haibatullah Akhundzada on the Eve of Eid-ul-fitr”, Al Emarah, 2 July 2016, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/message-of-felicitation-of-amir-ul-momineen-sheikh-habatullah-akhundzada-on-the-eve-of-eid-ul-fitr/> (Accessed 4 July 2023).

clearly articulating its notion of 'inclusivity'. It instead launched a counter narrative, often pointing to the inclusive multi-ethnic political coalitions that failed to establish security and stability in the country in the past decades.⁴

However, despite several senior and veteran Taliban leaders serving on the commission, it has thus far failed for various reasons to negotiate the return of any significant opposition leader or political group from exile, which raises fundamental questions about the credibility and effectiveness of the commission, as well as the 'general amnesty' announced by the Taliban. Is the commission just a part of the Taliban's ongoing image makeover, a mere exercise in optics, or is there a subtext to it? The monograph seeks to assess the Taliban's 'amnesty' and the role and effectiveness of its Contact Commission in facilitating the return of the members of the previous Afghan regime to the country over the past three years.⁵ The study assumes significance as Afghans in large numbers including those exiled since 2021 are being forced returned or deported by their host countries to Afghanistan, which also includes mostly the middle and low ranking members of the former regime.

It would be useful to briefly delve into key aspects of the amnesty offered by various Afghan regimes in the past decades before assessing the Taliban's amnesty and the effectiveness of the Contact Commission.

⁴ "What an Inclusive Government Really Means?", Al Emarah, 20 June 2023, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/the-real-meaning-of-an-inclusive-government/> (Accessed 10 May 2024); "Challenges and Drawbacks of an Inclusive Government in Afghanistan", Al Emarah, 12 June 2024, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/challenges-and-drawbacks-of-an-inclusive-government-in-afghanistan/> (Accessed 15 June 2024).

⁵ The monograph is a detailed and expanded version of the author's recent shorter publication on the theme. See Vishal Chandra, "Taliban's 'Contact Commission': Three Years Later", MP-IDSA Occasional Paper, July 2025, at <https://www.idsa.in/publisher/occasionalpaper/talibans-contact-commission-three-years-later>.

The idea of amnesty, rather blanket amnesty, could be traced back to the early 1990s when President Mohammad Najibullah was struggling to manage various externally-sponsored armed groups as the Soviet forces withdrew in 1988–1989. The amnesty decree issued by him in February 1992 stated:

Article 1.

Those members of the armed forces personnel who for various reasons refused [words indistinct], abandoned or escaped from military service will not be prosecuted if they return to their unit, company or appropriate commissariat by 1st Sowr 1371 [21st April 1992] for continuing service in the ranks of the armed forces, provided they are not accused of committing intentional homicide, or accused of taking part in an (attack) on security posts resulting in loss of life, or accused of causing disorder in garrisons resulting in losses.

Article 2.

(a) The amnesty applies also to those individuals who have been convicted and sentenced in absentia on charges of committing crimes as outlined in Article 1 of this decree.

(b) If prosecution has already been initiated against the perpetrators of crimes as outlined in Article 1 of this decree, the prosecution shall be discontinued.

(c) Investigation and prosecution shall be discontinued against those individuals who have committed crimes as outlined in Article 1 of this decree and prior to the publication of this decree who have voluntarily reported to the appropriate units and companies or have been captured.⁶

⁶ Peace Agreements Database, University of Edinburgh, at <https://www.peaceagreements.org/amnesties/>.

Later, after the fall of President Najibullah's government in April 1992, the 'mujahideen' interim council led by Sibghatullah Mojadeddi announced an amnesty for "all Afghans, including members of the outgoing Soviet-backed Kabul regime such as soldiers and officers." In July 1992, the 'mujahideen' government reiterated that "the mujahid nation of Afghanistan has declared a general amnesty for communists and has pardoned them as long as they give up their sins and lay down their weapons unconditionally before the mujahideen."⁷

After the Taliban took over capital Kabul in September 1996, the chief justice of the Taliban's Supreme Court issued an amnesty decree in June 1997 that stated:

All returnees, irrespective of their political affiliations, are exempted from prosecution for all criminal offences committed for whatever reason prior to, or in, exile except of those criminal offences committed against other persons. This exemption includes, inter alia, having left Afghanistan and having found refuge in Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran or any other country, joining different commanders, draft evasion and desertion as well as the act of performing military service in internationally non-recognized armed forces.⁸

The rules of the operation of the Taliban's first amnesty declared in 1997 were as follows:

1. The voluntary repatriation and reintegration shall take place in conditions of safety and dignity according to recognized Islamic Shariah.
2. No returnee shall suffer any form of harassment, discrimination, persecution or any other form of punitive action on account of having fled Afghanistan and having

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

sought and found refuge in Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran or any other country.

3. No returnee shall be subject to harassment, intimidation, discrimination or persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, political opinion or gender.

4. In common with all other citizens, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of returnees will be accorded full respect.

5. UNHCR and other international agencies as appropriate will be allowed and will receive full cooperation and access to monitor the treatment of returnees in accordance with humanitarian and human rights standards, including the implementation of commitments contained in this Declaration.

6. In order to support their reintegration, returnees will be exempted from any outstanding military services or other obligatory service for the period of one year. Positive consideration will be given to requests for a complete exemption from military or other service obligations.⁹

After the fall of the first Taliban ‘emirate’ in late 2001, the founder leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Omar, established a commission for the purpose of amnesty in 2011 under the supervision of the current supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. Later, when Akhundzada took over the leadership of the Taliban in May 2016, the commission came to be supervised by Mullah Abdul Manan Omari, one of Mullah Omar’s brothers and a member of the Quetta Shura.¹⁰ The Taliban’s amnesty at the time was perhaps rooted in the *lahya* or codes of conduct or a rulebook issued by the Taliban leadership for

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “6773 Enemy Personnel Joined Mujahideen in 2016”, Al Emarah, 12 January 2017, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/6773-enemy-personnel-joined-mujahideen-in-2016/> (Accessed 4 February 2024).

its commanders and ground fighters in 2006, 2009 and 2010. The whole idea of inviting the government civil and military personnel to join its ranks in lieu of security guarantees was to counter the amnesty announced by the Karzai Government for the Taliban members willing to give up violence and join the political process.¹¹

In March 2009, with the US administration agreeing to the idea of reaching out to reconcilable elements within the Taliban, the Taliban responded by announcing their amnesty for the Afghan government officials, including members of the Afghan armed forces. It later turned into a competing agenda between Kabul and the Taliban. The Taliban sought to counter the peace and reintegration initiatives launched by President Hamid Karzai in 2005; the National Reconciliation, General Amnesty and National Stability Law passed by the Afghan Parliament in 2008; and finally, the appointment of the Afghan High Peace Council in 2010 which soon established its offices at provincial levels as well, by sharpening their propaganda machinery and setting up recruitment and guidance commission in areas under their control or influence.

The Article 2 and 3 of the 2008 Amnesty Law passed by the Afghan Parliament stated (for details see Annexure I):

Article 2:

To strengthen peace, stability and ending the war, the National Parliament of Afghanistan calls on all armed groups in opposition to the government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to join the process of strengthening the stability and national reconciliation of Afghanistan and participate in strengthening the system and reconstruction of the country.

¹¹ Vishal Chandra, "The Evolving Politics of Taliban Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan", *Strategic Analysis*, IDSA, Vol. 35, Issue 5, 2011, pp. 836–848. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2011.601653>; Vishal Chandra, "Politics of Taliban Reconciliation and Reintegration", in *The Unfinished War in Afghanistan: 2001–2014*, IDSA, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 123–156, at https://www.idsa.in/system/files/book/book_warinafghanistan.pdf (Accessed 18 June 2025).

Article 3:

1. All political factions and hostile parties who were involved in a way or another in hostilities before establishing of the Interim Administration shall be included in the reconciliation and general amnesty program for the purpose of reconciliation among different segments of society, strengthening of peace and stability and starting of new life in the contemporary political history of Afghanistan, and enjoy all their legal rights and shall not be legally and judicially prosecuted.
2. Those individuals and groups who are still in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and cease enmity after the enforcement of this resolution and join the process of national reconciliation, and respect the Constitution and other laws and abide them shall enjoy the benefits of this resolution.
3. The provisions set forth in clause (1) and (2) of this article shall not affect the claims of individuals against individuals based up on Haqullabd (rights of people) and criminal offences in respect of individual crimes.

After the signing of the US–Taliban deal in Doha in February 2020, the Taliban began to frequently post monthly updates on its website about areas captured and the number of government officials joining its ranks (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Number of Government Personnel Joining Taliban Ranks (Pre-August 2021)

(As claimed and stated on the Taliban website)

Number of Government Personnel Joining the Taliban Ranks	During the Month & Year
923	December 2019
682	January 2020
684	February 2020

1,301	April 2020
934	May 2020
887	June 2020
883	July 2020
1,201	August 2020
1,252	September 2020
1,463	October 2020
1,654	November 2020
1,346	December 2020
1,062	March 2021
1,127	April 2021
1,533	May 2021

Source: Compiled by the author based on monthly claims made by the Preaching, Guidance and Recruitment Commission of the Taliban; data drawn from the Taliban's official website Al Emarah.

The Taliban's announcement of 'general amnesty' following the fall of capital Kabul in August 2021 was largely a continuation of the amnesty announced a decade earlier for the serving government officials and

security personnel willing to join its ranks.¹² The Contact Commission appointed by the Taliban interim cabinet in March 2022 is supposed to work within the framework of the nation-wide ‘general amnesty’ announced by the Taliban.¹³ However, there is no written text of the ‘general amnesty’ or any formal statement clearly defining the scope and terms and conditions of it. The bill or the Charter of the Taliban’s Contact Commission discussed in the next chapter provides some insight into the Taliban’s so-called ‘general amnesty.’

¹² “Invitation by Islamic Emirate to Workers of Invaders and Kabul Administration”, Al Emarah, 21 May 2016, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/invitation-by-islamic-emirate-to-workers-of-invaders-and-kabul-administration/> (Accessed 3 February 2023).

¹³ “Taliban Announces ‘Amnesty,’ Reaches Out to Women”, *Al Jazeera*, 17 August 2021, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/17/taliban-announces-amnesty-urges-women-to-join-government> (Accessed 14 May 2025); “Transcript of Taliban’s First News Conference in Kabul”, *Al Jazeera*, 17 August 2021, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/17/taliban-announces-amnesty-urges-women-to-join-government> (Accessed 22 August 2021); Ali M. Laitifi, “‘All Afghans’ Should Feel Safe Under Taliban, Says Security Chief”, *Al Jazeera*, 22 August 2021, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/22/all-afghans-should-feel-safe-under-taliban-says-security-chief> (Accessed 21 July 2024).

COMPOSITION AND CHARTER OF THE CONTACT COMMISSION

The all-Taliban Contact Commission set up in March 2022 has seven regular members and is headed by veteran Taliban leader Shahabuddin Delawar, who was the acting minister of mines and petroleum until July 2024. Although Delawar has since been relegated to the position of acting president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, he continues to head the commission. The other six members of the commission are: Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting minister of foreign affairs; Khairullah Khairkhwa, the acting minister of information and culture; Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, the acting minister of propagation of virtue and prevention of vice; Abdul Haq Wasiq, the acting head of the Taliban intelligence agency, the General Directorate of Intelligence; Fasihuddin Fitrat, the acting chief of staff of the Taliban armed forces; and Mohammad Anas Haqqani, the youngest brother of the acting interior minister and ‘Khalifa’ of the Haqqani Network, Sirajuddin Haqqani. He is also the youngest member of the commission. The presence of Khairkhwa and Wasiq is significant also due to their long standing ties with Iran where a large number of former Afghan civil and particularly military and intelligence personnel had taken refuge.

At least five of the seven members of the commission are Pashtun Taliban from southern and eastern parts of the country. Khalid Hanafi is a Pashai (often referred to as a Pashtun in some sources) from Nuristan and Fasihuddin Fitrat is a Tajik from Badakhshan and the only one from the northern Afghanistan in the commission. Except for three members, Khalid Hanafi, Fasihuddin Fitrat and Anas Haqqani, the other four are veterans from the first Taliban regime that ruled from Kabul from September 1996 to November 2001. Four of the seven regular members of the commission are under the United Nations (UN)

Sanctions List, which includes Shahabuddin Delawar (TAi.113; listed on 23 February 2001), Amir Khan Muttaqi (TAi.026; listed on 25 January 2001), Khairullah Khairkhwa (TAi.093; listed on 25 January 2001), and Abdul Haq Wasiq (TAi.082; listed on 31 January 2001).¹⁴ All four are also designated under the sanctions lists of the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU).¹⁵

On 7 March 2023, EU, in addition to the abovementioned four members, listed Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, who heads the notorious Taliban ministry for the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice, under its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime for committing “serious human rights violations in Afghanistan, in particular the widespread violation of women’s rights, such as their freedom of expression, as well as the right to equal treatment between men and women.” Hanafi was designated along with the acting Taliban minister of higher education, Neda Mohammad Nadeem, in the EU sanctions list.¹⁶ Nine months later, on 8 December 2023, the US Department of the Treasury too added Khalid Hanafi, along with the acting president

¹⁴ “1988 Sanctions List”, United Nations Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1988 (2011), Last Updated 30 January 2019, at <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1988/materials> (Accessed 24 March 2025).

¹⁵ “Consolidated List of Financial Sanctions Targets in the UK”, Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, HM Treasury, UK Government, Last Updated 25 February 2022, at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1057454/Afghanistan.pdf (Accessed 24 March 2025); “Council Regulation (EU) No 753/2011 of 1 August 2011 Concerning Restrictive Measures Directed Against Certain Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities in View of the Situation in Afghanistan”, Document 32011R0753, EUR-Lex, European Union, Current Consolidated Version: 13 September 2024, at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/753/oj> (Accessed 24 March 2025).

¹⁶ Council of the European Union, “Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/500 of 7 March 2023 Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1998 Concerning Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses”, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 069I, Vol. 66, 7 March 2023, at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R0500> (Accessed 1 April 2025); “Violence Against Women and Girls: EU Sanctions Nine Individuals and Three Entities Under

of the Afghanistan Academy of Sciences, Fariduddin Mahmood, to its specially designated nationals and blocked persons list for “serious human rights abuse related to the repression of women and girls, including through the restriction of access to secondary education for women and girls in Afghanistan solely on the basis of gender.”¹⁷

Perhaps, Fasihuddin Fīrat and Anas Haqqani are the only two members in the seven-member commission who are not designated under the UN or any other sanctions list.

At least three of the seven members of the commission are former Guantanamo Bay or Bagram detainees: Khairullah Khairkhwa, Abdul Haq Wasiq, and Anas Haqqani. Both Khairkhwa and Wasiq were released along with three other Taliban members, together known as the ‘Taliban Five’ or ‘Gitmo Five,’ in June 2014 in exchange for US Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl who was reportedly in the custody of the Haqqani Network since mid-2009.¹⁸ Anas Haqqani was held at the Bagram

its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime”, Council of the European Union, Press Release, 7 March 2023, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/07/violence-against-women-and-girls-eu-sanctions-nine-individuals-and-three-entities-under-its-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/> (Accessed 31 March 2025).

¹⁷ “Treasury Designates Perpetrators of Human Rights Abuse and Commemorates the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, Office of Foreign Assets Control, US Department of the Treasury, Press Release, 8 December 2023, at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1972> (Accessed 31 March 2025).

¹⁸ Besides Khairkhwa and Wasiq, the other three Taliban detainees released by the US in June 2014 were: Mullah Noorullah Noori, who served in the first Taliban regime as the provincial governor of Balkh, Baghlan, Laghman and Maidan Wardak and is currently the acting minister of borders and tribal affairs; Mullah Mohammad Fazal Mazloom, a senior commander who served in the first Taliban regime as the deputy chief of staff of the Taliban forces and is currently the first deputy minister of defence; and Mullah Mohammad Nabi Omari, a mid-level Haqqani Network commander in the 1990s and currently the first deputy minister of interior affairs. Interestingly, it was the Afghan High Peace Council appointed by President Hamid Karzai in September 2010 that had first called for the release of Khairkhwa from the US detention.

detention facility for five years before being released, along with two senior members of the Haqqani Network, in November 2019. All three Haqqani members were released in exchange for two foreign professors of the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul, American Kevin C. King and Australian Timothy J. Weeks, who were held by the Haqqani Network since August 2016.¹⁹

The commission has a secretariat and an official spokesperson. Mawlawi Zakirullah Zakir is the head of the secretariat and Mawlawi Ahmadullah Wasiq is the official spokesperson of the commission. Zakirullah Zakir, a Pashtun, is the director general (often also referred to as the chief of staff) of the office of the acting deputy prime minister for political affairs. The commission, which is a part of the Political Commission, had been working until December 2024 under the overall supervision of Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, who was the acting deputy prime minister for political affairs and head of the Political Commission. In January 2025, Kabir, a veteran Taliban leader from the 1990s, was relegated to a ministerial position following the death of Khalil-ur Rehman Haqqani, the acting minister of refugees and repatriation affairs and the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, in a suicide attack at his ministry compound in Kabul in December 2024. The Taliban leadership is unlikely to announce Kabir's replacement as there are reports suggesting the abolishment of the post of deputy prime minister for political affairs by the Taliban supreme leader or the *Amir-ul-Mumineen* (the commander and leader of the 'faithful'), Hibatullah Akhundzada.²⁰ The downgrading of the

¹⁹ Besides Anas Haqqani, the other two Haqqani detainees released by the former Afghan Government in November 2019 were: Haji Mali Khan, the maternal uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani and currently the deputy chief of staff of the Taliban armed forces; and Abdul Rashid Omari, the former commander for southeast Afghanistan and the brother of Mohammad Nabi Omari, who was one of the 'Taliban Five' released from the Guantanamo Bay in November 2014.

²⁰ "Taliban Abolishes Political Deputy PM Post, Dismisses over 250 Staff Members", *Afghanistan International*, 30 April 2025, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202504303839> (Accessed 3 May 2025).

position of two key senior leaders associated with the commission—Shahabuddin Delawar, the commission's chairman, and Abdul Kabir, who supervised the overall functioning of the commission—is bound to impact the overall profile of the Contact Commission.

Commission's spokesperson Ahmadullah Wasiq, a Pashtun, and a former Bagram detainee like Anas Haqqani, was the deputy leader of the Taliban's Cultural Commission and the acting director general of the national broadcaster, *Radio Television of Afghanistan* (RTA), until he was reassigned in August 2023 as the acting director general of the directorate of physical education and sports and acting president of the National Olympic Committee of Afghanistan, which is not recognised by the International Olympic Committee.

The composition of the commission reflects the power balancing that the Taliban leadership has constantly struggled or juggled with internally over the past years, both before and after 2021. It explains the presence of senior members from key Taliban commissions. Besides the Political Commission, of which the Contact Commission is a part, other key Taliban commissions—Military Commission; Cultural Commission; Intelligence Commission; and the Commission for Invitation, Preaching and Recruitment—are well represented. Chairman Shahabuddin Delawar has been associated with both political and economic commissions in the past; Amir Khan Muttaqi, currently the acting minister of foreign affairs, earlier headed the Cultural Commission. He also briefly led the Commission for Invitation, Preaching and Recruitment (sometimes also referred to as the Preaching and Guidance commission) or *Dawat-wal-Irshad* Commission, which was responsible for implementing the 'general amnesty' announced earlier for the serving government officials by Taliban chief Akhundzada in May 2016. Muttaqi was also a member of the Leadership Council (also referred to as the *Rahbari Shura* or the Quetta *Shura*), Taliban's highest decision-making body headed by its *Amir-ul-Mumineen*; Fasihuddin Fitrati, the chief of staff of the Taliban forces, has been the deputy leader of the Military Commission headed by Mohammad Yaqoob, the acting minister of defence and the son of the Taliban's founder chief, Mullah Mohammad Omar; Khalid Hanafi, the acting minister for the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice, has been closely associated with the Preaching and Guidance Commission. His presence in the commission, given his

direct role in enforcing the socially repressive decrees issued or approved by Akhundzada, must be discomfiting to educated Afghan professionals, particularly women professionals, several of whom left the country in wake of the Taliban's rapid military advance in the summer of 2021.

Five of the seven commission members—Shahabuddin Delawar, Amir Khan Muttaqi, Khairullah Khairkhwa, Abdul Haq Wasiq, and Anas Haqqani, and also commission's spokesperson Ahmadullah Wasiq—have earlier served at the Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar. They have been members of one or the other Taliban negotiating teams that conducted talks with the American negotiators or the Afghan government-appointed negotiating teams in Doha. Muttaqi has been one of the key Taliban negotiators since the late 1990s. He was said to have played a key role in convincing some of the opponents to give up their resistance to the Taliban in the months leading to the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani Government.

Charter of the Contact Commission

The commission was formally launched on 21 May 2022—two months after the interim cabinet announced its formation—with the release of a 15-point charter or bill laying down the basic tasks of the commission and its secretariat. The contact details of the commission were also released on the occasion.²¹ According to the charter or the bill, posted by Taliban Deputy Spokesperson Inamullah Samangani the same day

²¹ “Commission for Liaison and Repatriation with Afghan Personalities Officially Started its Work”, Al Emarah, 21 May 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/commission-for-liaison-and-repatriation-of-afghan-personalities-officially-started-its-work/> (Accessed 3 February 2025); “Delawar Called on All Afghan Political Figures to Return Home”, *Bakhtar News Agency*, 21 May 2022, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/iea-made-the-commission-of-contact-afghan-personalities-bill-public/> (Accessed 29 March 2025).

on his X platform, the commission is supposed to collect information about Afghan political and military figures who left the country, either before or after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, and facilitate their return based on assurances and guarantees provided under the general amnesty announced by Taliban chief Akhundzada. Interestingly, the text of the general amnesty and its terms and conditions has never been made public. The secretariat of the commission is supposed to prepare the list of exiled Afghan leaders and senior officials (male and female) and their whereabouts and forward it to the commission members for their consideration.²²

Those returning through the mediation of the commission are to be issued immunity or security cards as assurance against any arbitrary detention or legal prosecution for their past associations with the previous Afghan regime or the United States-led Western coalition. However, in case of any disputes at the local level, the returnee can approach the commission which after due consideration would forward the case to the relevant judicial authorities. Similarly, in cases where the security of the political or military figures returning through the commission is threatened, the commission is supposed to arrange for their personal security. According to the commission's charter, the commission would extend similar privileges to the members of the previous regime who are within the country and have given up their opposition to the Taliban regime (also see Annexure II for details).²³

²² Inamullah Samangani, Taliban Deputy Spokesperson and Director of Information and Culture Department of Kandahar, “روشکې باهېر اېتدوع و ن اغېا” یاهېتې صخشاېس اېس اېت نوې پېس یم که ح یال [Bill on Contact Commission with Afghan Personalities and Their Return to the Country], X (formerly Twitter), 21 May 2022, 5:40 PM, at <https://x.com/HabibiSamangani/status/1527985135680991232> (Accessed 15 March 2025). In Persian.

²³ Ibid.

Although the charter is completely silent about the prospects of integrating the returnee Afghan officials and personnel, including the military returnees, into the Taliban's political, administrative and military structures, it does state that the commission would facilitate work opportunities for the returnee professionals in the private sector and business opportunities for those seeking to invest in the country.²⁴ In March 2023, some 10 months after the commission was formally launched, Ahmadullah Wasiq, the spokesperson of the commission, stated that the returnees with professional experience and expertise “may join certain areas of the government because hundreds of thousands of former government officials are currently included in the government.”²⁵

The 15-point charter or bill is evidently rudimentary with barely any defined objectives or a roadmap to engage the exiled Afghan political figures and opposition groups. It lacks both content and clarity and at best may be deemed as a draft in progress. It is also clear that the commission is neither intended nor empowered to enter into any structured dialogue with the exiled opposition political parties or groups. The focus is primarily on negotiating the return of individual political figures and officials from the previous regime and not on seeking political reconciliation with the opposition groups or co-opting the returnees into the Taliban political and military structures. Senior Taliban leader and Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar had early on ruled out the possibility of including former leaders and officials into the interim cabinet. Accusing them of “being corrupt,” he reportedly stated: “These people cannot be with us in the government, because even if they are five (even if only five people are

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Nazir Shinwari, “‘Talented’ Ex-Officials Will Be Given Jobs if they Return: Commission”, *Tolo News*, 13 March 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-182478> (Accessed 3 February 2024).

included), they will harm our government's standing and we don't want our government to be brought down by such people."²⁶

The limited scope and mandate of the Contact Commission should not come as a surprise in view of the Taliban's strong aversion to co-opting the non-Taliban elements, including the non-Taliban Pashtuns, in its system.²⁷

The so-called Charter lacks provision for confidence-building measures as well. A lot has been left for back channel negotiations. With the Taliban putting a ban on all political parties and activities and refusing to negotiate any power-sharing arrangement, the prospect of key opposition leaders, mainly ethnic non-Pashtun, returning to the country is currently ruled out. The exiled political figures cannot be expected to simply walk into uncertainty and nothingness. That leads to two key questions: who are those high ranking members of the former regime or which section of the former regime the Contact Commission claims to have returned to the country, and why have they returned or what have they returned to, when there is barely any provision or scope for integration into the Taliban-led system, and also when their children, particularly the daughters, have no avenues to pursue higher education or seek any professional career as the Taliban continue to ban girls from attending schools beyond primary level and women from having any public life. However, prior to moving ahead, it is essential to first consider those prominent Afghan figures that chose to stay in the country beyond August 2021.

²⁶ "No Place for Ex-Officials in Cabinet: Mullah Baradar", *Tolo News*, 4 January 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-176168> (Accessed 6 January 2022).

²⁷ For a detailed analysis, see Vishal Chandra, "The Why and What of Non-Inclusivity and Dissensus in the Taliban 'Emirate'", MP-IDSa Special Feature, 4 November 2024, at <https://www.ids.a.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/sf-vchandra-041124-1.pdf>.

WHO STAYED BACK AND WHY

Several senior political figures, mostly Pashtun though, decided to stay put even as the Taliban took over capital Kabul. It included former President Hamid Karzai, former Chairman of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) and Chief Executive in the National Unity Government Abdullah Abdullah, former Deputy Chairman of HCNR Asadullah Saadati, former Chairman of *Mesbrano Jirga* (House of Elders) or the Upper House of the Afghan Parliament Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, Hezb-e Islami chief Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, Chieftain of Grand Kuchi Council and brother of former President Ghani, Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai, former Governor of Kandahar and Nangarhar and former Minister for Border and Tribal Affairs Gul Agha Sherzai (also known as Muhammad Sharif), former Kabul Mayor Mohammad Daoud Sultanzy, and several members of the parliament and provincial councils. The former finance minister and Afghan ambassador to Pakistan and president of Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, Omar Zakhilwal, who returned to Kabul within days of the Taliban takeover, was also a member of the government-appointed negotiating team that held direct talks with senior Taliban negotiators in Doha.

Former Afghan leaders like Hamid Karzai, Abdullah Abdullah and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar could not have decided to stay back without having prior understanding with the Haqqani Network or the Taliban or with the Pakistan military establishment. Perhaps, their decision to stay back was part of a political understanding at the broader regional level, involving several regional countries, besides Pakistan that hosted and backed the Taliban for two decades, that had directly engaged the Taliban representatives based in Doha, to establish an inclusive post-US and post-Ghani political order in Afghanistan. The backchannels had been at work as the Western military coalition rushed for an exit and the Haqqani and Taliban forces closed in on Kabul.

After President Ghani and his cabinet fled the country in mid-August 2021, former President Karzai together with Abdullah Abdullah and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar had formed a coordination council to facilitate a peaceful transfer of power to an inclusive transitional administration. The deceased senior Haqqani leader, Khalil-ur-Rehman Haqqani, had claimed that he was in contact with senior officials of the Ghani Government and had assured them of their safety and security.²⁸ Such claims and counter claims have reportedly been made by former Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Moheb and former President Ghani's brother Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai as well.²⁹ Such backchannel contacts between Kabul and the Haqqani Network had long been there. The meetings that Haqqani and Taliban leaders held after the fall of capital Kabul with Karzai, Abdullah and others in Kabul were widely publicised to project a conciliatory image of a new and different Taliban, different from the one that brutally tortured and killed former President Mohammad Najibullah and his brother in capital Kabul in September 1996. However, the whole idea of having some members of the former regime in the Taliban-led interim government to secure early international recognition fell through largely due to severe differences on the issue within the Taliban.

²⁸ Ali M. Laitifi, "All Afghans' Should Feel Safe Under Taliban, Says Security Chief", *Al Jazeera*, 22 August 2021, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/22/all-afghans-should-feel-safe-under-taliban-says-security-chief> (Accessed 21 July 2024); Amin Kawa, "Khalil Haqqani's Claims and Atta Muhammad Nur's Response: Allegiance or Troubled Dreams?", *Hasht-e Subb*, 19 February 2024, at <https://8am.media/eng/khalil-haqqanis-claims-and-atta-muhammad-nurs-response-allegiance-or-troubled-dreams/> (Accessed 22 February 2024); "Afghan Minister Haqqani Reveals Taliban's 2021 Offer of Resignation to Ousted President Ghani", *Daryo.uz*, 16 February 2024, at <https://daryo.uz/en/2024/02/16/afghan-minister-haqqani-reveals-talibans-2021-offer-of-resignation-to-ousted-president-ghani> (Accessed 16 February 2024).

²⁹ "Most Politicians Had Ties With Taliban Before Kabul's Collapse, Claims Former Afghan NSA", *Afghanistan International*, 29 February 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202402297227> (Accessed 5 June 2024).

The Taliban hardliners had been opposed to former Afghan leaders and political opposition groups having any public role in the ‘emirate.’ It must be mentioned that in November 2021, just three months after the Taliban takeover, Khalid Hanafi, who is a member of the Contact Commission, had openly referred to the former Afghan leaders who remained in the country, particularly Hamid Karzai, Abdullah Abdullah and Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, as “criminals.”³⁰ Recently in April 2025, while addressing the government employees in Kabul, he also reportedly made offensive remarks against non-Muslims.³¹ As someone known to make highly provocative and derogatory public statements in his ministerial capacity, Khalid Hanafi’s presence in the commission remains rather counter-productive.

Meanwhile, the Taliban sought to use the presence of former Afghan leaders particularly Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah in capital Kabul, who were later allowed to occasionally undertake foreign travels and meet foreign ambassadors and senior foreign officials visiting Kabul, to showcase the ‘general amnesty’ announced for members of the former regime and that it was safe for the exiled figures to return to the country. Abdullah’s return to Kabul after over a 40-day stay with his family in India on 11 June 2022 was publicised across the Taliban-run media with the Taliban officials warmly receiving him at the Kabul

³⁰ Giti Rahimi, “Official Sparks Reactions for Criticizing Former Leaders”, *Tolo News*, 17 November 2021, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175501> (Accessed 19 November 2021).

³¹ Ahmad Azizi, “Taliban Minister Calls Non-Muslims ‘Worse than Four-legged Animals’”, *Amu TV*, 9 April 2025, at <https://amu.tv/167755/> (Accessed 12 April 2025); Fidel Rahmati, “Khalid Hanafi: Non-Muslims are ‘Worse than Animals’”, *The Khaama Press*, 10 April 2025, at <https://www.khaama.com/khalid-hanafi-non-muslims-are-worse-than-animals/> (Accessed 12 April 2025).

Airport.³² During his stay in India, Abdullah had also met the then US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, who was on a visit to New Delhi in late May 2022.³³

Karzai's first foreign travel since the Taliban takeover came in early December 2022, when he visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE) enroute to Germany and Türkiye. Interestingly, his three-day visit to UAE, along with his former Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal, coincided with the first official visit of Acting Taliban Minister of Defence Mullah Yaqoob, who was accompanied by Anas Haqqani, and also the visit of US Special Representative Thomas West, to UAE.³⁴ During his over two weeks long multi-nation tour, Karzai was said to have met Thomas West and also former Afghan Vice President Ahmad

³² "Abdullah Abdullah Leaves Afghanistan", *Tolo News*, 1 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177827> (Accessed 11 June 2025); "Dr. Abdullah Ex-Chairman of National Reconciliation Return to the Country", *Bakhtar News Agency*, 11 June 2022, at <https://bakhtarnews.af/en/dr-abdullah-former-chairman-of-national-reconciliation-return-to-the-country/> (Accessed 9 May 2023); Mujeeb Rahman Awrang Stanikzai, "Abdullah Returns to Country After 43-Day Personal Visit to India", *Tolo News*, 11 June 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178424> (Accessed 10 June 2025).

³³ Rezaul H. Laskar, "US Special Representative for Afghanistan Meets Senior Indian Officials, Abdullah Abdullah", *Hindustan Times*, 27 May 2022, at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/us-special-representative-for-afghanistan-meets-senior-indian-officials-abdullah-abdullah-101653591094513.html> (Accessed 11 June 2025); Saqalain Eqbal, "US Special Representative Thomas West Meets Dr. Abdullah Abdullah", *The Khaama Press*, 26 May 2022, at <https://www.khaama.com/us-special-representative-thomas-west-meets-dr-abdullah-abdullah37465/> (Accessed 11 June 2025).

³⁴ Mujeeb Rahman Awrang Stanikzai, "Karzai Leaves Kabul for UAE", *Tolo News*, 3 December 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-181026> (Accessed 16 June 2025); "Karzai Leaves for UAE Over a Year After Travel Ban by Taliban", *Amu TV*, 3 December 2022, at <https://amu.tv/26015/> (Accessed 15 June 2025).

Zia Massoud and former Governor of Balkh Province Atta Mohammad Noor in UAE; former Minister of Justice Fazl Ahmad Manawi in Germany; and several exiled Afghan leaders including Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Karim Khalili, and Abdul Rashid Dostum in Türkiye.³⁵

Both Karzai and Abdullah being politicians and not ethnic militia commanders or leaders of any ethnicity-based political groups are not seen as much of a threat by the Taliban. Both leaders may not have a defined ethno-political support base but they have the ability to work through various power networks, which makes them relatively well positioned, compared to exiled ethnic political leaders and militia commanders, to act as potential intermediaries and backchannel negotiators. However, for now, with none of the former Afghan political figures and senior officials based inside the country finding any place or role in the Taliban setup or having an active public life, their presence in Kabul barely seem to serve as an inspiration to the exiled Afghan leaders.

It is noteworthy that on 17 May 2022, just four days before the formal launch of the Contact Commission on 21 May, former Afghan vice president and leader of predominantly ethnic Uzbek Junbish-e-Milli Abdul Rashid Dostum hosted a meeting that was attended by a large number of exiled political figures or their representatives in Ankara to discuss the future course of political and military action in Afghanistan. A key outcome of the meeting was the formation of the Supreme

³⁵ Saqalain Eqbal, “Former Afghan President and Former Minister of Justice Meet in Berlin”, *The Khaama Press*, 17 December 2022, at <https://www.khaama.com/former-afghan-president-and-former-minister-of-justice-meet-in-berlin-46576/> (Accessed 16 June 2025); Banafsha Binesh, “Karzai Meets Exiled Politicians in Germany, Turkey”, *Tolo News*, 19 December 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-181260> (Accessed 15 June 2025); “Afghanistan: Karzai Pitching National Dialogue to Exiled Politicians”, *Amu TV*, 20 December 2022, at <https://amu.tv/28704/> (Accessed 16 June 2025).

Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan, generally referred to as the National Resistance Council (NRC) in short. Several rounds of meeting have since been held but key constituents of NRC have yet to have a unified approach towards the Taliban-led Afghanistan.³⁶ NRC's over-lengthy and complex charter itself refers to disagreements and amendments (see Annexure III). A year later in August 2023, the Taliban-led Ministry of Justice formally banned all the political parties registered with the former ministry of justice and imposed severe restrictions on political activism of any kind,³⁷ effectively leaving no scope for reconciliation with the political opposition whether based inside or outside the country. The Taliban interim government has since imposed several restrictions on Hikmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami.³⁸

³⁶ Saqalain Eqbal, "Ankara Gathering of Political Figures Forms the Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan", *The Khaama Press*, 19 May 2022, at <https://www.khaama.com/ankara-gathering-of-political-figures-forms-the-supreme-council-of-national-resistance-for-the-salvation-of-afghanistan68391/> (Accessed 21 May 2025); "Afghan Political Leaders Meet in Turkey", *Tolo News*, 19 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-178080> (Accessed 21 May 2022); Mohammad Farshad Daryosh, "Statement Released from Afghan Politicians at Turkey Meeting", *Tolo News*, 19 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178087> (Accessed 21 May 2022).

³⁷ Fidel Rahmati, "Taliban Declare Ban on All Political Parties in Afghanistan", *The Khaama Press*, 16 August 2023, at <https://www.khaama.com/taliban-declare-ban-on-all-political-parties-in-afghanistan/> (Accessed 17 August 2023). The list of Registered Political Parties is still accessible, as of 10 June 2025, on the official website of the Afghan Ministry of Justice, at <https://moj.gov.af/en/registered-political-parties>. According to the list, 72 political parties were last registered with the department of registration of political parties and social organisations of the ministry.

³⁸ Fidel Rahmati, "Taliban Orders Hizb-e-Islami Leader to Vacate Home and Office", *The Khaama Press*, 25 March 2024, at <https://www.khaama.com/taliban-orders-hizb-e-islami-leader-to-vacate-home-and-office/> (Accessed 26 March 2024); Fidel Rahmati, "Habib Rahman Hekmatyar: Taliban Closes Barya TV Over Ideological Differences", *The Khaama Press*, 17 April 2024, at <https://www.khaama.com/habib-rahman-hekmatyar-taliban-shuts-down-barya-tv-for-disagreeing-with-talibanism/> (Accessed 19 April 2024).

The Taliban's failure to meaningfully engage the former political leaders based inside the country only added to the long held mistrust of the Taliban regime and its strong monopolistic tendencies, making it difficult for the Contact Commission to negotiate the return of exiled political figures. With the Taliban regime having nothing to offer to the exiled Afghan leaders, except perhaps a politically dumb and non-active stay in the country, the commission clearly had a notably limited scope and mandate for political outreach. That to an extent explains the slowdown in the voluntary arrival of high ranking former officials and the commission's subsequent focus instead on bringing back Afghan technocrats, businessmen, traders and investors to help revive the national economy. However, the commission does not seem to have had much success in attracting them either.

One also finds the commission presenting the deportation or forced return of hundreds of mid to low ranking former civil and particularly security and intelligence officials to the country, whether due to changes in host country's policy towards foreign migrants, refugees and asylum seekers or due to the pressure reportedly brought upon by the Taliban intelligence on family members of the exiled officials left behind in Afghanistan, as an outcome of its mediation and facilitation.

It is also important to note that a large number of civil personnel from the previous regime, including women personnel, mostly serving in middle and low level positions in ministries and government departments, and in provincial and district administrations, remained in the country even as the government collapsed and the Taliban took over. They never had the means and the option to leave the country. Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi in his interaction at the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies in Doha on 11 October 2021 had for the first claimed that about 500,000 civil servants—male and female—from the previous government have resumed their work and that none have been removed.³⁹ Muttaqi has since reiterated the same

³⁹ "Event Report: A Conversation between Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, and Professor Sultan Barakat, Founding Director of CHS", Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies,

figure several times, particularly when addressing the foreign audience.⁴⁰ However, an article published in the *Foreign Policy* magazine in February 2022 stated a much lower figure, citing a Taliban source. To quote from the article: “of the 455,000 total civil servants, more than 98 percent remained in Afghanistan, including at least two deputies at the Ministry of Finance, two at the Ministry of Transport and Aviation, and one in Kabul’s municipal government.”⁴¹

The Taliban claim that there are women serving in their administrative structures. In November 2023, the interior ministry spokesperson stated that about 2,000 women personnel were working in various departments of the ministry, particularly the General Directorate of Passports and Directorate of Public Services. The spokesperson further stated that some women personnel were deployed at security checkpoints and also worked with the night operations division of the ministry.⁴² The ministry had first set up a 100-member women police

Doha, 14 October 2021, p. 3, at <https://chs-doha.org/en/Events/Documents/Mawlawi%20Muttaqi%20-%20Post%20Event%20Report%20final.pdf> (Accessed 21 April 2025).

⁴⁰ “Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Islamabad”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan, 11 November 2021, at <https://mfa.gov.af/en/5650> (Accessed 20 April 2025); “Speech by Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi at OIC Foreign Ministers Meeting in Islamabad”, Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 December 2021, at <https://mfa.gov.af/en/7872> (Accessed 22 April 2024); Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, “Afghanistan is Ready to Work with the US, But Sanctions Must Go”, Opinion, *Al Jazeera*, 23 March 2023, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/3/23/afghanistan-is-ready-to-work-with-the-us-but-sanctions-must-go> (Accessed 10 May 2024).

⁴¹ Stefanie Glinski, “I Wanted to Stay for My People”, *Foreign Policy*, 9 February 2022, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/09/afghanistan-civil-servants-stay-taliban/> (Accessed 10 December 2022).

⁴² “MoI: Nearly 2,000 Women Work in Ministry”, *Tolo News*, 15 November 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186048> (Accessed 16 November 2023).

unit in the latter half of 2022 to manage women demonstrators and protestors.⁴³ Later in May 2024, Acting Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Abdul Kabir reportedly claimed in his meeting with UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo in Kabul that about 85,000 women were working in various government departments.⁴⁴ It is difficult to verify these figures in the absence of credible and independent sources of information.

The Taliban leadership further point to the ethnic and regional diversity of the retained civil personnel to showcase inclusivity in their government. However, since they are mostly serving at middle and low ranking positions, the Taliban's claim about having an inclusive government are met with scepticism and criticism both inside and outside the country. Even though the Contact Commission is an exercise in political outreach to the exiled Afghan figures, it does not have a single non-Taliban member or any representation from the previous regime. Nevertheless, due to various factors discussed below, several hundred former civil and military personnel associated with the former Afghan Republic have returned to the country.

⁴³ "IEA Establishes Female Police Unit", *Ariana News*, 1 November 2022, at <https://www.ariananews.af/iea-establishes-female-police-unit/> (Accessed 23 April 2025).

⁴⁴ "Taliban Hopes Stance on Doha Meeting Accepted", *Amu TV*, 20 May 2024, at <https://amu.tv/98682/> (Accessed 27 May 2025).

WHO RETURNED AND WHY

The decision to form the Contact Commission was preceded by numerous calls by the Taliban interim government for educated Afghans and technically qualified workforce to return to the country. The Taliban leaders sought to project their full territorial control over the country and its borders as an opportunity not just for the regional countries to invest in the country but also for the Afghan professionals and investors to return and help rebuild the state capacities and revive the local economy.⁴⁵ Unlike the Akhundzada-led ultraconservative cliché in

⁴⁵ “Head of New Afghan Government Calls on Ex-officials to Return”, *Al Jazeera*, 8 September 2021, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/8/acting-afghan-pm-calls-on-former-officials-to-return-al-jazeera> (Accessed 27 April 2025); “Declaration of Ministry of Higher Education”, *Bakhtar News Agency*, 10 February 2022, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/declaration-of-ministry-of-higher-education/> (Accessed 30 March 2025); “Deputy PM Meets with Afghan Elites”, *Al Emarah*, 21 March 2022, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/deputy-pm-meets-with-afghan-elites/> (Accessed 30 March 2025); “Many Afghan Personalities Returned Back Home”, *Bakhtar News Agency*, 5 June 2022, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/many-afghan-personalities-returned-back-home/> (Accessed 29 March 2025); “IEA Highly Regards Potentiality of Each Individual”, *Al Emarah*, 7 December 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/iea-highly-regards-potentiality-of-each-individual/> (Accessed 23 March 2025); “Realistic Opportunity for All Afghan [*šā*] to Work Together for Development of the Country”, *Al Emarah*, 12 December 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/a-realistic-opportunity-for-all-afghan-to-work-for-development-of-the-country/> (Accessed 23 March 2025).

Kandahar, a section of the political leadership in Kabul, due to external exposure and better situational awareness, has apparently been conscious of the various complex policy formulation and implementation challenges—administrative, financial, and economic—that lay ahead in delivering basic services to the people and reviving the national economy in a sustained manner.

Just days before the formal launch of the Contact Commission on 21 May 2022, Anas Haqqani claimed that about 50 former government officials had returned to the country. He however did not provide any details about them.⁴⁶ Even prior to it, there were reports about members of the previous government returning to the country. Former President Ghani's Special Representative and Minister of State for Peace Abdul Salam Rahimi and some former Afghan Air Force pilots had reportedly returned in February and March 2022.⁴⁷ In late February, the former woman mayor of Maidan Shahr, the capital of central Maidan Wardak Province, Zarifa Ghafari, had returned to Afghanistan from Germany but was said to have left the country two weeks later.⁴⁸ She reportedly

⁴⁶ Shirshah Rasooli, “‘Nearly 50 Former Govt Officials Returned’: Anas Haqqani”, *Tolo News*, 12 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177980> (Accessed 28 May 2024).

⁴⁷ “Senior Officials of the IEA Welcome Arrival of Former’s [sic] Regime [sic] Minister of Peace to Kabul”, Al Emarah, 12 February 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/senior-officials-of-the-iea-welcome-arrival-of-formers-regime-minister-of-peace-to-kabul/> (Accessed 22 April 2024); “5 Afghan Pilots Returns [sic] Home”, Al Emarah, 6 February 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/5-afghan-pilots-returns-home/> (Accessed 22 April 2024); “Air Force Pilot Returned Back to Home”, Al Emarah, 26 March 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/air-force-pilot-retained-back-to-home/> (Accessed 23 April 2024).

⁴⁸ “Former Mayor Zarifa Ghafari Returns to Afghanistan”, *Tolo News*, 27 February 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-176905> (Accessed 2 May 2025); Frogh Tareen, “I Found Myself Again on Return to Kabul: Zarifa Ghafari”, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 28 February 2022, at <https://pajhwok.com/2022/02/28/i-found-myself-again-when-retained-to-kabul-zarifa-ghafari/> (Accessed 2 May 2025).

stated in early March that the Taliban are “capable of changing” but soon after leaving the country referred to the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as “a prison for women.”⁴⁹

Of particular note was the ‘return’ of Sultan Masood Dakik, an Afghan-German entrepreneur and a self-described ‘State Development Specialist,’ after 37 years.⁵⁰ Given his professional profile and also apparently due to his distinguished lineage, several senior Taliban ministers, including Acting Deputy Prime Ministers Abdul Ghani Baradar and Abdul Kabir, engaged him and sought German and European aid and investments for Afghanistan. Dakik also reportedly offered to act as a bridge between EU and the Taliban regime.⁵¹

Commission’s spokesperson Ahmadullah Wasiq while speaking to the official *Bakhtar News Agency* in Herat in October 2022 stated that the commission has invited all exiled political and military figures, except

⁴⁹ “Former Mayor’s Return to Kabul Sparks Controversy”, *Voice of America*, 10 March 2022, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/former-mayor-s-return-to-kabul-sparks-controversy/6479705.html> (Accessed 2 May 2025); Akmal Dawi, “Taliban Welcome, Others Criticize Return of Former Afghan Officials”, *Voice of America*, 8 June 2022, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-welcome-others-criticize-return-of-former-afghan-officials/6609042.html> (Accessed 2 May 2025).

⁵⁰ “Afghan Development Expert Returns Home After 37 Years in Exile”, *Al Emarah*, 7 March 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/afghan-development-expert-returns-home-after-37-years-in-exile/> (Accessed 25 March 2025). Also see, Sultan Masood Dakik’s Biography, at <https://www.sultan-masood-dakik.com/biography/> (Accessed 13 May 2025).

⁵¹ Abdul Raqeeb Sail and Ismat Khawrin, “Dakik, Govt High-Ups Talk Execution of Development Projects”, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 9 March 2022, at <https://pajhwok.com/2022/03/09/dakik-govt-high-ups-talk-execution-of-development-projects/> (Accessed 22 April 2025); Abdul Raqeeb Sail and Ismat Khawrin, “Daqiq: Trying to Set up Company That Benefits Baitul Mall”, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 15 March 2022, at <https://pajhwok.com/2022/03/15/daqiq-trying-to-set-up-company-that-benefits-baitul-mall/> (Accessed 22 April 2025).

former President Ghani, and also the journalists to return to the country. He informed that the commission had approached Mohammad Ismail Khan, the former governor of western Herat Province and a prominent anti-Taliban commander, several times but he refused to return.⁵²

It is noteworthy that the Taliban had earlier provided Ismail Khan a safe passage to Iran after the fall of Herat on 13 August 2021. Five months later, Acting Foreign Minister Muttaqi claimed to have met both Ismail Khan and Ahmad Massoud, the leader of anti-Taliban National Resistance Front and son of late Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, on the sidelines of his first official visit to Iran in early January 2022. Muttaqi was said to have urged both the leaders to return to the country.⁵³ It was also reported at the time that Muttaqi appointed Abdul Qayyum Sulaimani, a nephew of Ismail Khan, as the head of Afghan Embassy in Tehran. Sulaimani until then served as the deputy ambassador and was appointed by the previous government.⁵⁴ Similarly, Acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani while addressing a gathering in central Bamyán Province in September 2023 had reportedly urged

⁵² “370 Afghan Personalities So Far Returned Back to Country”, Al Emarah, 22 October 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/370-afghan-personalities-returned-back-to-country/> (Accessed 9 May 2023).

⁵³ “Taliban Confirms Foreign Minister Met Rebel Leader In Tehran”, *Afghanistan International*, 10 January 2022, at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202201101906> (Accessed 8 June 2025); “Muttaqi Meets Ismail Khan, Ahmad Massoud in Tehran”, *Tolo News*, 10 January 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-176246> (Accessed 8 June 2025).

⁵⁴ Giuliano Bifulchi, “Taliban Reported a Meeting With Ahmad Massoud and Ismail Khan in Tehran”, *The Special Eurasia*, 10 January 2022, at <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2022/01/10/taliban-ahmad-massoud-tehran/> (Accessed 8 June 2025); Syed Zafar Mehdi, “Taliban Delegation Meets Afghan Opposition Figures in Iran”, *Anadolu Agency*, 10 January 2022, at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/taliban-delegation-meets-afghan-opposition-figures-in-iran/2470116> (Accessed 8 June 2025).

Hazara leaders Mohammad Mohaqiq and Karim Khalili to return to the country.⁵⁵

Interestingly in early December 2022, Mutasim Agha Jan, who served as the finance minister in the first Taliban regime and later was a member of the Quetta *Shura*, returned to Kabul along with Acting Taliban Minister of Defence Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, who along with Anas Haqqani was on an official visit to the UAE.

A perusal of the statements issued by the Contact Commission over time provides insight into the pace at which members of the previous regime reportedly returned from exile in the past three years (see Table 2 below).

Table 2
Flow of Returnees Associated with Previous Regime

(As claimed and stated by the Contact Commission)

Approx. Number of Returnees	As of Date
100	14 June 2022
130	22 August 2022
300	12 September 2022
370	22 October 2022
471	16 January 2023
491	13 February 2023

⁵⁵ Naweed Samadi, "Haqqani Asks Mohaqiq, Khalili to Return to Afghanistan", *Tolo News*, 8 September 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185013> (Accessed 10 September 2023).

513	13 March 2023
520	30 June 2023
605	16 July 2023
692	30 January 2024
711	6 March 2024
839	24 April 2024
992	15 October 2024
1,008	8 November 2024
1,045	2 February 2025

Sources: Compiled by the author based on figures stated by the Contact Commission and quoted primarily in the Taliban and Afghan sources, including the *Bakhtar News Agency*; Al Emarah, X (formerly twitter) platform of the Contact Commission; and leading Afghan news agencies based in the country.

In order to have an idea about the profile of the returnees from the previous Afghan regime that the Contact Commission claims to have returned over the past three years, the names of the returnees and the positions they previously held have been listed in the tables below. The tables are intended to reflect the composition of the returnees and not to provide an exhaustive list of the returnees. The names of the returnees are listed in the order in which the Contact Commission reported their return since June 2022. The names of two notable women returnees have been listed in bold letters. In cases where the year of the returnee's arrival in the country is not clear, the names have been added at the end of the relevant tables. The country of exile/refuge of the returnees has been mentioned only where it was stated or reported by the Contact Commission or leading Afghan sources.

Table 3.1

Returnee Former Ministers, Members of Parliament and Provincial Councils, and Senior Administrative Officials

Name of the Returnee	Key Position(s) Previously Held	Country of Exile/Refuge
2022 (June Onward)		
Said Intizar Khadim	Former Director General for Peace, Refugees and Prisons' Affairs at the Office of the National Security Council of Afghanistan; Strategic Communications Advisor, Afghan High Peace Council; and former Director, Strategic Communications, Independent Directorate of Local Governance.	UAE
Hussni Mubarak Azizi	Former Acting Minister and Deputy Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation; Director of Education Department, Ghazni Province; and Director for School Affairs and Programmes, Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority of Afghanistan.	Türkiye
Amanullah Ghalib (British citizen)	Former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of <i>Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat</i> (DABS), the National Power Utility of Afghanistan; Director of Renewable Energy and Deputy Minister of Energy, Ministry of Renewable Energy and Water. A British national, Ghalib has been the Director of Land Bridge Technical Support Limited in the UK since January 2022.	UK
Ghulam Farooq Wardak (Hezb-e Islami)	Former Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Education. Earlier headed the secretariats of the Constitutional Commission, Joint Electoral Management Body, Council of Ministers, and the Peace <i>Jirga</i> . He also headed the Office of Administrative Affairs of the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. Prior to 2001, he worked with the UN Development Programme and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA).	Türkiye

<p>Mohammad Sediq Chakari <i>(Jamiat-e Islami; dual Afghan and British citizenship)</i></p>	<p>Briefly served as Minister of Hajj and Awqaf in President Karzai's cabinet. Earlier served as the Minister of Tribal Affairs and Minister of Information and Culture in President Rabbani's cabinet in the 1990s.</p>	UK
<p>Abdul Hakim Noorzai</p>	<p>Former Deputy Director of Internal Audit in the Office of the National Security Council, and the leader of <i>Da Afghanistan Da Milli Wabdat Wolesi Tabreek</i> or the People's Movement of the National Unity of Afghanistan. He has also been associated with the Danish Refugee Council's Danish Demining Group as its chief of operations in Afghanistan.</p>	--
<p>Eng Amirzai Sangin <i>(Swedish citizen)</i></p>	<p>Former Minister of Communications and Information Technology and former CEO of state-owned Afghan Telecom. Prior to 2001, he was associated with the Swedish Telia International (founder member), Swedish Telecom, and was an active member of the SCA. He studied and taught at the Telecommunications Training Centre in Kabul, and later headed it in the 1970s. He is also the founder & CEO of the Sangin Technology Services (SanTech) located in Kabul.</p>	Sweden
<p>Abdul Wasay Tokhi/Tawhidi</p>	<p>Former Advisor to the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation.</p>	--
<p>Hidayat Amin Arsala <i>(founder member Mahaz-e-Melli of Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani; pro-royalist Rome Group)</i></p>	<p>Former Senior Minister and Minister of Commerce and Industry in President Karzai's first cabinet; Vice President in the Karzai-led Afghan Transitional Authority; Vice Chairman and Finance Minister in the Karzai-led Afghan Interim Administration; and Foreign Minister in President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government in the 1990s.</p>	US

Muhammad Asif Nang	Former Provincial Governor of Laghman and Farah; Deputy Minister of Technical Education and Acting Minister of Education; Spokesperson, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Ministry of Education; and former Editor of the government-run <i>Peace Jirga</i> magazine.	--
Makhdum Mohibullah Furqani (<i>Jumbish-e Milli</i>)	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> (House of Representatives or House of People) from Samangan Province and former District Governor of Dar-e-Suf in Samangan Province.	--
Eng Hamidullah Yalani	Former Director General, Afghanistan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation, Kabul.	--
Hasibullah Kalimzai	Former MP from Maidan Wardak and Second Deputy Speaker of <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> (Senate or House of Elders).	--
Amir Khan Yar	Former MP from Nangarhar Province and First Deputy Speaker of <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> .	--
Mohammad Tayyab Atta	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> from Kunar Province.	--
Kuchi Zazai	Former Director, Education Department, Paktia Province.	--
Yar Mohammad Hussainkhel	Former Director General, Special Prosecution Attorney for Counter-Narcotics.	--
Zabit Amir Mohammad	Former Member of the Nangarhar Provincial Council.	--
Hakim Munib	Former Acting Minister of Hajj and Awqaf.	--
Abdul Aleem Ayyar	Former Director of Education Department, Kapisa Province.	--

TORPEKAI RASOOLI	Former Member of Kunar Provincial Council. She is married to former Deputy Minister of Education Mohammad Sediq Patman.	--
Mohammad Dawood Ghafari (<i>Jamiat-e Islami</i>)	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> from Ghor Province and former Member of Ghor Provincial Council.	--
Kamal Nasir Osuli	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Khost Province.	--
Kafil Reyhan	Former Chairman of Khost Provincial Council.	--
Kamil Bek Hussaini	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> from Badakhshan Province.	--
Payanda Mohammad	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Sar-e-Pul Province.	--
Mohibullah Bandari (<i>Jumbish-e Milli</i>)	Former Member of the Faryab Provincial Council. <i>Killed by 'unknown' armed men in Maimana, the capital of Faryab Province, in July 2025.</i>	--
Abdul Bashir Hakimi	Former Deputy Minister of Finance, Administration and Tourism, Ministry of Information and Culture.	--
Toryalai Wesa (<i>Canadian citizen; originally from Kandahar</i>)	Former Governor of Kandahar; known to have had close ties with former President Karzai and his family. Mukhtar Rashidi, former Adviser to President Karzai, is said to be a relative of Wesa. Rashidi returned to Afghanistan later in 2023.	Canada
Abdul Mobin Faqirzada	Former Chairman of the Paktika Provincial Council.	US
Hussain Hussaini	Former Chief of Staff and Advisor on Political and International Relations to former Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh.	--

Abdul Wudud Paiman	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Kunduz Province. He was considered close to former Minister of Economy and former Acting Minister of Finance Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, who led a moderate political faction of the Hezb-e-Islami.	--
Mohammad Daud Gulzar	Former Advisor to President Ghani. A Hotak Pashtun, he previously headed the High Peace Provincial Council in Zabul Province.	--
Mohammad Sardar Timory	Director of Prisons in Faryab Province.	Uzbekistan
Shamsuddin Sarhadi	Former Spokesperson of the Ministry of Refugees and former District Governor of Doshi and Dahana-e-Ghori in Baghlan Province.	--
Nizam Khpalwak	Former Spokesperson of the National Water Affairs Regulation Authority of Afghanistan.	Türkiye
Najibullah Nasir	Former MP from Kabul and Second Deputy Speaker of <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> ; and former Member of the Nimroz Provincial Council.	--
Baz Mohammad Nasir	Former Chairman of the Nimroz Provincial Council.	UAE
2023		
Faqir Mohammad Qaisar	Former Member of the Faryab Provincial Council.	Iran
Maj Gen Gul Nabi Ahmadzai	Former Governor of Paktia Province; Commander of the Kabul Garrison; Commander of 505 Spin Ghar Police Zone; and former Director of Education, Ministry of Interior.	Türkiye
Sadiq Mangal	Former Advisor to President Ghani.	Saudi Arabia

Eng Wali Mohammad Ortaq	Former Provincial Director of DABS in Faryab.	Iran
Abdul Rahim	Former District Governor of Bilchiragh in Faryab Province.	Iran
Abdul Aziz Babakarkhail	Former CEO of the Bank- <i>e-Millie</i> Afghan and former CEO and President of the <i>Pashtany</i> Bank.	Norway
Munawar Shah Bahaduri	Former MP from Herat Province and Founder of Pamir Cola Group of Company and Sadaf Aria Food Manufacturing Company.	Türkiye
Gen Ghulam Ali Wahdat	Former Police Chief and former Governor of Bamyān Province, and former Deputy Interior Minister for Logistics Support.	Türkiye
Habibur Rahman Afghan	Former Kuchi MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> .	--
Allah Gul Mujahid (former district commander of <i>Hezb-e-Islami</i>)	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Kabul. An influential businessman from Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province. Currently detained and sentenced to imprisonment at Pul-e-Charkhi Prison in Kabul on murder charges.	Türkiye (returned via Iran)
Shahidullah Safi	Former Director of the Department of Work Permits Issuance for Expatriates, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled Affairs.	--
Abdul Rauf Amiri (<i>Jamiat-e Islami</i>)	Former Mayor of Hairatan City in northern Balkh Province and former Member of the Balkh Provincial Council.	Iran
MARYAM KOOFI	Former Woman MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Takhar Province. She is the sister of Fowzia Koofi, former woman MP and Second Deputy Speaker in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Badakhshan Province and a leading Afghan women's rights activist.	--

Ahmad Yusuf Nuristani	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> and former Chairman of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (August 2013–March 2016), former Governor of Herat Province and former Deputy Minister of Defence and Minister of Irrigation.	--
Mohammad Moeen Marastial	Former Afghan Consul General in Peshawar, former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Kunduz and former Deputy Minister of Education in the Karzai-led Afghan Interim Administration.	--
Ghulam Ali Rasikh	Former Acting Minister and Deputy Minister of Finance & Administration, Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation.	Türkiye
Daru Khan	Former District Governor of Ghorak in Kandahar Province.	Pakistan
Sayed Mahboobullah Sadat	Former Director of Kabul Traffic Department.	Germany
Sulaiman Hamid	Former Deputy Minister of Hajj and Awqaf and Adviser to President Karzai on judicial affairs.	Türkiye
Mukhtar Rashidi	Former Advisor to President Ghani on conflict resolution.	--
Khaliluddin Hakimi	Former Member of the Kunduz Provincial Council.	Iran
Abdul Waris Sherzad	Former District Governor of Bala Murghab in Badghis Province.	Iran
Muhammad Karim Jawzjani	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Jawzjan Province.	Iran
Shah Wali Shahid	Former Deputy Governor of Parwan Province.	Iran
2024		
Sohrab Qaderi	Former Member of the Nangarhar Provincial Council.	Iran

Faridullah Sherzai	Former Director of the Kabul Transport Department; and former Director of state-owned Fuel and Liquid Gas Enterprise, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.	--
Mohammad Hanif	Former Director of National Standards and Building Codes Development and Promotion, Afghanistan National Standards Authority, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.	--
FAWZIA GAILANI	Former Woman MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Herat Province.	UAE
Shahpoor Hassanzai	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Logar Province.	Pakistan
Mohammad Ghulam Mullakhel	Former Director of Human Resource, Ministry of Finance.	Türkiye
Mirza Ali Bidar	Former District Governor of Qadis in Badghis Province.	Iran
Reza Khawar	Former Director General of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.	Türkiye
Narender Singh Khalsa	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> on the reserved seat for Afghan Hindus and Sikhs.	Canada
Wahidullah Kalimzai	Former Deputy Interior Minister for Counter Narcotics and former Provincial Governor of Kunar and Ghazni.	UAE
Maiwand Nasiri/Naziri	Former Member of the Kabul Provincial Council.	UAE
Shahmahmood Mangal	Former Director General of Academic Council, Ministry of Education.	Canada

Said Mubin Shah Musamam	Former Commercial Attaché at Afghan Embassy in Washington, DC; former Deputy Minister of Finance; former Research and Policy Director, Afghanistan Investment Support Agency; former Programme Economist, USAID Afghanistan; and former Director General, Central Bank of Afghanistan.	US
Mohammad Qahir Haidari	Former Deputy Minister for Administration, Ministry of Finance; former Deputy Chief of Staff in President Karzai's Office of Administrative Affairs, and World Bank's former Operations Manager in Kabul.	US
Abdul Malik Hanafi	Former Provincial Chairman of the Independent Election Commission in Badakhshan.	Iran
Wahabuddin Sadat	Former Deputy Minister of Administration and Finance, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and former Deputy Mayor of Kabul.	US
Eng Mohammad Ayub	Former Minister of Water and Power in President Rabbani's government in the mid-1990s.	US
Gen Abdul Muzaffaruddin Yamin	Former Governor of Maidan Wardak Province. His son Hamid Yamin, who was said to be a former National Directorate of Security (NDS) official, was killed in Kabul on 10 April 2023.	Iran
Akhtar Mohammad Khan Badizai	Former Presidential Adviser on Public Affairs. Considered close to Kandahar Police Chief Gen Abdul Raziq, an Achakzai Pashtun, who was assassinated in October 2019.	Iran
Mohammad Nader Baloch	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> from Nimroz Province and former Deputy Chairman of the Nimroz Provincial Council, and Chairman of Baloch National Council of Afghanistan.	Türkiye

Dr Faizullah Kakar	Former Chief of Staff of the Office of President Ghani (July 2019–March 2020) and former Afghan Ambassador to Qatar (2016–2019). A qualified epidemiologist, he earlier served as Presidential Advisor on Health and Education Affairs (2009–2016) and was Presidential National Focal Point for Polio Eradication in Afghanistan, part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s efforts to eradicate polio. He also twice served as Afghan Deputy Ministry of Public Health, from 1993 to 1995 and 2005 to 2009.	UAE
Hakimullah Akbari	Former Director of Finance and Administration, Khost Province.	Canada
Abdullah Jan	Former District Governor of Mandal in Nuristan Province.	Iran
Mohammad Azizi	Former District Governor of Nahrin in Baghlan Province.	Iran
Adil Shah Noorzai	Former Adviser to President Ghani on Anti-corruption and Land Acquisition Affairs.	Germany
Salahuddin Amin Arsala	Former Director General of Customs Law Enforcement, Ministry of Finance.	US
Abdul Qadir Safa	Former District Governor of Darwaz in Badakhshan Province.	Iran
2025 (Until July)		
Mohammad Yaqub Haidari	Former Governor of Kabul.	Iran
Abdul Halim	Former Director of Hajj and Religious Affairs Department, Badghis Province.	Iran
Mohammad Pazir Basij	Former Member of the Samangan Provincial Council.	Iran

Attaullah Paikar	Former Prosecutor in Attorney General's Provincial Office in Baghlan, and a member of the Afghanistan Prosecutors Association.	Iran
Sayed Iskandar Sadat	Former senior official at Faryab Police Headquarters.	Iran
Sayed Hassan Gardizi	Former MP in <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> from Paktia Province.	--
Abdul Latif Nahzat Yar (<i>Hezb-e Islami</i>)	Former MP in <i>Mesbrano Jirga</i> from Nuristan Province and former Member of the Nuristan Provincial Council.	--
Shir Khosti	Former Governor of Ghazni Province. He had long been based in the US.	--
Jalal Mahmoodi	Former Deputy Director General, RTA, Kabul.	Türkiye
Hassan Asadi	Former Member of the Bamyan Provincial Council.	Iran

Sources: Compiled by the author based on the information provided by the Contact Commission and quoted primarily in the Taliban and Afghan sources, including the *Bakhtar News Agency*; Al Emarah, X (formerly twitter) platform of the Contact Commission; and leading Afghan news agencies based in the country.

Table 3.2

**Returnee Former Senior Military, Police
and Intelligence Officials**

Name of the Returnee*	Key Position(s) Previously Held	Country of Exile/Refuge
2022 (June Onward)		
Gen Dawlat Waziri	Former Spokesperson of the Ministry of Defence.	--
Maj Gen Mohammad Anwar Kohistani	Former Director of National Police Cooperative Fund, Ministry of Interior.	--

Brig Gen Ghulam Sakhi Roghliwanai	Former Provincial Police Chief of Paktika, Zabul, and Logar.	--
Col Jannat Gul Oryakhil	Former Commander of the Kabul Police Training Centre.	--
Brig Gen Habibullah Ahmadzai	Former Special Security Adviser to President Ghani.	--
Lt Col Dil Agha	Former Commander of the Tarin Kot Police Training Centre and Deputy in the Ministry of Interior. He was probably earlier Commander of the Kabul Garrison.	--
Ahmad Rashid Totakhel	Former Director General of Prisons and Detention Centres, Ministry of Justice.	Türkiye
General Abdul Salam Bakhshi	Former Director General of Prisons, Ministry of Justice.	--
Col. Mohammad Hassan Karokhel	Former Army Officer, 201 <i>Selab</i> Corps, Afghan National Army (ANA).	--
Najibullah Sarter	Former Provincial Police Chief of Paktia and Zabul.	Tajikistan
Gen Hayatullah Rustazada	Former Provincial Director of NDS in Bamyan Province.	--
Col. Mohammad Nabi	Former Deputy Police Chief of Badakhshan Province.	--
Brig Gen Abdul Wasi Ahmadzai	Former Provincial Director of NDS in Khost.	--
Maj Gen Abdul Baqi	Former Provincial Police Chief of Kunduz and Nuristan.	Iran

2023		
Gen Syed Kamal Sadat	Former Director General of the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan; former Director of Operations/Training, Afghan Public Protection Force; and former Police Chief of Balkh Province. He also worked as security consultant/adviser for various international organisations.	--
Yama Khalidi	Former District Police Commander of Bilchiragh in Faryab Province. <i>Killed by 'unknown' armed men in the Sayyad District of Sar-e-Pul Province in August 2023.</i>	Iran
Col Mir Salam Adamkhel	Former District Police Chief of Sarobi in Kabul Province.	Iran
Gen Amir Mohammad Jamshid	Former Director General of Central Prisons Directorate/General Directorate for Prisons and Detention Centres, Ministry of Interior.	--
Hamidullah Sadaqat	Former District Police Chief of Haska Mina in Nangarhar Province.	Iran
Col Mohammad Nader	Former Commanding Officer /Operations Officer of the Afghan Border Police.	Iran
Col Aminullah Wardak	Former Army Officer, 203 <i>Tandar</i> (Thunder) Corps, ANA, Gardez, Paktia Province.	Iran
Brig Gen Mirwais Safi	Former Commander of 203 <i>Tandar</i> (Thunder) Corps, ANA, Gardez.	Iran
2024		
Brig Gen Mohammad Ayub Ansari	Former member of the government-appointed negotiating team in Doha, former Deputy Police Chief of Helmand Province and Provincial Police Chief of Logar and Herat. He probably earlier served with the Ministry of Transport under the first Taliban regime.	Türkiye

Col Abdul Alim	Former senior official at Samangan Police Headquarter. He probably also earlier served as the Programme Director of Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups Project in Afghanistan.	Saudi Arabia
Col Ghulam Dastagir Rahimi	Former Director of the Nangarhar Traffic Department.	Tajikistan
Aziz Ahmad Andarabi	Former senior official at NDS in Kabul.	Iran
Brig Gen Raz Mohammad Mandozai	Former Police Chief of Paktia Province.	Türkiye
Brig Gen Abdul Basir Khpalwak	Former Police Chief of Kapisa Province.	Türkiye
Brig Gen Mohammad Sharif Safi	Former Military Prosecutor of Kunduz Province.	Iran
Gen. Sayed Gul Agha Rouhani	Former Deputy Police Chief of Kabul, former Provincial Police Chief of Nangarhar and Paktia, former Commander of Kabul International Airport, and former Commander of National Police Academy, Kabul.	The Netherlands
Lt Gen Mohammad Shafiq Fazli	Former Commander of Afghan Border Police, Ministry of Interior; former Police Chief of Herat Province and Deputy Police Chief of Kabul.	Sweden
Gen Abdul Sami Seddiqi	Former Provincial Director of NDS in Khost Province.	UAE
2025 (Until July)		
Sharafuddin Stanikzai	Former Commander of NDS Unit in the Khanabad District of Kunduz Province.	Iran

Raz Mohammad Lonai (former PDPA)	Former Provincial Director of NDS in Ghazni and other provinces.	Iran
Sanaullah Rohani	Former Spokesperson of the Badakhshan Police Headquarters.	--
Ahmad Khan Ahmadzai	Former District Police Chief of Bagram in Parwan Province.	Iran
Asadullah Sherzad	Former Provincial Police Chief of Helmand and Baghlan.	--

* *The ranks of military and police returnees listed in the table may not be accurate as it often differed in different sources. Some of the military returnees listed in the table had retired well before the Taliban takeover.*

Sources: Compiled by the author based on information provided by the Contact Commission and quoted primarily in the Taliban and Afghan sources, including the *Bakhtar News Agency*; Al Emarah, X (formerly twitter) platform of the Contact Commission; and leading Afghan news agencies based in the country.

Table 3.3

Other Notable Returnees

Name of the Returnee	Position(s) Held	Country of Exile/Refuge
2022 (June Onward)		
Mawlawi Abdul Kabir Chichaka	Former Member of the Afghan Ulema Council and Adviser to <i>Meshrano Jirga</i> .	--
Janat Fahim Chakari	Former President of Karwan Institute of Higher Education in Kabul.	--

Nizamuddin Qaisari	Former Uzbek militia commander from Qaisar District of Faryab Province and a senior member of Abdul Rashid Dostum's Junbish-e-Milli.	--
Ehsanullah Arianzai	Former Director of <i>Ariana TV</i> and Adviser to the Afghan Government; and also probably the former President of Afghanistan Chapter of the South Asia Free Media Association.	--
Zia-ul-Haq Wazirzai	Founder& CEO of Wazirzai Global Group of Companies; Former Board Member of International Chamber of Commerce in Afghanistan; Founder of German-Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry-GACCI; and Co-founder and President of Paktika Chamber of Commerce and Investment.	--
Sayed Shamsuddin Sadat	Senior member of Junbish-e Milli and former head of Junbish in Balkh Province.	--
Mohammad Hakim Basharat	Correspondent of <i>Pajhwok Afghan News</i> .	Norway
Mohammad Saber Hakimi	Vice President of Harirod Construction Company.	--
Abdul Tawab Suratzada	Former Member of Board of Directors of the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.	--
Ahmadyar Gharany	CEO of Gharany Group of Companies. The company is mainly into construction, electric & power, gemstone, and mining sectors.	UAE
Najib Sharifi	President of Afghan Journalists Safety Committee and Founder President of Rumi Consultancy; and former Senior Political Officer, Office of the Special Representative of the EU for Afghanistan. He earlier worked for CNN, <i>National Public Radio</i> (NPR) and <i>The Washington Post</i> in Afghanistan.	UAE

2023		
Baryalai Noori	CEO of Kabul Ahrar Construction Company.	Tajikistan
Ali Mohammad Karimi	Probably former President of Samangan Branch of the Mawlana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi University, Mazar-e-Sharif.	--
Ibrahim Asim	The owner of Khawar Construction Company (KCC) Private Limited. KCC is the developer for the Kabul New City Mega Project, which has been prioritised by the Taliban interim government.	UAE
2024		
Ahmad Hotak	Leader of the National Stability Party of Afghanistan.	US
Azizullah Kinjazada	A former commander of Jamiat-e Islami.	UAE
Nasim Doost	President of Doost Marble Factory in Herat, and former Member of Afghan Marble Industry Association and Herat Marble Union.	Canada
Zalmai Noori	Former journalist with the <i>Radio Television of Afghanistan</i> .	Iran
Abdul Khaliq Baloch	Chairman of Baloch Peace and Solidarity Council of Afghanistan, Helmand.	Pakistan
Mohammad Nader Noorzai	Founder and Chairman of Benawa Institute of Higher Education in Kandahar and former Member of the Kandahar Provincial Council. A relative of Afghan druglord Bashir Noorzai, who had worked closely with the Taliban leadership in Kandahar in the 1990s and also with the American and Pakistani intelligence agencies. Bashir was released from the American detention in September 2022 in exchange for US Navy veteran Mark Frerichs, who was kidnapped in late January 2020 and held in the Haqqani Network's custody.	Türkiye

Mohammad Wali Amini	Founder of <i>Millie</i> Amini Pharma Company, Kabul.	Iran
2025 (Until July)		
Zalmai Nusrat Momand	Former Deputy Director of Cadre and Personnel in the Ministry of State Security in President Mohammad Daoud Khan's Government in the 1970s.	Denmark
Abdul Haq Danishmal	Founder of Ariana Institute of Higher Education, Jalalabad and Kabul.	Türkiye
Shah Saud	Former militia commander from Batikot District of Nangarhar Province.	Iran

Sources: Compiled by the author based on information provided by the Contact Commission and quoted primarily in the Taliban and Afghan sources, including the *Bakhtar News Agency*; Al Emarah, X (formerly twitter) platform of the Contact Commission; and leading Afghan news agencies based in the country.

It is evident from the above tables that cross sections of former Afghan ministers and deputy ministers and members of parliament and provincial councils, and ranking civil, military and police officials, including members of the former intelligence agency National Directorate of Security (NDS); and business owners and heads of private institutions have returned to the country through the Contact Commission. However, it was reported that some of the high profile returnees left Afghanistan again after a short stay.⁵⁶ Here it is important

⁵⁶ Banafsha Binesh, "Over 300 Former Govt Officials, Traders Returned to Country: Commission", *Tolo News*, 12 September 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-179821> (Accessed 10 March 2023).

to note that several of the former senior government officials, who were among the earliest to arrive through the Contact Commission, either had dual citizenship or foreign residency or had their businesses and families based outside the country. There were some who needed periodic medical attention and could not have stayed for long in view of the declining or the lack of specialised medical facilities in the country. It seems that some of them have since travelled in and out of the country. Just as they had not permanently returned to the country, they also cannot be said to have permanently left the country.

Interestingly, some of them had returned from exile for the second time. They had earlier returned following the collapse of the first Taliban regime in late 2001. Mostly educated and long based in the West, they served in various capacities in the US-backed governments in Kabul and left along with the withdrawing Western coalition, particularly after the signing of the US–Taliban deal in Doha in February 2020. It is only ironical that their second return from exile came following the return of the same Taliban to power two decades later. Afghanistan has witnessed several waves of both exodus and return from exile of its educated and professional workforce, either preceding or following the political transitions in the country, over the past five decades. This time around, in the absence of any professional or business opportunities under the Taliban regime, their arrivals in Kabul 2022 onwards have apparently been more of a visit than a ‘return’ to the country. It leads to the question as to why they returned or for what reasons they keep coming and leaving the country.

It is noteworthy that several of the high profile returnees, who left the country in haste following the collapse of both the government and the economy in 2021, had allegations of official misconduct and misappropriation of government or international funds against them. Some of them had been charged or sentenced to imprisonment by the Attorney General’s Office in the previous government. They perhaps needed to return to either sell off their properties or manage their business interests whereas others came to explore new opportunities that usually open up with the change in regime. Their return in a way marked the coming together of the corrupt elements from the previous regime and the internationally sanctioned members of the current regime. Several of the former parliamentarians and provincial council

members, many of whom were businessmen and traders, needed to take care of their assets and revive family businesses.

Besides former ministers, parliamentarians, and senior civil and military officials, whose voluntary return through the Contact Commission was highly publicised and extensively reported—with photographs and video clippings of their arrival and reception at the Kabul Airport and meetings with senior Taliban leaders and ministers flashed across the Taliban-run websites and Afghan official news agencies and also numerous pro-Taliban social media accounts—several hundred mid to low ranking former officials and personnel have returned, mostly forced returned or deported, mainly from Iran, Türkiye and US in the past three years.

Some members of the elite Khost Protection Force (KPF) arrived from the United States in mid-2024 with the facilitation of the Contact Commission. It was reported that immunity cards were issued by the commission to former KPF members.⁵⁷ The return of Afghan military personnel from Iran and United States could not have been voluntary, or completely voluntary. The KPF, which was directly backed and exclusively mentored and equipped by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as a specialised counter terrorism force, was particularly despised by the Taliban. The KPF members were evacuated by the United States at the time of military withdrawal in mid 2021. Besides KPF, there were other CIA-backed strike forces and NDS-backed pro-government local militia units that acted without much oversight and were known to have used brutal tactics, including against the local population, to counter the Taliban. Their heavy handed approach turned the local population against the government and often

⁵⁷ “Liaison Commission Issues Immunity Cards to Returning Afghan Dignitaries and Former KPF Members”, *Bakhtar News Agency*, 21 July 2024, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/liaison-commission-issues-immunity-cards-to-returning-afghan-dignitaries-and-former-kpf-members/> (Accessed 21 July 2024).

worked to the advantage of the Taliban, particularly in the southeastern provinces.⁵⁸ Several of their commanders and fighters had left mainly for Iran at the time of the collapse of the Afghan Republic.⁵⁹

Besides reporting the return of former civil and military officials who served under the previous governments led by Karzai and Ghani, the commission also reported the return of a former official of the ministry of state security in President Daoud's government in the 1970s; former minister of water and power in President Rabbani's government in the mid-1990s; and the son and daughter of former Afghan Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Samad Hamid in Zahir Shah's government in the early 1970s.

The commission also claims to have facilitated the return of some members of predominantly Tajik Jamiat-e Islami and Uzbek Junbish-e Milli, old arch rivals of the Taliban. Besides senior Junbish commander Nizamuddin Qaisari, who reportedly returned in June 2022, a month after the launch of the commission, two more senior Junbish members, including Jamiat's provincial head of Balkh, were said to have returned the very next month in July. A year later in July 2024, the commission claimed that a few Jamiat members returned from Iran, including a member of the Balkh Provincial Council. The remaining were mostly low ranking Jamiat functionaries or local commanders. Interestingly,

⁵⁸ Stefanie Glinski, "How the CIA Aims to Keep a Footprint in Afghanistan", *Foreign Policy*, 8 August 2019, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/08/how-the-cia-aims-to-keep-a-footprint-in-afghanistan-taliban-talks/> (Accessed 1 June 2025); "'They've Shot Many Like This': Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces", Human Rights Watch, 31 October 2019, at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/afghanistan1019_web.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2025).

⁵⁹ Jawid Hasanzada, "'I'm Very Worried': Former Afghan Soldiers Fear Forced Return to Taliban-Ruled Homeland", RFE/RL, 13 November 2023, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-former-soldiers-fear-return/32682775.html> (Accessed 20 June 2024).

the commission also reported the return of two former bodyguards of Abdul Rashid Dostum, former vice president during the Ghani Government and the chief of Junbish, in July 2022 and the former chief of Atta Mohammad Noor's security from UAE in March 2024. A cursory glance through the Contact Commission's routine announcements suggests that immunity cards have been issued or are being issued to several hundred officials of the previous government returning to Afghanistan.

However, the Taliban track record in terms of enforcement and implementation of the 'general amnesty' across the country and on the ground has been questionable, despite senior Taliban leaders, particularly Acting Minister of Defence Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob and Acting Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani, repeatedly urging the Taliban forces to refrain from carrying out revenge killings and violating the 'general amnesty' declared by Taliban chief Akhundzada.⁶⁰ Acting Minister of Defence Mawlawi Yaqoob had also expressed concern at the prospect of exiled security personnel being used as proxies and mercenaries by host countries.⁶¹ To reinforce the idea of amnesty among

⁶⁰ Abdullah Hamim, "Acting Defense Minister Orders Forces to Respect Amnesty", *Tolo News*, 24 September 2021, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-174778> (Accessed 25 September 2021); "Haqqani in Khost Again Calls for Respect of General Amnesty", *Tolo News*, 5 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177880> (Accessed 6 May 2022); Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Tout Islamic Rule, Claim 'General Amnesty' Reunited Afghans", *Voice of America*, 25 October 2023, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-tout-islamic-rule-claim-general-amnesty-reunited-afghans/7326400.html> (Accessed 24 November 2023); "Acting Interior Minister Reaffirms Commitment to General Amnesty Decree", *Tolo News*, 10 August 2024, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-190170> (Accessed 13 August 2024).

⁶¹ "Minister of Defense Highlights Achievements and Improved Security in the Country", *Al Emarah*, 31 December 2023, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/minister-of-defense-highlights-achievements-and-improved-security-in-the-country/> (Accessed 23 April 2024).

the rank and file, Sirajuddin had emphasised that it is a Sharia-based amnesty and not a political amnesty.⁶²

Amid reports of former government officials and security personnel returning to the country, there have been reports of prolonged delay in the issuance of immunity cards by the commission to the returnees, arbitrary detention and repeated interrogation of the military returnees by the Taliban's intelligence agency, and continued security threat from rival Taliban commanders from the past. Despite 'general amnesty' in place, former security personnel are often detained for indefinite period.⁶³ There are several reports suggesting a pattern of torture and killing of former Afghan security officials.⁶⁴ In case of exiled former military and police commanders, there have also been reports of arbitrary detention and harassment of their family members allegedly by the Taliban intelligence agency looking for information about their whereabouts and also weapons. It is important to note that the Taliban security and intelligence agencies reportedly have access to biometric database and devices left behind by the Afghan government and

⁶² "Minister of Interior: Our Amnesty is Sharia-based Not a Political Amnesty", Al Emarah, 27 February 2022, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/minister-of-interior-our-amnesty-is-sharia-based-not-a-political-amnesty/> (Accessed 21 April 2024).

⁶³ "Former Afghan Security Forces Members Detained by Taliban Following Expulsion from Iran", *Afghanistan International*, 3 August 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202408036598> (Accessed 4 August 2024); "Dozens of Former Security Forces Imprisoned by Taliban in Nangarhar", *Afghanistan International*, 22 August 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202408223683> (Accessed 22 August 2024).

⁶⁴ Mantasha Ansari, "Violating Prophet Muhammad's Tradition of General Amnesty: Taliban Fighters Systematically Target Former Soldiers, Police Officers, and Officials", *Hasbt-e-Subh Daily*, 20 April 2024, at <https://8am.media/eng/violating-prophet-muhammads-tradition-of-general-amnesty-taliban-fighters-systematically-target-former-soldiers-police-officers-and-officials/> (Accessed 20 June 2024).

Western agencies in the rush to make an exit, containing sensitive personal details of not only ordinary Afghan citizens and former civilian officials but also thousands of former military and security personnel, including pro-government militia commanders and fighters, and also interpreters who worked closely with Western forces and military contractors. Fearing reprisal, a large number of former civil and military officials, including women officials and interpreters, who could not leave the country are said to be in hiding and remain reluctant to register with the Contact Commission and seek immunity cards.

Some of the returnees are said to have left the country as they felt vulnerable and threatened by old rivals and deceived by the Contact Commission. For instance, Ghalib Mujahid, the former district governor of Bihsud, Bati Kot and Achin in Nangarhar Province, who had returned from Iran through the Contact Commission, had to again leave the country due to attempts on his life and continued harassment by the local Taliban members.⁶⁵ There have been instances where the returnee former police officials and commanders have been killed. Lal Mohammad Gharibzadeh, a former police commander of Chaharbulak District of northern Balkh Province and a member of Jamiat-e Islami, whose return from Iran was facilitated by the Contact Commission and an immunity card was issued to him, was assassinated by ‘unknown’ armed men in July 2023.⁶⁶ Gharibzadeh was close to

⁶⁵ “Former Official Who Returned to Afghanistan at Taliban’s Invitation Forced to Flee Again”, *Afghanistan International*, 16 May 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202405167769> (Accessed 18 May 2024).

⁶⁶ “Taliban Accused of Killing Former Police Commander in Balkh Province”, *Kabul Now*, 7 July 2023, at <https://kabulnow.com/2023/07/gunmen-kill-former-local-police-commander-in-balkh-province/> (Accessed 2 May 2025); Mohsen Ara, “The Taliban Shot a Former Local Police Commander in Balkh”, *Voice of Citizen News*, 7 July 2023, at <https://www.voc-news.com/en/2023/07/07/the-taliban-shot-a-former-local-police-commander-in-balkh-2/> (Accessed 2 May 2025); Naweed Yousufi, “Taliban Rejects Murder of Former Police Commander, Lal Mohammad Gharibzadeh”, *Kauser News Agency*, 7

former Governor of Balkh and a leader of Jamiat-e Islami, Atta Mohammad Noor, who alleged that “a Taliban mercenary group” was behind the assassination.⁶⁷

Similarly, former police commander of Bilchiragh District in Faryab Province, Yama Khalidi, who had returned from Iran through the Contact Commission, was killed by ‘unknown’ armed men in Sar-e-Pul Province in early August 2023.⁶⁸ In August 2024, there were reports about the detention of former army commander Ahmad Shah, who had returned from Iran through the commission, in Jalalabad. Shah had earlier served with an Afghan army brigade based in Nangarhar.⁶⁹ Former MP from Logar Province Shahpoor Hassanzai, who had

July 2023, at <https://kusernews.com/taliban-rejects-murder-of-former-police-commander-lal-mohammad-gharibzadeh/> (Accessed 2 May 2025); Mustafa Sarwar, “The Azadi Briefing: Fear, Disillusionment Undermine Taliban’s Efforts To Woo Exiled Former Afghan Officials”, RFE/RL, 28 July 2023, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-woos-former-officials/32524328.html> (Accessed 2 May 2025).

⁶⁷ Atta Mohammad Noor, Former Governor of Balkh Province, X Post, 7 July 2023, 2:24 AM, at <https://x.com/Atamohammadnoor/status/1677058524063449090?s=20> (Accessed 2 May 2025).

⁶⁸ “Former Afghan Police Commander Killed in Sar-e Pol Province”, *Afghanistan International*, 8 August 2023, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202308087439?nxtPslug=202308087439> (Accessed 12 May 2025); “Former Military Commander Shot Dead in Sar-e-Pol Province”, *Kabul Now*, 8 August 2023, at <https://kabulnow.com/2023/08/former-military-commander-shot-dead-in-sar-e-pol-province/> (Accessed 12 May 2025).

⁶⁹ “Former Afghan Military Officer Arrested by Taliban After Returning from Iran”, *Afghanistan International*, 24 August 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202408244930> (Accessed 26 August 2024).

returned from Pakistan in early 2024, was detained twice by the Taliban.⁷⁰ Like some other high ranking returnees, he initially urged other Afghan parliamentarians to return to the country in a video clip posted on social media, but weeks later after he was detained the first time in March 2024, he posted another video where he accused the Taliban of deception and threatened to leave the country again.⁷¹ In May 2024, it was reported that 73 members of the KPF, who after the completion of their training in US had returned to their families, had been under the Taliban detention in Khost for the past two years.⁷²

In December 2024, Col Rahamdil Hanafi, who was said to be a former bodyguard of President Ghani from Panjshir, and who had returned from Iran with the support of Acting Taliban Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi, who too is from Panjshir, and former Taliban Governor of Panjshir Qudratullah Amini, committed suicide in Kabul after his wife was detained in his absence by the Taliban's intelligence agency.⁷³ Even Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai, the brother of

⁷⁰ "Imprisoned by Taliban, Faced Humiliation & Now Will Leave Afghanistan, Says Ex-Lawmaker", *Afghanistan International*, 15 March 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202403151798> (Accessed 27 April 2025); Milad Sayar, "Ex-MP Shahpoor Hassanzoi in Taliban Custody for Past Four Days: Source", *Amu TV*, 29 September 2024, at <https://amu.tv/126768/> (Accessed 22 March 2025).

⁷¹ Afghan Analyst, X Post, 15 March 2024, 1:05 AM, at <https://x.com/AfghanAnalyst2/status/1768360364545073608> (Accessed 17 May 2025).

⁷² "Over 70 KPF Members Detained By Taliban Intelligence, Report Local Sources", *Afghanistan International*, 29 May 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202405296238> (Accessed 30 April 2025).

⁷³ "Ashraf Ghani's Former Bodyguard Commits Suicide After Taliban Detains His Wife", *Afghanistan International*, 18 December 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202412185699> (Accessed 24 December 2024); "Five Days After Ashraf Ghani's Former Bodyguard Commits Suicide, Taliban Releases His Wife", *Afghanistan International*, 20 December 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202412208523> (Accessed 24 December 2024).

former President Ashraf Ghani, who remained in Kabul even as the Taliban took over, had complained in May 2023 of harassment by Ibrahim Haqqani's men.⁷⁴ Ibrahim Haqqani is a senior member of the Haqqani Network and an uncle of Acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani. Interestingly, Hashmat Ghani and Ibrahim Haqqani were believed to have known each other for a long time.

For the mid and low-level military returnees, many of whom could not take their families along, life remains difficult and uncertain and future prospects mostly bleak. For those still exiled, it is simply about the lack of options as they continue to be forced deported, along with millions of Afghans who had sought refuge in Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye, Central Asia, United States, and in EU countries.

Besides the abovementioned cases of violation of 'general amnesty' reported mostly by Afghan media agencies based outside the country, both United Nations and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have regularly documented several instances of enforced disappearances and summary killings of former security officials and personnel, often alleging links with the National Resistance Front or Islamic State Khorasan, over the past three years. It is no surprise that despite issuance of immunity cards, assured physical security has been among the key concerns and demands of the former civil and military officials returning to the country.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in its report published in August 2023 had documented at least 800 cases of human rights violations against former government civil and military officials between the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021 and 30 June

⁷⁴ "Former Afghan President's Brother Accuses Haqqani Network of Harassing Him", *Afghanistan International*, 19 May 2023, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202305190608> (Accessed 5 June 2024).

2023. It included at least 218 cases of extrajudicial killings of former government officials, including members of the former armed forces. According to the report, the most targeted groups were former Afghan army, police, NDS, and ALP officials. It also documented at least 14 instances of enforced disappearance, more than 424 cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions, and more than 144 instances of torture and ill treatment of former civil and military officials since August 2021.⁷⁵

Earlier, HRW in its report published in November 2021 had claimed to have documented the summary execution or enforced disappearance of at least 47 members of the former Afghan armed forces, including police, intelligence, and paramilitary militia, who had reportedly surrendered to or were apprehended by the Taliban forces between 15 August and 31 October 2021. The report claimed that there were more than 100 cases of summary execution or forced disappearance of former security personnel in just four provinces—Ghazni, Helmand, Kunduz, and Kandahar—in the first three months of the Taliban takeover.⁷⁶

Amid all, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has announced the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Afghanistan, with effect from 14 July 2025, stating that Afghanistan “no longer continues to meet the conditions for the TPS designation.”

⁷⁵ “A Barrier to Securing Peace: Human Rights Violations Against Former Government Officials and Former Armed Force Members in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021–30 June 2023”, UNAMA, 22 August 2023, at https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/a_barrier_to_securing_peace_aug_2023_english_.pdf (Accessed 16 June 2025).

⁷⁶ ““No Forgiveness for People Like You”: Executions and Enforced Disappearances Under the Taliban in Afghanistan”, Human Right Watch, 30 November 2021, at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/11/afghanistan1121_web.pdf (Accessed 14 May 2025).

According to DHS estimates, approximately 11,700 Afghan nationals in US come under TPS, out of which approximately 3,600 are also approved as Lawful Permanent Residents. Interestingly, the Secretary of DHS after having reviewed the situation in Afghanistan and having consulted appropriate US agencies is said to have determined that “there are notable improvements in the security and economic situation” in Afghanistan and “the return of Afghan nationals does not pose a threat to their personal safety due to armed conflict or extraordinary and temporary conditions.” The Secretary added that “permitting Afghan nationals to remain temporarily in the United States is contrary to the national interest of the United States”. In this regard, the Secretary referred to Afghan TPS recipients “who have been the subject of administrative investigations for fraud, public safety, and national security.” The Secretary further observed that “continuing to permit these Afghan nationals to remain in the United States does not champion core American interests or put American interests first” and that “the US foreign policy interests are best served and protected by curtailing policies that facilitate or encourage destabilizing migration.”⁷⁷ Interestingly, just two months before in March, US Vice President JD Vance had described the Taliban as “one of the worst terrorist organizations in the world.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “DHS Terminating Temporary Protected Status for Afghanistan”, US Department of Homeland Security, 12 May 2025, at <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/05/12/dhs-terminating-temporary-protected-status-afghanistan> (Accessed 30 May 2025); “Termination of the Designation of Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status”, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, 13 May 2025, at <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-08201.pdf> (Accessed 30 May 2025).

⁷⁸ “Remarks by the Vice President to U.S. Troops at Pituffik Space Base and an Exchange with Reporters in Avannaata Municipality, Greenland”, The American Presidency Project, 28 March 2025, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-us-troops-pituffik-space-base-and-exchange-with-reporters> (Accessed 2 June 2025).

The AfghanEvac, which had been working in collaboration with the US Government since August 2021 to help relocate and resettle over 195,000 eligible Afghan allies, reacted stating that “the decision to terminate TPS for Afghanistan is not rooted in reality—it’s rooted in politics.” Pointing to the absence of “functioning asylum system” in Afghanistan, the President of AfghanEvac argued that the decision will not make US safer and will “shred what’s left of our moral credibility.”⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement welcoming the US decision as “a positive step” and “an acknowledgement of existing realities, affirming progress in Afghanistan’s security & economic environment.” It further stated that the Taliban “stands ready to engage in constructive dialogue with the US & other countries regarding repatriation of Afghans who no longer meet criteria to remain in host countries.”⁸⁰ The Taliban not only felt that their claims about improved security and economic situation in the country stood validated but also saw an opportunity to sustain the momentum in bilateral ties generated by the recent release of foreign prisoners by the Taliban. The Contact Commission probably hopes that, similar to former KPF members deported earlier, several ranking former Afghan officials based in US would return or be deported to Afghanistan in the near future.

Meanwhile, the Taliban interim government, realising the humanitarian crisis facing the country and the complex economic challenges ahead, encouraged Afghan traders, businessmen and investors to return to the country. The Taliban had been stressing on the need to strengthen

⁷⁹ AfghanEvac, “Statement on the Expiration of Temporary Protection Status for Afghanistan”, X Post, 12 May 2025, 10:46 PM, at <https://x.com/afghanevac/status/1921977687544914141> (Accessed 30 May 2025).

⁸⁰ “IEA-MoFA Spokesperson Remarks Regarding the Termination of TPS for Afghanistan by U.S. Department of Homeland Security”, Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 May 2025, at <https://mfa.gov.af/en/18695> (Accessed 30 May 2025).

the private sector participation in rebuilding the country's economy.⁸¹ The interim government has been struggling to convince the Afghan investors mostly based in Dubai to invest in the country and help revive the national economy. Taliban Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Baradar while addressing a conference organised jointly by the Afghanistan-American Chamber of Commerce and the Afghanistan Business Council, titled "Afghanistan's Trade and Economic Relations", in Kabul in September 2023, went all out to appeal to both Afghan and foreign investors to take advantage of the security, stability and strong anti-corruption mechanisms in the country to invest in the Afghan economy. According to a report posted on the Taliban's official website, Baradar stated:

The Deputy Prime Minister further elucidated that Afghanistan, being rich in natural resources, boasts a government that actively encourages investment, a youthful, proficient, and cost-effective workforce, easy access to international markets facilitated by regional connectivity, an investor-friendly environment, and simplified investment regulations. These factors collectively lay the foundation for lucrative investment opportunities in Afghanistan.

He emphasized that the Islamic Emirate has enacted investor-friendly laws and established an inter-ministerial committee,

⁸¹ "Deputy PM Kabir: Supporting Private Sector Investors is One of IEA's First Priorit [*sic*]", *Bakhtar News Agency*, 6 February 2022, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/deputy-pm-kabir-supporting-private-sector-investors-is-one-of-ieas-first-priorit/> (Accessed 30 March 2025); Tamim Shahir, "Baradar at Business Opening Calls for Afghan Investors to Return", *Tolo News*, 19 June 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/business-178558> (Accessed 21 June 2022); Bibi Amina Hakimi, "Kabul Offering Incentives for Investment in Afghanistan: Deputy PM", *Tolo News*, 28 December 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/business-186701> (Accessed 31 December 2023).

eliminating the need for investors to navigate cumbersome bureaucratic processes. We have established industrial parks, reduced taxes on raw materials, and initiated the reconstruction of highways to stimulate business development. In the near future, a pivotal development in transit is on the horizon, as Afghanistan will be connected to Iran's Chabahar port through a railway network, marking a momentous leap forward in our transit capabilities.

The Islamic Emirate has instituted an inter-ministerial committee tasked with facilitating all essential support for both domestic and foreign investors' seeking opportunities in Afghanistan. Presently, foreign investors arriving In [sic] Afghanistan are no longer required to navigate various institutions and bureaucratic hurdles; instead, they engage directly with this committee, receiving comprehensive and timely information. This represents a pivotal stride towards expediting the advancement of their ventures.

Concurrently, efforts are underway to formulate a comprehensive national economic strategy for our nation, aimed at addressing prevailing challenges within the economic sphere. This strategy will chart a vision for the next five years, targeting poverty reduction, positioning Afghanistan as a pivotal hub for regional trade, fostering consensus in confronting obstacles on the path to our national objectives, and catalyzing the growth and advancement of the private sector within the country.⁸²

⁸² "Deputy Economic PM's Address at the Conference on 'Afghanistan's Trade and Economic Relations'", Al Emarah, 6 September 2023, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/mullah-abdul-ghani-baradar-akhunds-address-at-the-conference-on-afghanistans-trade-and-economic-relations/> (Accessed 23 April 2024).

Besides reiterating the abovementioned points while addressing a conference organised two months later by the Afghan investors based in Iran in November 2023, Baradar was said to have “emphasized the support for domestic products through increased import taxes on items Afghanistan produces and the promotion of Afghan products in exhibitions.” He was said to have “called upon all Afghans, regardless of ethnicity or language, to contribute to the country’s development” and “encouraged Afghan investors living abroad to seize the current opportunity to contribute to as their country’s recovery.”⁸³

In December 2023, Acting Minister of Commerce and Industry Noorduiddin Azizi noted that Afghan investors had made investments worth approximately \$150 billion in Türkiye and UAE, and also some investments in Pakistan. Of the \$150 billion, about \$95 billion were invested in Türkiye and \$55 billion in UAE, and as per unconfirmed statistics about \$3 billion in Pakistan. While Azizi reportedly acknowledged huge investments made by Afghans in Iran but did not provide any details at the time.⁸⁴ However, a year later in January 2025, he stated that as per the Iranian assessment Afghans have invested about \$9 billion in the Iranian economy. He announced that 150,000 acres of land is being allocated to boost country’s domestic industry and efforts are also on to ensure regular supply of electricity for industries.⁸⁵

⁸³ “Deputy PM for Economic Affairs Addresses Conference Organized by Afghan Expatriate Investors in Iran”, Al Emarah, 8 November 2023, at <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/deputy-pm-for-economic-affairs-addresses-conference-organized-by-afghan-expatriate-investors-in-iran/> (Accessed 23 April 2024).

⁸⁴ Bibi Amina Hakimi, “Afghans Invest \$150 Billion Abroad: Azizi”, *Tolo News*, 25 December 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/business-186654> (Accessed 31 December 2023).

⁸⁵ “Azizi Expresses Concern, Says Afghans Invested Billions in Neighboring Countries”, *Ariana News*, 3 January 2025, at <https://www.ariananews.af/azizi-expresses-concern-says-afghans-invested-billions-in-neighboring-countries/> (Accessed 4 January 2025).

It is also said that half of the foreign companies registered in Iran are owned by Afghans. In July 2024, Chairman of the Iran–Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce Mahmoud Siadat stated that more than 50 per cent of foreign companies registered in Iran are owned by Afghans, which also makes them the largest foreign investor in Iran. Siadat further stated that Afghan companies have invested more than \$3 billion in Iran.⁸⁶ Interestingly, in April 2025, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs of the Iranian Ministry of Interior informed that more than 2,000 Afghan doctors, including 700 specialists and subspecialists, are working in hospitals across Iran. It also noted that some Afghan professors are also working on contract with various Iranian universities.⁸⁷

Relevant Taliban-led ministries have announced several measures to incentivise Afghan investors to return and invest in the country. In March 2024, the Taliban interim government announced a major reduction in customs tariff, from 2.5 per cent to 1 per cent, on import of raw materials to boost domestic production. In December 2024, Taliban supreme leader Akhundzada was said to have chaired a special meeting of the Economic Commission in which it was decided that over 2,000 jeribs of land will be allotted in the north, south, east, and west of Kabul for the establishment of industrial zones, primarily for light industries; 20,000 jeribs of land for setting up industrial zones in eastern Nangarhar Province, southern Kandahar Province, and northern Balkh Province, with a portion of the allotted land to be used for mineral

⁸⁶ “Half of Foreign Companies Registered in Iran Belong to Afghan Nationals: Official”, *Amu TV*, 9 June 2024, at <https://amu.tv/102982/> (Accessed 11 July 2024); “Afghans Invested \$3 Billion in Iran, Says Country’s Official”, *Afghanistan International*, 10 July 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202407107083> (Accessed 11 July 2024).

⁸⁷ “Iranian Official Says Nearly 2,000 Afghan Doctors Working in Iran”, *Kabul Now*, 3 April 2025, at <https://kabulnow.com/2025/04/iranian-official-says-nearly-2000-afghan-doctors-working-in-iran/> (Accessed 4 April 2025).

processing purposes; 10,000 jeribs of land to be allotted in northern Kunduz Province for industrial zones; and 1,000 jeribs of land to be allotted for establishing industrial parks in the remaining provinces. It was further announced that 10 to 50 jeribs of land will be allotted in each province for setting up small industries or enterprises.⁸⁸

In January 2025, Baradar, while speaking at a conference titled “National Call for Domestic Investment” in Kabul, announced a slew of measures to incentivise Afghan entrepreneurs to move their capital back and invest in the Afghan economy. He announced a five-year exemption from all taxes except employee payroll taxes for those setting up new industries in the country. He further announced exemption from custom duties on imported machinery and tools for industrial use and two-year visas for foreign technical experts hired for setting up industries in the country.⁸⁹ About four months later, in May 2025, Acting Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs Hanafi stated while visiting Ghazni that Afghans who own large businesses in Pakistan will be given free land in industrial parks and exemption from all taxes for five years.⁹⁰

As indicated in Table 3.3, the heads of some of the Afghan companies who were based in the country until 2021 have returned but none of

⁸⁸ “Economic Commission Convenes Under the Leadership of His Excellency Amir Ul-Mu'minin”, *Bakhtar News Agency*, 17 December 2024, at <https://www.bakhtarnews.af/en/a-special-meeting-of-the-economic-commission-chaired-by-his-excellency-amir-ul-muminin-sheikh-al-quran-wa-al-hadith-mullah-hibitullah-akhundzada-may-allah-protect-him-was-held/> (Accessed 28 March 2025).

⁸⁹ Siyar Sirat, “Taliban Promise Incentives to Returning Investors in Bid to Boost Domestic Economy”, *Amu TV*, 16 January 2025, at <https://amu.tv/151241/> (Accessed 17 January 2025).

⁹⁰ Farid Ahmad Atiqi, “Islamic Emirate Grants Five-Year Tax Exemption to Returning Investors”, *Tolo News*, 9 May 2025, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-194237> (Accessed 9 May 2025).

them are major investors. Same can be said for several of the former members of parliament and provincial councils that have had family-run businesses and have returned through the Contact Commission. Of particular note was the return of CEO of Khawar Construction Company which is a major developer of the New Kabul City mega project. The Taliban leadership has shown interest at the highest level to take this mega project forward.

Since late 2022, to deal with rising unemployment in the country, the Taliban interim government has also been working towards sending Afghan workers abroad, particularly to Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and perhaps also Russia.⁹¹ Taliban have particularly sought to build strong ties with UAE, which was one of the three countries that had recognised the first Taliban regime in the 1990s, and currently a UAE firm has the contract to manage the Kabul International Airport. The Chairman of Afghan Business Council in Dubai Obaidullah Sader Khail had reportedly stated in February 2023 that “80 percent of the major Afghan traders have homes here and central offices [in UAE] and they have business in 45 to 50 countries including Afghanistan”. He also informed that about 300,000 Afghans are based in Dubai.⁹² In the same month, Acting Taliban Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi also announced the setting up of a consortium of companies that included 14 companies from Afghanistan and some

⁹¹ “Over 60,000 Workers to be Sent Abroad for Work, Official”, *The Kabul Times*, 9 November 2022, at <https://thekabultimes.com/over-60000-workers-to-be-sent-abroad-for-work-official/> (Accessed 3 May 2025); “Plans Underway to Send Afghan Workers Abroad Amid Rising Unemployment”, *Tolo News*, 28 April 2025, at <https://tolonews.com/business-194102> (Accessed 29 April 2025).

⁹² Mitra Majeedy, “80% Afghan Traders Based in UAE: Sader Khail”, *Tolo News*, 26 February 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/business-182244> (Accessed 1 March 2023).

from Iran, Russia and Pakistan. The consortium was supposed to work on an investment plan worth \$1 billion mainly in the field of energy, mining, and infrastructure.⁹³ However, despite offering several incentives, Afghan investors remain wary of making huge capital investments in the manufacturing sector which is supposed to generate much needed employment particularly as hundreds of thousands of Afghans continue to be forced returned and deported from Pakistan and Iran.

⁹³ “Taliban Sets Up Investment Consortium with Firms from Russia, Iran”, *Reuters*, 22 February 2023, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/taliban-sets-up-investment-consortium-with-firms-russia-iran-2023-02-22/> (Accessed 23 February 2023).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

After the initial return of several high profile returnees, the number of returnees had gone down. According to the *Tolo News*, only 34 former government officials had returned to the country between January and May in 2023 compared to 189 between August and December in 2022. Some efforts seem to have been made by the commission to bring clarity to the terms and conditions for the members of the former government returning to the country.⁹⁴ It must be mentioned that senior figures from the previous government had questioned the overall approach as well as the method adopted by the commission to facilitate their return, particularly the requirement to fill up application forms provided by the commission. Taking a strong exception to it, they instead suggested that the commission approach key figures from the previous regime and hold delegation-level talks to first address their concerns.⁹⁵ Mohammad Umar Daudzai, who served in various senior positions in the previous regime including as the Afghan Ambassador

⁹⁴ Banafsha Binesh, “Guidelines Finalized for Figures Returning to Country: Commission”, *Tolo News*, 30 May 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-183582> (Accessed 3 February 2024).

⁹⁵ “Former Officials: We Will Return to Afghanistan, But Not Only by Contact, Should a Delegation Be Sent” [*sic*], *Shamshad News*, 18 May 2023, at <https://shamshadnews.com/en/2023/05/18/former-officials-we-will-return-to-afghanistan-but-not-only-by-contact-should-a-delegation-be-sent/> (Accessed 22 March 2025).

to Pakistan and Iran and Minister of Interior Affairs, was said to have stated:

The Contact Commission's attitude is insulting and does not match our Afghan culture and tradition. Inviting someone is not in that way, the form is available on the internet and you have to fill it. Instead of a form, go and talk to them face to face about their concerns, their addresses are obvious, some of them are in the United Arab Emirates or in Qatar or in Turkey or in the countries of Central Asia, but still no one on the behalf of the IE [Islamic Emirate] has yet met them.⁹⁶

Some of the exiled former Afghan figures have also been of the opinion that the commission must first engage the former leaders already based inside the country before approaching the ones based outside.⁹⁷ The Afghan opposition leaders, senior military and police officers, and thousands of educated Afghan professionals—both male and female, and Pashtun and non-Pashtun, often look at the commission as a mechanism to lure them into the Taliban trap.

In fact, the commission has failed to stop the exodus of educational professionals from the country.⁹⁸ The brain drain continues as the Taliban have yet to create conducive atmosphere particularly for Afghan youth to remain in the country. The background profile of both the acting Taliban minister of education and the acting Taliban minister of higher education does not inspire any confidence or hope in the country's education sector. One is a former head of the Kandahar Ulema Council and the other a military commander who earlier served as the provincial

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Political Figures in Country Ask for Kabul's Engagement", *Tolo News*, 23 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178134> (Accessed 3 May 2025).

⁹⁸ Pia Krishnankutty, "'Professor Exodus': Afghanistan's Brightest Minds Are Fleeing Taliban Rule, Again", *The Print*, 29 August 2022, at <https://theprint.in/world/professor-exodus-afghanistans-brightest-minds-are-fleeing-taliban-rule-again/1101836/> (Accessed 27 August 2024).

police chief of Nangarhar and the governor of Kabul. The position of academic professionals who stayed back remains precarious as several of them, particularly those engaged in the higher education sector, have been either removed and replaced or downgraded in the past three years.

The low enrollment rate of students primarily due to the ban on secondary and higher education for girls has led to the closure of several private educational institutions in the country. As the ultraconservative Kandahar cliché led by Akhundzada continues to exert its control through vice and virtue directorates established in all ministries and departments and ulema councils set up in all the provinces, a systematic effort seems to be on to gradually weed out appointees from the previous regime including in the higher education sector. With the Taliban prioritising the establishment of jihadi madrassas across the country, the future prospect of modern education and institutions of higher learning in the country only appears bleak. The altering of national educational curricula and contents of the textbooks by people notably unqualified to undertake such an exercise on the one hand, and making civil appointees undertake a written test to check their religious credentials on the other, both geared at institutionalising the process of ideological indoctrination, makes the overall employment scenario impossible for the returnee educated professionals.⁹⁹

The declining academic standards and shrinking space for modern education, and restrictions on female education and employment, makes it difficult for the educated Afghans and technocrats to permanently return and bring their families along. On a contrary note, several Taliban leaders are known to have their sons and daughters receiving modern

⁹⁹ “Under The Taliban, Public Employees Must Pass Test of Faith”, RFE/RL, 8 September 2022, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-ministries-tests-islam/32024524.html> (Accessed 3 May 2025).

education outside the country, particularly in Qatar and Pakistan.¹⁰⁰ Some senior leaders had directly or indirectly expressed their support for the reopening of secondary schools and universities for female students.¹⁰¹ Anas Haqqani, a member of the Contact Commission, had reportedly stated while addressing a gathering in Kabul that “in the name of Propagation of Virtue & the Prevention of Vice, we should not cause people to hate Islam, but we should take care of the people in the way we sacrificed for them before.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Praveen Swami, “School Ban for Afghan Girls, But Taliban Leaders’ Daughters Play Football, Study Medicine Abroad”, *The Print*, 13 April 2022, at <https://theprint.in/world/school-ban-for-afghan-girls-but-taliban-leaders-daughters-play-football-study-medicine-abroad/913150/> (Accessed 22 August 2022); “Taliban Official Admits Daughters Go to School as Afghan Teens Are Banned”, *Newsweek*, 10 May 2022, at <https://www.newsweek.com/taliban-afghanistan-girls-education-ban-official-daughter-comment-1705389> (20 May 2025).

¹⁰¹ “Deputy Foreign Minister Calls for Girls’ Education”, *Tolo News*, 22 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178128> (Accessed 20 May 2025); Tamim Shaheer, “Stanekzai Calls for Inclusion of Women in Govt Departments”, *Tolo News*, 7 July 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-178832> (Accessed 8 July 2022); Asma Saayin, “Islamic Emirate Officials Stress Need to Facilitate Female Education”, *Tolo News*, 23 August 2023, at <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-184777> (Accessed 7 October 2023); Naweed Samadi, “Senior Intelligence Official Stresses Importance of Modern Education”, *Tolo News*, 12 January 2024, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186926> (Accessed 13 January 2024); Fidel Rahmati, “Education Key for Afghanistan’s Development, says Abbas Stanikzai”, *The Khaama Press*, 22 February 2024, at <https://www.khaama.com/education-key-for-afghanistans-development-says-abbas-stanikzai/> (Accessed 24 February 2024); “Political System Not Only for Taliban & Clerics, Says Senior Group Official”, *Afghanistan International*, 16 April 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202404166572> (Accessed 18 April 2024); Siyar Sirat, “Haqqani Warns Religious Leaders Against Alienating People from Islam”, *Amu TV*, 7 January 2025, at <https://amu.tv/149146/> (Accessed 8 January 2025).

¹⁰² Banafsha Binesh, “Islamic Emirate’s Suhail Shaheen Clarifies Hijab Rules”, *Tolo News*, 11 May 2022, at <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177965> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

Similarly, realising that madrassa pass outs do not have the required skill sets to run the affairs of the government, former Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlawi Kabir reportedly stated in June 2023: “Besides religious studies, modern sciences should also be added to the madrassa curriculum so that graduates could gain the required knowledge and work for government institutions as well.”¹⁰³ It was also reported that at several places, the local Taliban authorities have converted schools and other training centres into madrassas in their quest to implement Akhundzada’s decree to open jihadi madrassas in all districts.

In the absence of any avenue for formal or modern education beyond sixth grade, the female students, unlike male students who have the option of attending modern schools where both religious and secular subjects are taught, are forced to receive only religious education and only in madrassas, mostly run by ignorant Taliban clerics from Pakistani madrassas. According to UNICEF, an estimated four million Afghan girls would be impacted if the ban continues until 2030.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Nizamuddin Rezahi, “Madrasa Graduates Lack Knowledge to Work for Govt Institutions, Says PM Kabir”, *The Khaama Press*, 15 June 2023, at <https://www.khaama.com/madrasa-graduates-lack-the-potential-to-work-for-govt-institutions-says-pm-kabir/> (Accessed 19 June 2023).

¹⁰⁴ “Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell on the Third Anniversary of the Ban on Secondary Education for Girls in Afghanistan”, UNICEF, Press Release, 21 March 2025, at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/new-school-year-starts-afghanistan-almost-400000-more-girls-deprived-their-right> (Accessed 25 May 2025); “UNAMA Expresses Deep Disappointment as Ban on Girls’ Secondary Education Goes into Fourth Year”, UNAMA, 26 March 2025, at <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-expresses-deep-disappointment-ban-girls%E2%80%99-secondary-education-goes-fourth-year-0#:~:text=UNAMA%20expresses%20its%20deep%20disappointment,%20humanitarian%20and%20economic%20crises> (Accessed 25 May 2025).

Again, in the absence of avenues for higher education and professional courses, Afghan women have turned to running small businesses mostly from their homes. Interestingly, in January 2024, the director of Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), Salma Yousafzai, claimed a four-fold increase in the number of businesswoman in the country over the past three years. She stated that the number of women with business license and membership of the women's chamber has surged from 2,421 to 9,162 since 2020. She added that the number of women doing business without license too has surged from about 52,000 to about 120,000 in the past three years.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, the 'emirate' remains hostage to the personal whims and fancies and illusions and delusions of the Kandahar cliché, which enjoys absolute unaccountability. In the garb of implementing a sharia-based rule across the country, the Akhundzada-led cliché in Kandahar, fearing dilution of its power and hold of clerics over the 'emirate,' continues to exert greater control and authority over 'Kabul affairs.' Their contracted worldview will only further erode the social-cultural and spiritual fabric of the Afghan Nation. On a political plane, the current Taliban regime, like the previous Afghan regimes, including the first Taliban regime of the 1990s, seems to be failing in making timely course corrections. The Taliban hardliners appear bent on executing the old unfinished political and ideological agenda of the 1990s.

¹⁰⁵ Afsana Haidari, "4-fold Rise in Number of Businesswomen in 3 Years: AWCCI", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 18 January 2024, at <https://pajhwok.com/2024/01/18/4-fold-rise-in-number-of-businesswomen-in-3-years-awcci/> (Accessed 2 March 2024); Roshan Noorzai and Zheela Noori, "Small Businesses a Lifeline for Afghan Women Facing Taliban Restrictions", *Voice of America*, 23 April 2024, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/small-businesses-a-lifeline-for-afghan-women-facing-taliban-restrictions/7582044.html> (Accessed 28 April 2024).

However, questions have been raised from within the ‘emirate’. Most recently, the (former) Deputy Foreign Minister, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, a veteran Taliban leader from the 1990s who led the Taliban political office in Doha, had to leave the country in January this year for allegedly warning the Taliban in an audio message against blindly obeying and worshipping or according “prophetic or divine status” to Akhundzada. In his message, he allegedly asked the Taliban officials to reject orders that contradict Islamic teachings. He also allegedly stated directly addressing Akhundzada that “We cannot destroy our country for your sake.” He was said to have further asserted: “You are my leader and Amir al-Mu’minin only as long as you remain on the path of God. If you deviate even one step from God’s path, you are no longer my leader, and I do not recognise you.” He allegedly added that “hundreds like him [Akhundzada] have come and gone in Afghanistan’s history, and others will replace him in the future.” He expressed hope that the country would be led by those who “work in the path of God and His Prophet and for the national interests of the country” and prayed for Afghanistan to be saved from “calamities and hardships.”¹⁰⁶

Following internal disquiet and dissent over growing power concentration in Kandahar, with Acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani too staying outside the country and away from public engagements for almost three months early this year, Akhundzada’s loyalists have increasingly stressed the need to obey and not question the *Amir-ul-Mumineen* and his decisions. Acting Taliban Minister of Education Nadim went to the extent of stating that “Obedience to the Emir [leader] is a command from God and is obligatory” and that “Emir is the caliph of the Prophet, and insulting him is tantamount to insulting the Prophet.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ “Senior Taliban Official Warns Against Blind Obedience To Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada”, *Afghanistan International*, 2 February 2025, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202502023449> (Accessed 4 February 2025).

¹⁰⁷ Ahmad Azizi, “Taliban Minister Equates Criticism of their Leader With Blasphemy”, *Amu TV*, 15 April 2025, at <https://amu.tv/168743/> (Accessed 16 April 2025).

The 'emirate' in its current form cannot be regarded as a political system. It represents a clerical rule with a structured hierarchy but with undefined roles and functions of the various organs of the government and one in which no one trusts no one.¹⁰⁸ An increasingly insecure and insular Kandahar is least likely to devolve policy making and decision making powers to the political leadership in Kabul, which means the political fissures within the 'emirate' and the gap between the regime and the people will likely remain and grow in the coming times, opening avenues for political purges and power realignments within the 'emirate'. Unfortunately, four years into power, the political ideologues in Kandahar have yet to start drawing basic lessons from the past. The political wear and tear caused due to persistent internal friction is bound to sooner or later lead to either restructuring or distortion of the 'emirate'.

On the whole, the return of former Afghan government officials, civil and military, may have served good optics for the Taliban but it cannot necessarily be regarded as increased endorsement of the 'emirate' and its policies. It has not led to, and is neither meant to lead to, a grand reunion of Afghan forces representing conflicting ideologies and contrasting worldviews. The regular reports of violation of 'general amnesty' by the Taliban members, particularly in the case of mid and low ranking former military personnel, several of whom have been forced returned or deported via the Contact Commission, have exposed the limitations to the implementation of Akhundzada's amnesty decree on the ground. There are very few instances where the Taliban interim government has retained or employed former Afghan officials and professionals at higher (not necessarily senior) levels. In such a scenario, the commission cannot act as a bridge between the Taliban regime and the Afghan people, whether outside or inside the country, unless the regime itself acts as a bridge connecting various ethnicities and identities that make up the Afghan Nation.

¹⁰⁸ "Emir's Tyranny Causes Islamic Societies' Decline, Says Ex-Taliban Official", *Afghanistan International*, 15 June 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202406156092> (Accessed 15 June 2024); "Former Taliban Ambassador Insists on Acknowledging Mistakes", *Afghanistan International*, 20 June 2024, at <https://www.afintl.com/en/202406209682> (Accessed 22 June 2024).

Annexure - I

National Reconciliation, General Amnesty, and National Stability Law

(Unofficial English translation)

Official Gazette, publishing date: 13 Qaus 1387 Serial No: (965)

Whereas jihad, resistance and the rightful struggles of our people to defend the religion and country is the splendid achievement in the history of the country and are considered as our distinguished national glories, and whereas the realization of national reconciliation policy and ending of war and bloodshed, strengthening of national unity and building of trust among all segments of society is crucial in this juncture of time, therefore the following is approved to achieve the above:

Article 1:

This law is adopted for the purpose of strengthening the reconciliation and national stability, ensuring the supreme interests of the country, ending rivalries and building confidence among the belligerent parties, based on their immunity in case of adherence to the Constitution and other enforced laws of the country.

Article 2:

To strengthen peace, stability and ending the war, the National Parliament of Afghanistan calls on all armed groups in opposition to the government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to join the process of strengthening the stability and national reconciliation of Afghanistan and participate in strengthening the system and reconstruction of the country.

Article 3:

(1) All political factions and hostile parties who were involved in a way or another in hostilities before establishing of the Interim Administration

shall be included in the reconciliation and general amnesty program for the purpose of reconciliation among different segments of society, strengthening of peace and stability and starting of new life in the contemporary political history of Afghanistan, and enjoy all their legal rights and shall not be legally and judicially prosecuted.

(2) Those individuals and groups who are still in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and cease enmity after the enforcement of this resolution and join the process of national reconciliation, and respect the Constitution and other laws and abide them shall enjoy the benefits of this resolution.

(3) The provisions set forth in clause (1) and (2) of this article shall not affect the claims of individuals against individuals based up on Haqullabd (rights of people) and criminal offences in respect of individual crimes.

Article 4:

(1) Those people who are under prosecution due to crimes against internal and external security of the country shall not enjoy the benefits of this law.

(2) Those people who are sentenced to crimes against internal and external security of the country shall be forgiven or their punishment mitigated by separate decrees, according to the situation and based on recommendations and guarantee of the Commission for Consolidation of Peace, in case of they commit, not to resume their activities against the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Article 5:

In order to help end the violence and distrust between the government and armed opposition factions, and to strengthening stability and national reconciliation, an extraordinary commission shall be appointed by the National Assembly to prepare the grounds for their joining the process of strengthening stability and national reconciliation, in cooperation with the Commission for Consolidation of Peace.

Article 6:

This law shall be enforce from the date of endorsement and published in the official gazette.

Source: ICC Legal Tools Database, at <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/7825c2/pdf/>.

*Annexure - II***Bill or Charter of Commission for Contact with Afghan Personalities and Their Return to the Country**

(Tentative English Translation)

Article 1:

The Commission for Contacting Afghan Personalities and Their Return to the Country is of great trust, value and importance to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The commission, which is part of the Political Commission of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan,

And under the chairmanship of the Honorable Sheikh Al-Hadith Shahabuddin Dilawar, Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, and with the membership of the Honorable Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honorable Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, Acting Minister of Information and Culture, the Honorable Sheikh Muhammad Khalid Hanafi, Acting Minister of Encouraging Righteousness and Preventing Evil, Qari Fasihuddin Fitrati, Chief of Staff of the Ministry of National Defense, Mullah Abdul Haq Wasiq, Chief of Intelligence, Mohammad Anas Haqqani, Maulvi Zia-ur-Rehman Madani and Maulvi Abdul Rahman Mansoor will carry out the following duties in the field of communication with Afghan personalities and their return to the country

Article 2:

This commission will collect complete information about all those political and military figures and establish their whereabouts, who, before or after the recent developments in the country, have gone abroad due to a feeling of insecurity, or who are inside the country but oppose the Islamic Emirate.

Article 3:

This commission has a special secretariat to carry out all technical and administrative matters and provide other necessary facilities

Article 4:

The general duties of the Secretariat include preparing lists of Afghan personalities residing abroad, managing all administrative, financial and technical matters, arranging cards or lines of confidence for returnees, providing temporary or short-term accommodation for returning Afghan political and military personalities, and other related matters.

Article 5:

In order to facilitate the contact of Afghan personalities with the Commission, the Commission's relations officer shall publish special contact numbers and other easy and secure ways of contact, and shall share the flow of calls with the Commission's leadership and provide the caller with proper guidance in accordance with the provisions of the bill.

Article 6:

This commission will identify and prepare lists of those Afghans who, after receiving assurances about their safety, are interested in returning to normal life in their country, and will contact them to return to the country and prepare the ground for their return.

Article 7:

This commission will issue a special card to any Afghan individual who, after receiving assurances, returns to the country and chooses a normal and peaceful life, by which his life and reputation will be protected and he will enjoy complete security like other compatriots.

Article 8:

Individuals and people who are returned to the country by this commission for a safe life; based on the general amnesty decree of the Islamic Emirate, no one has the right to detain or torture them because of their civil and military record duties. If returnees are threatened by someone or an organization, they can inform the commission, and the commission will take legal action against violators.

Article 9:

If anyone has a personal dispute with the aforementioned individuals, they can refer to this commission, and the commission will refer the case of both parties to the judicial authorities through the Supreme Court. Apart from this, no one has the right to do anything arbitrary.

Article 10:

If there is concern about the safety of compatriots who have returned to the country through the mediation of this commission, bodyguards can be assigned to them in order to ensure their security, based on the commission's view and within the framework of intelligence.

Article 11:

Those returning Afghans who want to work in the private sector or who have previously worked in it will be provided with possible work facilities by the Islamic Emirate and encouraged to invest in the country.

Article 12:

All civil servants who are returned to normal and peaceful life in the country by this commission; including ministers, deputies, general and ordinary heads, male and female employees, members of parliament and senators, can enjoy the above-mentioned privileges.

Article 13:

All military commanders, army, intelligence, police, air force and local police commanders and personnel who are returned to normal life by this commission may also enjoy the above-mentioned privileges.

Article 14:

Within the country, if someone opposes the Islamic Emirate and stops opposing it and wants to live a normal and peaceful life in the country in the future, they will also enjoy the above-mentioned privileges.

Article 15:

The spokesperson of this commission shall reflect the activities of the commission and share the activities of the commission with the media and shall strive to have constructive publications in this sector.

End

Source: Inamullah Samangani, Head of Information and Culture of Kandahar, “تدويع و ناغفا’ ياد تي صخش اب سامت نوي سيمک ده يال” [Bill on Contact Commission with Afghan Personalities and Their Return to the Country], X (formerly Twitter), 21 May 2022, 5:40 PM, at <https://x.com/HabibiSamangani/status/1527985135680991232> (Accessed 15 March 2025). In Persian.

*Annexure - III***The Charter of the Supreme Council of National Resistance
For the Salvation of Afghanistan**

In the Name of Allah Almighty, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate

Praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds and may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon the most honored of messengers Muhammed (s.a.v.), upon his family and all companions which are good enough and immaculate from the beginning until the day of the Judgment.

“And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affairs are guided by consultation among themselves, and who spend from what we have provided them,” (Surah ash-shura, Ayat, 38).

Introduction

In the last two decades, Afghanistan with the help of the international community achieved considerable progress in numerous aspects of the life of its citizens. It expanded its international relations; creating the basis for economic, cultural and political cooperation with its neighbors and international partners. Of course, the opportunities which were presented to Afghanistan were not used optimally, because of the shortcomings of the country's leadership. However, a small circle of government insiders acting in combination with powerful international representatives betrayed the people of Afghanistan. They legitimized the Taliban terrorist group in the Doha negotiations process and opened the way for the Taliban back to grab power on the August 15, 2021 the entire system and the Islamic Republic collapsed. A disaster unfolded, impacting all aspects of life in Afghanistan. The economy collapsed and the country's nascent economic system was destroyed. The

education system was disrupted. Women and girls were excluded from education and from employment. Poverty became widespread in the country. Freedom of expression and the media were severely restricted. The Taliban, with their extremist interpretation of Islam, have imposed an iron despotism. They responded to the mildest protest or opposition with violent crackdowns, murder and bullets.

However, the Taliban's violent actions have failed to suppress resistance, protest and popular opposition. Instead, protests and acts of civil resistance, especially by women, have expanded across the country over time. Meanwhile, the international community's insistence on seeking a peaceful solution to this crisis has not yielded any results.

We respect the civil protests staged by women and men as well as the stand taken by brave resistance fighters across the country against the Taliban attempt to impose themselves by force. Our prayers are with the martyred who sacrificed their lives on the resistance frontlines and with all those killed by Taliban. We pray for the recovery of all the wounded. We honor all the martyred of years of Jihad and Resistance, as they defended freedom, independence and the territorial integrity of the country. We respect all the families of martyred, the refugees and all those who have been affected by the crisis. We appreciate all the efforts made to establish a just and democratic system. Nonetheless, the crisis still continues, and we are still at the beginning of a long path of struggle to save the country from terrorists and to free the people from their power monopoly and tyranny.

We are grateful to the international community for the fact that they have stood by the people of Afghanistan. We appreciate that they have not recognized the despotic and illegitimate rule of the Taliban. Conditions set by the international community for recognition of a new system in Afghanistan include the establishment of an inclusive transitional administration, and restoration of human rights, constitutionality and popular democratic accountability. However, we do not consider this position of the international community towards the Taliban adequate. Therefore we call on the international community to base their stance towards the Taliban group on the UN Security Council resolution number 2513 dated March 10, 2020, and the communique of the Geneva international conference on Afghanistan

on November 23-24, 2020. In these resolutions the importance of dialogue among the people of Afghanistan, to establish the country's future system and government based on the will of the people, expressed through elections was emphasized. These key documents provide for participation of all ethnicities, religious groups, women and youths. They reject the return of the Taliban's emirate regime and the associated terrorist threat to global peace and security. The resolutions emphasis the importance of eliminating terrorist threats to global peace and security.

We realize the depth and scale of the political, social and economic crisis precipitated by Taliban rule. We have considered our religious, national and historic mission to rescue the country from complete destruction. We hope to ensure effective cooperation and coordination among political parties and current and national and prominent public figures in the joint task of liberating the country and its people from the current crisis. Therefore, we formed a coalition under name of the "Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan" on May 17, 2022. We have now adopted and agreed a set of bylaws under the title of "Charter of the Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan", comprising this introduction and the following articles:

CHAPTER ONE

General Provisions

Article 1

The name of this political coalition shall be the "Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan which, hereinafter, shall be referred to as the "Supreme Council of National Resistance shortly SCNR"

Article 2

The name of this document is the "Charter of the Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan" which hereinafter shall be referred to as the "Charter of the Supreme Council of National Resistance."

Article 3

Proportional and balanced representation of ethnic groups in membership and management of SCNR bodies shall be observed by ensuring the presence of effective figures from these groups in this Council.

CHAPTER TWO

Foundations and Values

Article 4

We are alarmed by developments in Afghanistan, including the expansion of extremism and terrorism, the pattern of enforced disappearances and summary executions and the country becoming a battlefield for proxy wars. We note that there is a need for comprehensive action to counter these developments;

Article 5

We acknowledge the need for the unity of political forces for the sake of protecting our independence, safeguarding territorial integrity, defending the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, including women and men;

Article 6

Considering the egregious political, security, and economic faults of the ruling teams in the past twenty years (2001-2021) which turned unprecedented opportunities into challenges; reviewing them as well as learning lessons from the intentional and unintentional mistakes of the last 20 years and seriously trying to prevent their repetition;

Article 7

We highlight the failed experience of all the previous political regimes of Afghanistan in terms of respecting the people's right to exercise their will in decision-making and micro-management by the center of provinces and districts; and we emphasize the need for fundamental change to the structure of the country's political system;

Article 8

We believe that if we use the country's God-gifted natural wealth and huge human capacity optimally and fairly, they can provide for self-reliance, economic growth, and welfare of the people;

Article 9

We believe that our dear homeland Afghanistan shall become a secure and stable, free and prosperous and just country where the fundamental rights of its citizens rooted in Islamic teachings and human rights values are ensured and its citizens enjoy equal rights and responsibilities in real life and before the law, free from ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious discrimination;

Article 10

We believe that Afghanistan should become a locus for cooperation and regional connectivity. It should respect the United Nations charter, the Islamic Cooperation Organization charter, Islamic human rights declaration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and all covenants and conventions that Afghanistan has adopted. Afghanistan's international relations should be governed by the principles of mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs of other countries, good neighborliness, peaceful coexistence and pursuit of a positive and active policy of neutrality;

Article 11

Afghanistan shall try to announce at an international conference that it wishes to have no problems with any country and wishes to emerge as a neutral country in the arena of international politics and that there is a need for the international community to give necessary guarantees of non-interference in Afghanistan's affairs;

Article 12

We believe that an army is a prerequisite for a modern state, enabling a legitimate government to exercise its monopoly over the use of force. We believe that the rebuilding of the army, police, and national security institutions is urgently required for the integrity and stability of

Afghanistan and this rebuilding should be carried out in a way that makes these institutions strong. It should involve recruitment of the former military and security cadres and forces that are honest, committed, and loyal to the homeland. The technical and professional capabilities of these cadres and forces should be strengthened so they can play an appropriate role in accomplishing the mission to maintain national sovereignty, territorial integrity and rule of law in the country;

Article 13

We emphasize that the Taliban, especially after they usurped the government, have committed multiple egregious violations of human rights norms and committed crimes against humanity including torture, summary execution, enforced disappearance, forced eviction of defenseless people from their homes and places of living, expropriating and distributing people's lands and properties to their own followers; we believe that their inhumane acts should not remain unpunished and that the world and international human rights organizations should not stay silent. The Taliban should be held accountable for the consequences of their crimes and victims compensated. Meanwhile Taliban actions shall be considered devoid of any legal standing and their administration shall be considered lacking in legitimacy.

CHAPTER THREE

Goals and Visions

Political System

Article 14

We believe that sovereignty shall be returned to the people through the establishment of a system and government based on the collective will as manifest through transparent and fair elections.

Article 15

A non-centralized parliamentary Islamic Republic should be consolidated, which features a parliamentary system contributing to the flourishing of strong parties, independence of the judiciary, rule of law, attainment of fundamental rights by all citizens, safeguarding human

life and freedom of expression, and in which government, leaders and administrators are held to account for their actions.

The parliamentary system should be based on fair elections with safeguards to ensure that all ethnic groups residing in Afghanistan's provinces have balanced representation, proportionate to their population. Within this system, central government, municipal authorities, provincial and district governors should be elected.

Article 16

In this system members of local (provincial, district and village) councils shall be elected through direct elections,

Article 17

Provincial and district governors can be elected directly or indirectly. The manner of the election of provincial and district governors shall be specified by law.

Article 18

Provincial and district councils, consistent with the authority of the National Assembly shall have the mandate to approve local budgets, draft and approve development bills and plans for management of education affairs, the promotion of native language and culture, public health, women's empowerment, local public infrastructure, local public transportation, levying and collecting local tax and protection of the environment as well as overseeing execution of functions of local authorities, and will enjoy constitutional protection.

Article 19

Public participation shall be ensured while considering ethnic, religious and cultural diversity and balance and all forms of discrimination against any citizen shall be prohibited;

Article 20

Authorities of local (provincial, district and village) councils shall be regulated by law in view of the contents of this charter.

Article 21

We consider it necessary to revise the country's administrative units/divisions based on the successful experiences of countries in the region and the world at large and based on the geographical, economic, and cultural realities of our dear homeland.

Article 22

We support an electoral system that can simultaneously ensure fair party, ethnic, geographical, and gender representation and provide an opportunity for independent candidates to compete.

Article 23

The SCNR considers the extremist interpretation of Islam – which constitutes the ideology of the Taliban and many other terrorist groups in the Islamic world – contrary to the Islamic teachings based on the opinions of Islamic scholars and credible religious authorities. The SCNR stresses the need for countering extremism and terrorism in all their ideological and cultural aspects and forms, to prevent exploitation of religious teachings. The SCNR recognizes the need to prevent Afghanistan being turned into a safe haven for extremism and terrorism. The SCNR will contribute to regional and world peace and security. It stresses the need to fight against any force that denies the legitimate freedoms and fundamental rights of the people of Afghanistan and denies their democratic sovereignty.

Article 24

We emphasize the need to defend national interests, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity based on social justice among ethnic groups and citizens, fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, especially women, based on Islamic values and the universal declaration of human rights.

Article 25

We emphasize the need to ensure social justice, fair distribution of resources, national opportunities, the fair and proportionate participation of all ethnic groups of Afghanistan in political power and governance

based on merit and within the framework of the political system articulated in this charter.

Article 26

The role of true scholars in explaining religious teachings and removing the tarnish of prejudice, deviation and extremism from their understanding is considered one of the vital needs of society. We call upon our true scholars to play this role to the utmost of their ability.

Article 27

We support active participation of women in all areas such as education, higher education, and work, economic, political, social and cultural activities.

Article 28

Recognizing the critical capabilities and capacities of youths and in addition to emphasizing the need for effective investments in them, the SCNR is committed to advancing the role and status of the young generation and educated and specialized cadres in today's management and executive affairs of the SCNR and after the victory. The SCNR considers this as an essential step in the implementation of the spirit of this charter.

Article 29

We believe that our people's linguistic and cultural diversity must be respected by observing the principle of justice and equality of value among ethnic groups. Furthermore, we consider it of the utmost importance that those values be reflected in national documents and symbols such as the national anthem, national flag, emblems, medals, bank notes, national days and personalities.

Article 30

We are committed to the principle of collective wisdom, institutional approach, and decision-making based on the principle of the participation of all ethnicities of the country in all leadership and management fields.

Article 31

For the purpose of balanced and sustainable development, modernizing agriculture, alleviating poverty, creating jobs, and ensuring self-reliance with a productive economic approach, an economic system will be adopted that will provide a social safety net which prevents the deepening of the divide between poverty and wealth;

Article 32

An economy-driven policy will be pursued in foreign relations based on the priorities of Afghanistan as a landlocked country with rich natural resources that rely on regional and international cooperation in the fields of agriculture and livestock, trade and transit, excavation of mines, tapping of energy resources, human resources and the potential of Afghanistan's geo-economic location;

CHAPTER FOUR**Priorities of the Supreme Council of National Resistance****Article 33**

Efforts to establish lasting peace and ensure political stability of the country are the top priority of the SCNR; the SCNR prefers negotiation with the Taliban as a way out of the current dire situation of the country, as well as the formation of an inclusive transitional government to pave the way for the establishment of a popularly elected system and government, and all its members welcome in a united and coordinated fashion any opportunity that can contribute to achieving national reconciliation through genuine dialogue among various groups of the people of Afghanistan.

Article 34

If the Taliban do not submit to the rightful demands of the country's citizens and the world and refuse genuine negotiations to establish an inclusive transitional government and then an elected system and government, the SCNR will begin practical action in response to the growing demands of supporters and followers of parties, and personalities that are members of the SCNR as well as the free and

defiant people of Afghanistan to expand national resistance and uprisings across the country till the toppling of the illegitimate Taliban government and achieving enduring peace and stability in an elected system and government.

Article 35

Affirming the people's just demands and actions to secure their rights, the SCNR supports the resistance fronts in all parts of the country, especially the National Resistance Front, that have been defending their life, property, family, honor and land against the oppression, aggression and imposition of illegitimate and monopolistic and supremacist government of the Taliban and view resistance as the legitimate right of those defenders.

Article 36

In order to realize the goals and principles enshrined in this charter, policies will be developed from the SCNR and each of the Leadership Council members shall call on their party members and followers to coordinate and align their activities based on those policies.

Article 37

Each of the members as the head of a party, a group or a political personality, commensurate to their abilities, shall make serious efforts for the realization and implementation of policies and programs of the SCNR, within the framework of this charter;

Article 38

The SCNR supports freedom of the media and freedom of expression and will coordinate its media activities in view of the goals and visions enshrined in this charter.

Article 39

The SCNR shall consult and forge an understanding with all effective political parties, groups and personalities, Islamic scholars, women and youths working inside and outside the country for rescuing the country from the existing situation, and welcomes their coordination and cooperation with the SCNR or joining it.

Article 40

Afghanistan with the help of international community witnessed significant progress in numerous aspects of life in the last twenty years. All of these achievements have either been eliminated after the coming of the Taliban or are in the process of being eliminated. The SCNR tries to forge effective and purposeful relations with the international community by attracting the cooperation of the country's committed political activists and diplomats across the world, to inform them about the harm caused by Taliban rule to Afghanistan and the threat posed to peace and security of the region and the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Structure of the SCNR and the scope of work for its sub-structures.

Article 41

In order to realize the goals enshrined in this charter, the following bodies have been established within the framework of the SCNR:

1. Constituent Assembly
2. High Council
3. Leadership Council
4. Executive Council
5. Secretariat

1. Constituent Assembly

Article 42

The Constituent Assembly comprises personalities that participated in person, virtually or through their representatives in the historic meeting, on May 17, 2022, chaired by the honorable Ustad Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf and hosted by Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum. Leaders and

officials of the following parties and institutions were present in which the SCNR was formed with the approval of the overall principles of its charter and issue of a declaration: (Islamic Party of Afghanistan, Party of Jamiat-e- Islami of Afghanistan, National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, Islamic Dawah Party of Afghanistan, People's Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan, National Congress Party of Afghanistan, National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, the Great Eastern Council, the Great Kandahar Council, the Great Northern Council, the Movement of protecting the values of great Jihad and resistance of the people of Afghanistan).

Article 43

The duties of the Constituent Assembly shall end upon the formation of the Leadership Council from among the members of this Assembly. The name of the members of the Constituent Assembly will be registered in the archives of the SCNR as the founders of an historically important body.

Article 44

All the members of the Constituent Assembly shall be members of the High Council.

2. High Council

Article 45

The High Council is the highest decision-making authority of the SCNR.

Article 46

The High Council shall comprise of Leadership Council, Executive Council including Secretariat and heads of the committees, leaders of effective political parties and groups, political personalities, Islamic scholars, civil society activists, active women and youths.

Article 47

Qualifications of members of the High Council;

1. Good reputation;
2. Effective and inspiring personality;
3. Accepts the charter of the SCNR and commit to working towards the realization of its values and goals;

Article 48

The High Council shall have no less than 101 and no more than 201 members. The membership can only be increased beyond this by decision of the Leadership Council.

Article 49

Authorities of the High Council are as follows:

1. Amend and approve the charter of the SCNR;
2. Approve programs and policies proposed by the Leadership Council;
3. Take decisions about the major policies of the SCNR such as negotiations, reconciliation and armed resistance;
4. Other duties included in this charter.

Article 50

The High Council will be constituted with due regard to balance and proportion among the parties and members.

Article 51

Applications of new candidates for membership of the High Council shall be submitted at the suggestion of at least one of the Leadership Council members and shall be subject to the agreement of the SCNR.

Article 52

All decisions of the High Council shall be made in a consultative manner and effort shall be made to ensure they are made unanimously. In the absence of unanimity, decisions should be made by a vote of two thirds of the members present.

Article 53

The term of office of High Council members shall be for two years.

Article 54

The routine meetings of the High Council shall be held once a month and extraordinary meetings shall be held at the request of one quarter of members or by proposal of the Leadership Council.

Article 55

The rules and procedures of the High Council in the light of this charter are laid out in a separate document.

Article 56**3. The Leadership Council**

The leadership council shall be the highest decision-making authority in the SCNR after the High Council. It shall comprise leaders of effective political parties and personalities and a member to represent of independent figures.

Article 57

If the Leadership Council deems it necessary, they shall decide to increase in the number of the leadership council members.

Article 58

The Leadership Council shall elect one of its members as the head of the Leadership Council for a period of one month.

Article 59

The authorities of Leadership Council members are as follows:

1. Coordinate the affairs of the SCNR and develop and approve policies and programs of the SCNR;
2. Elect members of the High Council and determine the agenda of its meetings;
3. Develop coordination between various institutions of the SCNR;
4. Create an executive council to monitor the actions of the Secretariat and committees;
5. Appoint and dismiss the administrative board of the secretariat, administrative board of committees and boards, approve their rules of procedure, plans and programs;
6. Make decisions on urgent issues and direct the SCNR response to them;

The decisions of the Leadership Council relating to strategic policies and amendment of the charter are effective after the approval of the High Council.

Article 60

The executive board including its head and deputies shall be appointed from among the members of Leadership Council. Likewise, the head of Secretariat and committees shall be appointed from among the members of the Leadership Council or other figures whom the Leadership Council may co-opt. The head of Secretariat and the head of the Strategic Communication Committee shall participate in meetings and programs of the Leadership and Executive Councils.

Article 61

The Leadership Council can establish working groups, temporary committees or think tanks for some of its activities.

Article 62

The Leadership Council is obligated to present a report of its acts as well as its plans and proposals in every meeting of the SCNR.

Article 63

The routine meetings of the Leadership Council shall be held once a week and extraordinary meetings shall be held at the request of one quarter of members.

Article 64

The rules and procedures of the Leadership Council in the light of this charter are laid out in a separate document.

Article 65**4. The Executive Council**

In order to manage and to lead the committees more effectively, the Executive Council is established at the suggestion of the Leadership Council and with the approval of the High Council.

Article 66

The Executive Council is responsible for the daily affairs of the committees and implementation of the council's policies and is accountable to the Leadership Council.

Article 67

The Executive Council including the head, deputies and the head of Secretariat and committees shall be appointed by the Leadership Council.

Article 68

The head and deputies of the Executive Council shall be appointed by the Leadership Council for a period of six months. The management board of each committee, including a chair, deputies and a secretary,

shall be nominated by the Leadership Council and subject to the approval of the High Council. Appointment is for a period of one year and their terms can be extended for another one year.

Article 69

The committees of Executive Council are as follows:

1. Strategic Communication Committee
2. Foreign Relations Committee
3. Political Committee
4. Defense and Security Affairs Committee
5. Information Committee
6. Human Rights and Civil Society Affairs Committee
7. Peace and Negotiation Committee
8. Islamic Scholars Committee
9. Women's Affairs Committee
10. Youth Affairs Committee
11. Culture, Education and Higher Education affairs Committee

Article 70

All committees are under the control of the Executive Council and is managed by its board of directors (board of directors chief, deputy and secretary), and is accountable to the Leadership Council.

Article 71

The Executive Council suggests the number of committees and their members, as well developing a new committee or the cancellation of an existing committee, to the Leadership Council for approval.

Article 72

The Executive Council prepares list of duties of the Executive Council and committees and submits to the Leadership Council for approval.

5. Secretariat**Article 73**

The Secretariat is accountable to the Leadership Council and provides the necessary facilities for the High Council, Leadership Council and Executive Council.

Article 74

The head and other members of the administrative board shall be proposed by the head in view of its duties and approved by the Leadership Council as needed.

Article 75

The Secretariat shall be managed by its head and led by the Leadership Council. It shall prepare its rules or procedures and present them to the Leadership Council for approval and report to the Leadership Council.

CHAPTER SIX**Miscellaneous Provisions****Article 76**

Efforts shall be made by the signatories of this charter to enshrine in Afghanistan's future constitution what is enshrined in this charter with regards to the future political system of Afghanistan.

Article 77

During the transition, chapter two of the (2004) constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan shall be effective except for the articles that contradict and are in conflict with the content of this charter.

Article 78

The cost of activities of the SCNR shall be financed from the payments made by the Leadership Council members and contributions of its followers.

A statement of account of the Council's income and expenses shall be prepared by the Secretariat and shall be approved by the Leadership Council.

Article 79

This charter which has been prepared with an introduction, six chapters and seventy nine articles has become effective upon the approval by the Leadership Council on July 29, 2022, and its amendments approved on May 23, 2024 in the meeting of High Council.

Note:

It is hereby noted that the Islamic Dawah Party of Afghanistan proposes deferring the discussion and decisions about the nature and structure of the country's political system. Similarly, the Islamic Party does not agree with the mention of the word "noncentralized" in connection with the country's future political system. And the National Congress Party emphasized that the political system favored in this charter should be "federal."

In addition, after the establishment of the SCNR, the Justice and Freedom Party of Afghanistan, led by Ustad Sarwar Danesh, officially became a member of the Council.

Source: "The Charter of the Supreme Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan", National Resistance Council for the Salvation of Afghanistan, 14 August 2023, at <https://nrcafgghanistan.org/en/vision/the-charter-of-the-national-resistance-council-for-the-salvation-of-afghanistan/> (Accessed 3 June 2025).

The Taliban's unwritten and ambiguous 'general amnesty' neither implies political integration nor national reconciliation. It's about total control, and about who gets to stay and who gets to come back, and on what terms. In the absence of any credible political opposition, and with more and more Afghans being deported or forced to return to the country, including the exiled members of the previous regime, the Taliban's Contact Commission will remain in business in the foreseeable future.

However, reports of violation of 'general amnesty' by the Taliban members, particularly in the case of mid and low ranking former military personnel, have exposed the limitations to the implementation of the amnesty decree across the country.

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