




POLICY PAPER

As Back to Square One: How Should the EU Deal with the New Taliban Regime?

VOCAL
EUROPE

*This Policy Paper was written by **Michael Pitsounis** | 27 October 2021

 Rue de la loi 155, 1040 Brussels

 office@vocaleurope.eu

 + 32 02 588 00 14

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



[TWITTER.COM/THEVOCAL EUROPE](https://twitter.com/thevoCALEUROPE)



[FACEBOOK.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://facebook.com/vocaleurope)



[YOUTUBE.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://youtube.com/vocaleurope)



[INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://instagram.com/vocaleurope)

Disclaimer and Copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to Vocal Europe and its audience. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of Vocal Europe. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.

1. Background: The Successful Insurgents

It would be an understatement to suggest that these past few months have been eventful for Afghanistan. By the end of August 2021, United States' military forces had officially withdrawn from Afghan soil, thus putting an end to their 20-year presence in the country. Similarly, all NATO personnel operating in Afghanistan were instructed to cease their activities and evacuate the country¹.

As the U.S. and NATO troops gradually abandoned their posts during the summer, the Taliban advanced. In an impressively short span of time, the Islamist group managed to claim numerous decisive victories against the Afghan armed forces. By August 15th, they had taken over key provincial capitals, as well as Kabul.² This gave the Taliban a strong foothold in Afghanistan and effective control over the majority of the country's population.

Their rapid victory took many by surprise. The Afghanistan government forces were completely overrun, far quicker than Western analysts had predicted.³ Nonetheless, those familiar with the recent history and the present conditions of the country already anticipated the militants to triumph sooner or later.⁴ After all, this was not their first successful insurgency.

The Taliban, translated as “the students”, were born in 1994, amidst the civil strife chaos that was tormenting Afghanistan. Their founding leader, Mullah Muhammad Omer, gained prominence by offering assurances of protection to tormented local populations. Under his command, the Taliban militants achieved crucial military victories and gradually emerged as the rulers of the country by 1996.⁵

Twenty-five years later, their objectives remain unchanged. The Taliban operate in accordance with their religious and nationalist aims. On the one hand, they seek to enforce upon the Afghan society their own interpretation of Sunni Islam ideology, which is largely based on Deobandism. They adhere to a strict Islamic code with the aim to preserve Islamic purity and values and adopt “jihad” as the driving force behind their organization.⁶ On the other hand, they aim to establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, without aspiring to create a Pan-Islamic caliphate in the wider region.

Naturally, the ideological affinity between the Taliban and the terrorist organization, al-Qaeda⁷, brought the two jihadist groups into close contact and cooperation. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the Taliban leadership refused to turn over al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin-Laden, to the United States. As a result, a U.S.-led military coalition invaded Afghanistan later that same

¹ “North Atlantic Council Ministerial Statement on Afghanistan”, Press Release, April 14, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_183146.htm?selectedLocale=en

² “Timeline: The Taliban’s rapid advance across Afghanistan”, *Reuters*, August 16, 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/timeline-talibans-rapid-advance-across-afghanistan-2021-08-15/>

³ “Remarks by President Biden on Afghanistan”, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/16/remarks-by-president-biden-on-afghanistan/>

⁴ Ken Thomas and Vivian Salama, “Biden wanted to leave Afghanistan. He knew the risks.”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-wanted-to-leave-afghanistan-he-knew-the-risks-11629214842>

Gordon Lubold and Yaroslav Trofimov, “Afghan government could fall within six months of U.S. military withdrawal, new intelligence assessment says”, *Washington Post*, June 23, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/afghan-government-could-fall-within-six-months-of-us-military-withdrawal-new-intelligence-assessment-says/2021/06/24/42375b14-d52c-11eb-baed-4abcfa380a17_story.html

⁵ Naznin Qureshi, “Genesis of Taliban” in ed. by Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Challenges to Religions and Islam (A Study of Muslim Movements Personalities, Issues and Trends) Part-2*, 2007, 581-586

⁶ Seth G. Jones. “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad.” *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, vol. 32. no. 4. (Spring 2008): 26-28

⁷ id. 27-29

year and the Taliban forces were soundly defeated.⁸ Afghanistan was gradually democratized, with its first presidential elections taking place in 2004.⁹ The former Taliban rulers became insurgents once again.

While the militant group recuperated, the newly formed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan suffered. A combination of systemic problems, insufficient infrastructure, and subpar security forces diminished its chances of survival¹⁰. Between 2003 and 2020 the insurgent Taliban used both military and diplomatic means as part of a long-term strategy to force the withdrawal of foreign military forces and eventually topple the democratic Afghan government.¹¹

Finally, in 2020 the Taliban reached a bilateral agreement with the U.S.¹². The militants agreed to disallow terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda from operating in Afghanistan and cut ties with them. In turn, the U.S. and its allies would withdraw their forces from Afghanistan within the following year.

2. Current State of Play: The “new” Afghanistan and the E.U.

a) Empty promises and a potentially bleak future

Soon after the last American planes disappeared into the sky on August 31st, 2021, celebratory gunfire rang out throughout Kabul.¹³ Following their celebrations, the Taliban announced the formation of an interim government on September 8. Their all-male cabinet mainly consists of prominent members of the movement, including various leading figures of the past regime that lasted until 2001. It also includes hard-liner Taliban militants that gained prominence as insurgents in the past two decades¹⁴ and just a few members of ethnic minorities.¹⁵

Naturally, the cabinet’s members are overwhelmingly ethnically Pashtun. This comes as no surprise: the Taliban movement’s origins can be traced back to this ethnic group and its leaders have traditionally originated from Pashtunistan villages in eastern and southern Afghanistan¹⁶. Considering that the key governmental positions are held by veteran Taliban hardliners, it becomes apparent that the new regime’s promise in regards to an inclusive Afghan government, is under serious question. Nonetheless, this particular pledge is just one of many that the Taliban leadership has recently made.

In an attempt to project a novel, kinder face for themselves, the new leaders of the Taliban have put on a show of supposed moderation. Thus, they have repeatedly claimed that they intend to respect

⁸ Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, “The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of America’s Foreign Policy”, *The Brookings Institution*, April 2003, 19-20

⁹ Astri Suhrke, *Democratization of a Dependent State: The Case of Afghanistan*, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Working Paper, 2007:10. 7-9, 14-15 <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/2810-democratization-of-a-dependent-state.pdf>

¹⁰ Jones, 19-26

¹¹ *id.* 33

¹² “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America”, United States Department of State, February 29, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

¹³ Lyse Doucet, “Gunfire as Taliban celebrate US leaving Afghanistan”, *BBC News*, August 31, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-58389771>

¹⁴ “Hardliners get key posts in new Taliban government”, *BBC News*, September 7, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58479750>

¹⁵ “Taliban names deputy ministers, double down on all-male cabinet”, September 21, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/21/taliban-name-deputy-ministers-double-down-on-all-male-cabinet>

¹⁶ Anatol Lieven, “An Afghan Tragedy: The Pashtuns, the Taliban and the State”, *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, August 17, 2021., 30 <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/survival-blog/2021/08/afghanistan-taliban>

AS BACK TO SQUARE ONE: HOW SHOULD THE EU DEAL WITH THE NEW TALIBAN REGIME?

the rights of women¹⁷ and those of minority groups. They have also committed to cut all ties with Islamist terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, and prevent them from using Afghanistan as their base for anti-western operations.

However, these promises also appear less and less convincing, as time goes by. Reports from Afghanistan point towards a high degree of state repression, as well as multiple human rights' violations. Despite promising freedom of expression for the country's media, journalists have recently faced detainment and even corporal punishment for covering unauthorised protests of Afghan civilians.¹⁸ The future also looks bleak for religious and ethnic minorities. In July, Taliban insurgents repeatedly targeted and killed members of the Hazara community.¹⁹ Here, it should be noted that the persecution of Shiite Hazaras was the norm under the former, brutal Taliban regime²⁰.

Finally and perhaps most importantly to security analysts in Europe and in the United States, evidence suggests that the ties between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda remain strong. According to U.S. intelligence reports, the two jihadist groups maintain close financial relationships and hold regular meetings²¹, in defiance of the terms of the U.S.- Taliban agreement of February 2020. A recent U.N. report reached similar conclusions, while also raising concerns over the criminal activities that fund the Taliban cause.²² Thus, it becomes apparent that the Taliban's alleged commitment to cut ties with jihadist terrorist groups is doubtful, to say the least.

All in all, the Taliban have certainly not redefined themselves, as they would like international audiences to believe. They have just become more aware of the necessity to achieve international legitimacy, while they are solidifying their power. In turn, this realisation of theirs makes it more likely that their regime will last.

b) The response of the European Union

In this particularly alarming context, the European Union has suddenly been faced with a new and brutal reality in Afghanistan. After almost two decades of funding humanitarian aid and construction projects across the tormented country, the E.U. is now forced to deal with an anti-western, jihadist regime.

The urgent need for evacuation of European nationals, as well as a small number of Afghan refugees, appeared to be the first and foremost priority, as the Taliban took over Kabul. Since the E.U. has no

¹⁷ Ahmad Seir, Rahim Faiez, Kathy Gannon and Joseph Krauss, "Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression", *Associated Press*, August 18, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-1d4b052ccef113adc8dc94f965ff23c7>

¹⁸ Emma Graham Harrison and Peter Beaumont, "Violent attacks on Afghan journalists by Taliban prompt growing alarm", *The Guardian*, September 9, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/violent-attacks-on-afghan-journalists-by-taliban-prompt-growing-alarm>

¹⁹ "Afghanistan: Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men - new investigation", *Amnesty International*, August 19, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/afghanistan-taliban-responsible-for-brutal-massacre-of-hazara-men-new-investigation/>

²⁰ "The Massacre in Mazar-i Sharif", *Human Rights Watch*, November 1998, Vol. 10: No.7 <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/afghan/Afrep0r0.htm>

²¹ Gregory Sullivan, "Operation Inherent Resolve - Summary of Work Performed by the Department of the Treasury Related to Terrorist Financing, ISIS, and Anti-Money Laundering for First Quarter Fiscal Year 2021", United States Department of the Treasury, January 4, 2021. <https://oig.treasury.gov/sites/oig/files/2021-01/OIG-CA-21-012.pdf>

²² United Nations Security Council, "Twelfth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2557 (2020) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan", June 1, 2021. 12-14 <https://www.undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2021/486>

deployable troops, it relied on American forces to lead the evacuation operations. In return, this has once again led to discussions in regards to a potential establishment of a pan-European army that could be deployed in future crises, in Afghanistan and or elsewhere.²³

Apart from that however, the E.U. has once again found it difficult to illustrate a clearly defined stance. Instead, it has opted for a step-by-step approach, as it is still weighing its medium and long term policy options in Afghanistan. On September 3rd, Joseph Borrell, E.U.'s head of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated that operational contacts with the Taliban are necessary for the sake of the Afghan people. He added that further engagement of the Union with the militant group will depend on certain benchmarks that the Taliban need to meet during their following months²⁴.

In short, the five preconditions are the following:

- To prevent terrorists from using Afghanistan as a base for their operations.
- To ensure that human rights, the rule of law and media freedom are respected.
- To establish an inclusive and representative government.
- To allow and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid in the country.
- To allow foreign nationals and Afghans at risk to depart.

High Representative Borrell also revealed plans to create a regional political platform that will deal with arising issues, including refugee flows, and counterterrorism. The European Council conclusions on September 15, reiterated the aforementioned conditions and cemented E.U.'s foreign policy on Afghanistan.²⁵

It goes without saying that the evaluation of the Taliban in regard to them meeting their benchmarks is a process that is projected to take a lengthy period of time. Thus, in the foreseeable future, contacts with the Taliban leaders should not be perceived as a prelude to the political recognition of their regime.

c) Carrots and Sticks

In principle, the E.U. is correct in pursuing operational talks and setting out preconditions for future political engagement with the Taliban. After all, a carrot-and-stick approach has been implemented before by states and international institutions vis-à-vis oppressive regimes²⁶. This policy choice also signifies a long-term step-by-step strategy, which allows for the Taliban's behaviour to be closely monitored and continue to be re-assessed in the following months. Ideally, the new rulers of Afghanistan would gradually moderate their strict rule and adhere to their commitments towards the international community.

²³ European External Action Service, "Informal meeting of Defence Ministers: Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell upon arrival", September 2, 2021. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/103627/informal-meeting-defence-ministers-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-upon-arrival_en

²⁴ European Union External Action Service, "Afghanistan: Press statement by High Representative Josep Borrell at the informal meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers", Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia, 03/09/2021 https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/103712/afghanistan-press-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-informal-meeting-foreign_en

²⁵ Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on Afghanistan", September 15, 2021. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11713-2021-REV-2/en/pdf>

²⁶ Wael Alalwani, Karam Shaar "A Comprehensive Review of the Effectiveness of US and EU Sanctions in Syria", *Middle East Institute*, August 6, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/comprehensive-review-effectiveness-us-and-eu-sanctions-syria>

AS BACK TO SQUARE ONE: HOW SHOULD THE EU DEAL WITH THE NEW TALIBAN REGIME?

Nonetheless, as things stand, it is borderline delusional to expect significant progress in regard to the Taliban meeting most of these aforementioned benchmarks. This is due to two main reasons. The first one relates to the demonstrable unreliability of the Taliban leadership to adhere to their promises, which has been illustrated above. Additionally, even if some concessions are made on their behalf, there is also little to no evidence that the Taliban will not backtrack, once they solidify their rule and gain the international recognition and financial support that they depend on.

Considering that their new regime is still in its early days, it is also still unclear which direction it will take²⁷. If the hard-liner section of the Taliban eventually prevails over the pragmatists among them, engagement with the group will become increasingly more difficult over time.

The second one relates to the “carrots” and “sticks” that the E.U. has at its disposal. In our case, the success of the current E.U. approach depends on its ability to incentivize the Taliban with the lure of international recognition and funding. However, in the present conditions, neither Europe nor the U.S. are the only actors that are able to offer similar incentives to the group.

While Europe has opted for a step-by-step engagement with the Taliban, other regional and extra-regional actors have already rushed to take advantage of the ongoing developments in Afghanistan to promote their own geopolitical agenda. Pakistan has long supported the Taliban and their cause, by providing military aid and intel to their fighters and even guidance to their leadership in regard to establishing a government. China, on the other hand, appears to be more indirect in assisting the regime. Evidently, the priority of the latter is to alleviate some of the international pressure that the Taliban are facing during the early days of their second time in power²⁸.

In this context, it becomes apparent that the Taliban may gradually become less willing to make significant compromises in favour of western recognition and financial assistance, as time goes by. Simply put, while Pakistan and China are putting their weight behind the Taliban, the threat of “isolation” that High Representative Borrell threatened the militants with on August 12, is becoming less and less credible.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the E.U. cannot solely emphasize on geopolitics, irrespective of the consequences for the Afghan people. European institutions have coordinated and funded humanitarian aid projects in Afghanistan since 1994²⁹. In the past few months, such operations have been understandably halted, due to security concerns relevant to the Taliban insurgency and their rise in power. However, the continuously worsening financial conditions in Afghanistan³⁰, require continuous operational engagement between the Taliban and western institutions, in order for humanitarian organizations to keep on with their work.

In this context, negative developments in the E.U.-Taliban front could hinder aid projects and thus place extra burden on the vulnerable Afghan people. This undermines the Brussels’ ability to pursue a tougher stance vis-à-vis the Taliban in the long term.

²⁷ Kathy Gannon, “Friction among Taliban pragmatists, hard-liners intensifies”, *Associated Press*, September 16, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-afghanistan-kabul-taliban-abdul-ghani-baradar-56455c9c2e145c3e5bf57d697d968834>

²⁸ Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the U.N., “Explanation of Vote by Ambassador Geng Shuang on the Security Council Resolution on Afghanistan”, August 30, 2021. <http://chnun.chinamission.org.cn/eng/hyyfy/t1903272.htm>

²⁹ European Commission, “European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: Afghanistan”, October 2, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/asia-and-pacific/afghanistan_en

³⁰ Ajmal Ahmady. “Afghanistan faces an economic crisis, as well as a humanitarian one”, *Financial Times*, August 24, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/6395d167-3175-4332-8329-ae1478c616ca>

3. Policy Recommendations

The rise of the Taliban, unfortunate as it might be for Afghans, represents both an urgency and an opportunity for the E.U. On the one hand, it forces Brussels to face a number of pressing issues in the following years, including possible refugee waves, dealing with another oppressive and unstable regime and potentially heightened risks for terrorist attacks. Most importantly, however, it might just be the wake-up call that the E.U. needs in order to gradually assume a more prominent role in global affairs. In light of this, this policy paper recommends the following:

a) Know your “enemy” and learn from past mistakes

This paper has extensively argued that the E.U. should not deceive itself. Since assuming power the Taliban have made minimal efforts towards moderation. If left unchecked, there should be no doubt that their new regime will be at least as repressive as their last one. Considering that the Taliban lacks the necessary popular support that would make their rule considerably easier, it is unlikely that they will forgo repression and violence. Taking these vital realisations into consideration, the first step of E.U. policy makers should be to formulate a cohesive strategy for Afghanistan.

Additionally, the E.U. can learn from the shortcomings of the U.S. approach. The U.S.-Taliban agreement lacked conditionality in regard to the conflict of the latter with the Afghan state. This allowed the Taliban to continue their offensive and take over the country, without breaking the terms of the agreement. Thus, it becomes clear that any future E.U.-Taliban agreements should be well-defined in their terms and guidelines.

b) Implement elements of true strategic autonomy

The past few months have illustrated that the age of E.U. idleness is over. The United States no longer appears willing or capable of preserving their hegemonic status, at least when it comes to certain regions where serious geopolitical threats emerges against the EU. Nonetheless, Europe is still “addicted to U.S. leadership”, as former NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer recently commented.³¹ At the same time, Brussels has also increasingly been finding itself disagreeing with the U.S. on a number of issues, the latest of which is the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan.

In this regard, a change in Brussel’s mind-set is now a necessity. In short, the E.U. needs to embrace the prospect of becoming more autonomous in matters of security and defense. This entails an enhancement of the operational capabilities of the E.U. in order to better respond to potential crises in Afghanistan and elsewhere, as the European Council is currently debating³².

Admittedly, France and Germany’s plans for the establishment of an E.U. Entry Force of around 5,000 soldiers are still too premature and have not been well-received from other members of the Union.³³ A more realistic option is for Brussels to revisit and attempt to reinvigorate the existing

³¹ Steven Erlanger, “Afghan Fiasco Raises Hard Questions for Europe”, *The New York Times*, August 23, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/23/world/europe/afghanistan-europe-nato-biden.html>

³² “European Parliament resolution on the situation in Afghanistan”, September 14, 2021 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2021-0462_EN.html

³³EU says Afghanistan shows need for rapid-reaction force”, *Reuters*, August 30, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-says-afghanistan-shows-need-rapid-reaction-force-2021-08-30/>

AS BACK TO SQUARE ONE: HOW SHOULD THE EU DEAL WITH THE NEW TALIBAN REGIME?

concept of “E.U. battlegroups³⁴”, which was developed in 2007 but never really took off. If it had, the battlegroups would reportedly have been enough to ensure the Kabul airport evacuations³⁵.

Finally, the “Strategic Compass”³⁶ that is currently being drafted should place extra emphasis on crisis management. This will allow E.U. member states to be significantly more aware of their common threats and co-ordinate faster responses for upcoming crises related to the Taliban takeover.

c) Use your leverage carefully

The already dire financial conditions in Afghanistan are exacerbated on a daily basis, following the Taliban takeover. With the country’s bank reserves running out, an estimated 9.5\$ billion of Afghanistan’s Central Bank reserves have been frozen by the U.S. government. Effectively, these funds are intended to be used as leverage to ensure the Taliban’s compliance in regard to their commitments. The decision of the E.U. to halt development funding in Afghanistan³⁷ can be explained on a similar basis.

This risky approach is not only threatening to lead the country to societal and economic collapse and plunge the Afghan population into poverty. It also potentially pushes the regime’s leaders further into the hands of China³⁸, in search of political support and financial assistance. Finally, it increases Afghans’ mistrust towards Western states and institutions that are perceived as withholders of Afghan public’s wealth, as witnessed in the most recent demonstrations.³⁹

d) Avoid issuing sanctions, unless absolutely necessary

The lack of progress in regard to the Taliban commitments could lead the E.U. to consider imposing economic sanctions on their regime in the coming months. In fact, there have been reports that many in Brussels are already advocating for this approach.⁴⁰ After all, the E.U. has favoured sanctions as a policy choice in the past, when dealing with repressive regimes.⁴¹

³⁴ European External Action Service, Common Security and Defense Policy: EU Battlegroups, April 2013. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/esdp/91624.pdf

³⁵ Robin Emmott and John Chalmers, “Analysis: Afghanistan pullout spurs EU to revive rapid reaction force”, *Reuters*, September 1, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/afghanistan-pullout-spurs-eu-revive-rapid-reaction-force-2021-09-01/>

³⁶ European External Action Service, “Towards a Strategic Compass”, May 6, 2021.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en

³⁷ European External Action Service, “Afghanistan: Press remarks by the High Representative Josep Borrell after extraordinary videoconference of the EU Foreign Ministers”, August 17, 2021.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/103139/Afghanistan:%20Press%20remarks%20by%20the%20High%20Representative%20Josep%20Borrell%20after%20extraordinary%20videoconference%20of%20the%20EU%20Foreign%20Ministers

³⁸ China offers \$31m in emergency aid to Afghanistan, *BBC News*, September 9, 2021.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-58496867>

³⁹ James Mackenzie, “Hundreds protest in Kabul to demand release of Afghan foreign reserves”, *Reuters*, September 24, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hundreds-protest-kabul-demand-release-afghan-foreign-reserves-2021-09-24/>

⁴⁰ Bojan Pancevski and Laurence Norman, “Taliban Face Threat of European Sanctions over Abuses and Terror Links”, *The Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-face-threat-of-european-sanctions-over-rights-abuses-and-terror-links-11630516839>

⁴¹ Wael Alalwani and Karam Shaar, “A Comprehensive Review of US and EU sanctions on Syria”, *Middle East Institute*, August 6, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/comprehensive-review-effectiveness-us-and-eu-sanctions-syria>

AS BACK TO SQUARE ONE: HOW SHOULD THE EU DEAL WITH THE NEW TALIBAN REGIME?

However, if we look back to the last time that the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was faced with fiscal sanctions by the U.N. in October 1999⁴², we can clearly observe some of the negative consequences. While they were primarily aimed at the Taliban faction, the sanctions also took their toll on Afghan society. The unintended consequences included the loss of employment and income for many vulnerable Afghans, as well as the suspension of imports, exports and medicine supply links.

Additionally, it appears that the sanctions did not lead to popular dissatisfaction and public pressure towards the Taliban regime, as originally intended. Instead, they led to distrust towards international institutions and thus made the work of their aid agencies more difficult⁴³. Considering that the E.U. has pledged to lead humanitarian-aid operations in Afghanistan in the coming months, economic sanctions could even have an adverse effect on its important work. It has also been widely reported that a large portion of the Afghan population is currently at serious risk of starvation⁴⁴. In this context, sanctions of an economic nature pose too much risk to be considered as a viable route.

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



TWITTER.COM/THEVOCALEUROPE



FACEBOOK.COM/VOCALEUROPE



YOUTUBE.COM/VOCALEUROPE



INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCALEUROPE

Disclaimer and Copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to Vocal Europe and its audience. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of Vocal Europe. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.

⁴² United Nations Security Council, Resolution 126, October 15, 1999.

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1267>

⁴³ Michael Semple, "Vulnerability And Humanitarian Implications of UN Security Council Sanctions in Afghanistan", Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan, Islamabad, December, 2000, 31, 34-36. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A5B0543784BAE0C0852569B3007A8FBB-afgsanc.pdf>

⁴⁴ Kathy Gannon, Rahim Faiez and Edith M. Lederer, "Afghans face hunger crisis, adding to Taliban's challenges", *Associated Press*, September 2, 2021

<https://apnews.com/article/business-taliban-83b54183855df6f659fbccfc24ee9703>