



## THE ROOTS OF THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, Afghanistan has been plunged into the worst humanitarian crisis it has ever suffered in the 21st century. According to a recent statement by Dr. Ramiz Alakbarov, UN Deputy Special Representative for the Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator, the number of people suffering from acute hunger rose from 14 million in July 2021 to 23 million in March 2022, making Afghanistan the country with the highest number of people in emergency food insecurity in the world. Nearly 95% of the Afghan population to some extent is exposed to malnourishment leading to immediate or deferred health issues. 8.7 million Afghans, including 3.5 million children, are facing emergency levels of food insecurity. The situation is further aggravated by drought and the declining capabilities of the public services to alleviate the situation.

One of the reasons that led to such a severe humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan is the collapse of the public service that occurred after the withdrawal of NATO troops from the country. Over the last two decades, Afghanistan had been highly dependent on foreign funds that practically sustained many essentially important public services, including public health. For instance, the previous U.S.-backed government had relied on foreign funds for around 75% of its public spending, and 80% of the state budget was made of transfers from U.S. and other donors. With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, these funds were cut off. In addition, the administration of President Joe Biden took the decision to freeze Afghan government reserves kept in U.S. financial institutions. Nearly \$7 billion of Afghanistan reserves are blocked in the U.S. due to the sanctions against the Taliban, in spite of numerous calls by the U.N. and different charity institutions to unblock accounts. Besides that, because of the distrustful stance of the U.S. towards the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan potential providers of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan are often

unable to make financial transfers to Afghanistan. The financial institutions, through which the movement of assets is carried out, often refuse to undertake operations because of the risks associated with the sanctions on the Taliban.

On the other hand, the Taliban government does not seem to have taken steps to gain international trust and legitimize its rule. Since taking power, Taliban authorities have executed former government officials, arbitrarily arrested activists and journalists, and practiced widespread violations of women's rights. In spite of international pressure, Afghan authorities continue gross systematic violations of human rights and fall short of their commitments. For instance, after taking over Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban practically banned secondary education for girls. Although secondary schools reopened for girls in some provinces due to strong community pressure, in March 2022 the Taliban announced that all girls' high schools and those schools with female students above sixth grade would stay closed until the next order. Shortly after coming to power, the Taliban de facto deprived women of their right to work and disbanded the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Probably the most alarming fact is that there is a notable systematic increase in basic human rights violations and abuse against Afghans since the start of Taliban rule in the country. Unfortunately, the further continuation of these dynamics leaves less and less space for at least some acceptance and consensus between the Taliban and the western world in general.

In the meantime, we can observe the Taliban government being reluctant in seeking resources for resolving acute humanitarian problems. For instance, since 2001, the U.S. has provided military assistance worth nearly \$88 billion to Afghanistan. Two-thirds of \$88 billion were non-material spending and nearly one-third went toward material spending, including nearly 600,000 small arms and their ammunition. During 2017-2019, the U.S. supplied the Afghan military forces with

7,000 machine guns, and more than 20,000 grenades. From 2019 to 2021 alone Afghanistan has received more than 18 million rounds of ammunition. Although much of the equipment, aircraft, vehicles, and weaponry were either purposefully destroyed or removed from Afghanistan before the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO allies, the Taliban eagerly took over everything that was left. The market value of all military equipment and weaponry could be estimated at hundreds of millions or even billions of USD. However, we have not seen any serious attempts by the Taliban to convert excessive leftover weaponry into financial or other resources to cope with the humanitarian catastrophe in the country. This fact does not rule out that the Taliban could generate extra revenues from selling surplus military equipment and spend them on other purposes. Moreover, poor control from the center in Kabul and the possible division between the central leadership and the military commanders in peripheries might lead to the smuggling of military equipment jeopardizing regional security.

In general, we can summarize that there is a diminishing likelihood for the common grounds to be found between Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and western countries. Throughout the first eight months of governance, the Taliban have shown their indifference toward the acute humanitarian crisis and that their priorities of governance are not compatible with the basic requirements set by the U.S. and other western countries. Therefore, the Taliban's loss of credibility and acceptance by the western world and the global community reduces the options available for the transfer of humanitarian aid to Afghans suffering from the worst humanitarian crisis in their recent history. In this light, we can expect that adjacent Central Asia countries will play an increasingly important role as an area for the direct transfer of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. At the same time, the exacerbating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan should also be viewed as a source of soaring risks for regional security as well.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev chaired a meeting on introducing changes and additions to the Constitution. The Working Group prepared necessary changes developed by eminent legal scholars, Human Rights Commissioner, Parliament representatives and government bodies' officials. The Head of State pointed to the importance of including all the proposed initiatives aimed at the serious political transformation of the society in the prepared draft changes and additions to the Constitution. President Tokayev identifies this model as the Second Republic (Kazinform, 22.04.2022).
- Brussels is drawing up plans for the sixth package of sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. The new package is set to include a partial ban on Russian oil imports, and may also target more Russian banks by expelling them from the SWIFT international payments system. In the previous five packages, the EU has backed a ban on coal and removed a number of Russian banks from SWIFT in an effort to ratchet up economic pressure on Moscow (Politico.eu, 22.04.2022).
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev received Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Türkiye to the Kyrgyz Republic Ahmet Sadık Dogan. The parties discussed the current agenda of the Kyrgyz-Turkish strategic cooperation and noted the current high level of the Kyrgyz-Turkish political dialogue at all levels. The sides also noted the importance of the ongoing work of the Kyrgyz side in the framework of developing cooperation in the Organization of Turkic States and the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TurkPA) (Kabar, 19.04.2022).
- President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov visited Azerbaijan within the framework of the official visit and had a meeting with the President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev. The Presidents signed a Memorandum on the establishment of the Interstate Council on April 20. According to the document, the two countries will further deepen and expand bilateral cooperation to bring partnerships to a qualitatively new level, in order to strengthen comprehensive cooperation in political and economic areas (Kabar, 20.04.2022).
- On April 22, Russia and its Central Asian partners conducted the fifth meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the "Central Asia – Russia" format was held via videoconference. The agenda of the meeting were issues of multilateral cooperation between the parties, including mechanisms for maintaining stability in Central Asia, countering terrorist and extremist threats, and ensuring accelerated economic growth and food security. Representatives of the participating countries outlined the current state of bilateral and multilateral cooperation and a vision of its expansion (UzReport, 23.04.2022).
- Japan and the U.S. agreed to hold the Resolute Dragon exercises in Hokkaido this fall. The two-week exercises are expected to involve more than 4,000 personnel including Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force and the U.S. Marine Corps. One of the goals of the exercises is to strengthen coordination with the U.S. Marines' expeditionary advanced base operations, which entail setting up close to an enemy threat (Asia.nikkei.com, 24.04.2022).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- In 2021, Kazakhstan generated over four billion kilowatt-hours of electricity through renewable energy facilities. Around 1.8 billion kWh of the energy came from wind, 1.6 billion kWh from solar. In 2022, the output indicators will be much higher due to the commissioning of 10 stations. Another 11 renewable energy facilities will start operating in 2023. Kazakhstan intends to increase the share of renewables in the total energy system to 6% by 2025 (Qazaq TV, 22.04.2022).
- China launched a new railway route to Germany through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The train will also pass through Azerbaijan, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The total length of the transit route is more than 11 thousand kilometers and the cargo will cover this distance in 20 days. The new route opens new transport and market opportunities for Kazakhstan's carriers. The first train with sports goods, clothes and bedding departed from the international port of Xi'an (Qazaq TV, 22.04.2022).
- According to the Ministry of Energy of Uzbekistan, during the first 3 months of 2022, 5 new thermal power plants with a total capacity of 1.1 thousand MW have been put into full operation in three regions of the country. Turkish companies Aksa Enerji, Odas Enerji CA, and Cengiz Enerji implement these projects, the value of which amounted to \$705 million. In total, these 5 power plants will generate 9.4 billion kWh of electricity annually (UzReport, 22.04.2022).
- Turkmenistan adopted the Law on Accession to the UN Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards. Accession to the Convention will increase the attractiveness of Turkmenistan for foreign investors. Turkmenistan also ratified the Agreement establishing the International Islamic Trade and Economic Finance Corporation, the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods, as well as accession to the Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Procedures for Cross-Border Paperless Trade in the Asia-Pacific Region (Orient, 19.04.2022).
- Minister of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan Sherali Kabir had an online meeting with the Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia Bandar Alkhorayef. The parties considered the possibility of establishing a logistics hub to increase bilateral trade. Kabir noted that Tajikistan has a high potential for the production of mining, textile, food, and pharmaceutical products. However, it is worth noting that the bilateral trade between the two countries last year amounted to \$350 thousand (Asia-Plus, 19.04.2022).
- Azerbaijan and Russia plan to strengthen bilateral cooperation in food security issues. Recently, Azerbaijan's Food Safety Agency and Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision had a meeting, during which they agreed to hold consultations on the creation of animal disease-free zones, the organization of their diagnostics, and veterinary control. Russia's agriculture watchdog Rosselkhoz nadzor has fully lifted the ban on tomato imports from Azerbaijan in March 2022. Azerbaijan ranked first in supplies of fresh and chilled tomatoes to Russia (AzerNews, 20.04.2022).

## Society and Culture

- According to Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Türkiye has sent two more trucks of humanitarian aid to the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine. The trucks were sent to Lviv, a city in western Ukraine. In total, Türkiye has already sent 82 trucks of humanitarian aid and a mobile food truck for the people of Ukraine under the coordination of AFAD (Anadolu Agency, 21.04.2022).
- The Senate of Kazakhstan ratified the agreement between the government of Kazakhstan and the Turkic Academy. This document regulates all the issues linked to the operation of the academy on Kazakhstani soil. Once the agreement is entered into force, local and foreign employees must obtain official accreditation from the foreign ministry. Kazakhstan will cover 44.5% of all the academy's costs. Türkiye covers the same amount of expenditures in TURKSOY while Azerbaijan does the same in TURKPA (Kz.kursiv.media, 21.04.2022).
- According to the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, in the first quarter of 2022, Tajikistan received humanitarian assistance for \$52 million. This is four times more than the cost of humanitarian aid provided to Tajikistan in January-March last year. Among the donor countries in terms of the cost of aid, Japan (7.2% of the total cost), India (4.8%), Uzbekistan (2.7%), Russia (2.1%), Denmark (1.7%), Türkiye (1%). Assistance from the remaining 36 donor countries is less than 1% (ASIA-Plus, 18.04.2022).
- The second meeting of the Commission on Cooperation between the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan and the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan was held in the Aral district of the Kyzylorda region of Kazakhstan. Members of the Government of Kazakhstan and representatives of international organizations also attended the event. The key goal of the meeting was to strengthen cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in resolving issues of restoring the Aral Sea and protecting its ecosystem (Kz.undp.org, 22.04.2022).
- The Ministry of Finance of Kyrgyzstan and the World Bank signed a new financial agreement to support the Climate Resilient Water Services Project. This new project will enhance water service provision across multiple water-using sectors in a sustainable and inclusive way, as well as promote integrated water resources management. The direct beneficiaries of the project are almost 110,000 people in rural and peri-urban communities of Batken, Issyk-Kul, Jalal-Abad and Osh regions of the country comprising farmers, low-income households, women, and youth (Worldbank.org, 19.04.2022).
- The opening of the exhibition "My native land, my Karakalpakstan" took place in the halls of the Fine Arts Gallery of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. Works of several generations of artists of Karakalpakstan starting from the mid-1950s including 240 works by 58 artists of Karakalpakstan were presented at the exhibition. The exhibition "My native land, my Karakalpakstan" was meant to demonstrate the diversity of Uzbek art (UzDaily, 21.04.2021).