

CLAWS Newsletter



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by Akashika Mate

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. Afghanistan's Climate Crisis Displaces Hundreds of Thousands ([France 24, August 17](#); [Khaama Press, August 18](#))

Afghanistan is facing worsening climate-related disasters, with droughts and floods displacing nearly 400,000 people this year and affecting more than five million, according to a report by Agence France-Presse quoting the International Organisation for Migration's [Climate Vulnerability Assessment](#) from July this year. Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, the country has been hit by recurring environmental shocks that have uprooted thousands and disrupted livelihoods nationwide. Communities remain highly vulnerable, as many Afghans live in fragile mud houses and depend heavily on farming and livestock. The United Nations reports that more than five million Afghans have been affected by climate-driven events so far this year, with widespread displacement compounding the country's humanitarian emergency. Water shortages are worsening the crisis, with residents of Bamiyan among those reporting severe difficulties in accessing safe drinking water. While Taliban authorities have announced new water management projects, some officials have stated that drought relief should be "left to God," raising concerns over their ability to effectively address the crisis. UNICEF has previously warned that nearly one-third of Afghanistan's population lacks access to clean water, highlighting how climate change, poor infrastructure, and weak governance are intensifying the country's humanitarian challenges.

2. Jalalabad Hosts Environmental Conference Amid Alarming Pollution Warnings ([Tolo News, August 18](#))

The eastern city of Jalalabad is hosting a two-day conference titled 'Assessment of Afghanistan's Environmental Situation', bringing together officials, experts, and farmers to discuss the country's worsening ecological crisis. Speaking at the event, Matiulhaq Khalis, head of the National Environmental Protection Agency, accused foreign forces of using internationally banned weapons during past wars in Afghanistan, saying their long-term effects are still visible. "They brought globally banned weapons and used them in Afghanistan," Khalis said, citing the 2001 bombardment in Spin Ghar, Nangarhar, and the US military's use of the

“Mother of All Bombs” in Shinwari. “Our waters are polluted, our air is damaged, and our people’s mental health is harmed. Even now, in many areas, we see children being born with deformities and developing various diseases.” Experts at the conference stressed the urgent need for a national environmental strategy and stronger public participation in conservation efforts. Environmental expert Atta-ul-Haq Bushri pointed to deforestation as a major driver of air pollution and rising temperatures. Event organiser Izzatullah Siddiqui said the conference will gather views on energy, water, forests, biodiversity, and pollution to prepare a national-level report. Local farmers echoed these concerns, urging authorities to prioritise water storage systems such as check dams over uncontrolled well drilling, which they say is depleting groundwater reserves. Others called for stronger measures against deforestation, warning that forests are disappearing as families turn to firewood for survival. Despite these challenges, the National Environmental Protection Agency reported progress in reforestation, noting that against a target of 25 million trees this year, over 40 million have been planted nationwide. The conference underscores growing awareness of Afghanistan’s environmental emergency, where war legacies, climate pressures, and human practices are converging to threaten both ecosystems and public health.

3. Taliban Leaders Mark 106th Independence Anniversary, Stress Unity and Self-Reliance ([Tolo News, August 19](#))

Afghanistan marked the 106th anniversary of its independence from British colonial rule with a ceremony attended by senior officials of the Islamic Emirate. The event reflected both historical pride and the Taliban leadership’s emphasis on safeguarding sovereignty amid ongoing domestic and international challenges. Defence Minister Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid underlined that independence must be constantly defended: “One part is achieving freedom and independence, and the other is preserving it. In the past century, we have reclaimed our freedom and independence three times from those who forcibly entered and occupied Afghanistan.” Army Chief Fasihuddin Fitrat echoed this sentiment, contrasting past commemorations under foreign presence with the present: “Perhaps in previous years independence was celebrated, but at that time, the Afghan nation lived under occupation. Praise be to Allah, this is the fourth year that we are celebrating while our country is completely free.” Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar warned against internal divisions that had

historically undermined sovereignty, saying independence was lost in the past due to civil wars and conspiracies. Ministers Din Mohammad Hanif and Amir Khan Muttaqi also tied the preservation of independence to national unity, a strong government, and robust security forces capable of resisting foreign interference. Intelligence chief Abdul Haq Wasiq reinforced this line, insisting that occupiers and collaborators must not think they can once again impose their will on Afghanistan.

While the day has traditionally been marked with public marches and vibrant celebrations, this year's commemoration was a subdued official gathering, reflecting the changing political and social climate under Taliban rule. Analysts note that the leadership's focus on unity and vigilance reveals the Emirate's concern over internal fragmentation, militant threats, and diplomatic isolation, even as it seeks to project the image of a sovereign state free from foreign domination.

4. Taliban Expands Passport Restrictions, Raising Human Rights Concerns ([Khaama Press, August 24](#))

Afghanistan's Passport Directorate has issued new rules limiting access to travel documents, barring convicted individuals, banned travellers, children without guardians, and those with unpaid obligations from obtaining passports. The directive, enforced through biometric and database systems, marks a significant shift from previous laws, which allowed nearly all citizens the right to a passport except in limited criminal cases. Observers warn that the new restrictions could be used to target former government employees, political opponents, and other critics of the Taliban, consolidating control over movement. Human rights advocates have expressed concern that vulnerable groups may be deliberately prevented from seeking safety abroad, highlighting broader worries about shrinking freedoms and restricted mobility under the current regime. The policy has prompted calls for international attention to safeguard the right of Afghans to travel freely and access protection when needed.

5. Islamic Emirate Finalises Five-Year National Development Strategy ([Tolo News, August 26](#))

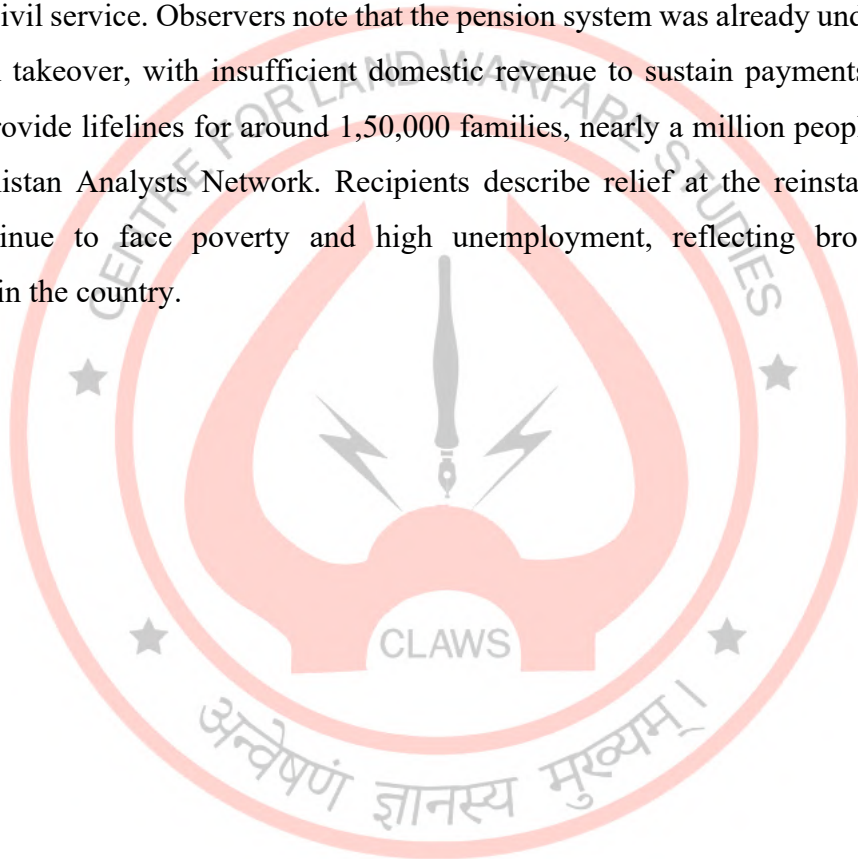
The Islamic Emirate has announced that its five-year development strategy, finalised by the Supreme Leader, is now moving into the implementation phase. The plan covers 15 key sectors, designed in line with Shari'a principles, scientific standards, and domestic capacities.

Pillars of the Islamic Emirate's Five-Year Development Strategy	
No.	Pillar of Development Strategy
1	Rule of Shari'a law and ensuring Islamic justice
2	Good governance and management of international relations
3	Reform of the public sector, ensuring transparency and accountability
4	Strengthening and expanding regional and international relations
5	Strengthening security, public order, and border protection
6	Law enforcement, combating crime, and strengthening local governance
7	Urban development and rural progress
8	Economic and social development
9	Effective and sustainable use of natural resources and provision of energy
10	Growth of agriculture and livestock
11	Improving financial management and expanding electricity payments
12	Improving health services and ensuring food security
13	Development of education, human resources, and culture
14	Growth of telecommunications and information technology
15	Development of transport and transit infrastructure

All ministries and state institutions have been instructed to align their programmes with this framework to ensure coordinated planning, efficient resource management, and stronger national self-reliance. Officials emphasise that the plan seeks to provide stability, safeguard territorial integrity, create jobs, and drive long-term economic growth. Analysts note that the success of this strategy will depend on how effectively the government can link its goals with political stability and regional economic connectivity.

6. Taliban Resumes Pensions for Retired Afghan Workers After Four Years ([Arab News, August 28](#), [Khaama Press, August 24](#))

After a four-year suspension, the Taliban government has announced the resumption of pension payments for Afghanistan's nearly 150,000 retired military and civil servants, the last public sector workers to receive financial support under the cash-strapped authorities. The rollout comes after years of delayed payments, which forced many retirees to protest outside government offices and rely on loans to survive. Pension fund officials confirmed that all pending amounts will be gradually distributed across government institutions, with retirees expected to receive 40,000-50,000 Afghanis (\$580-720) per year, a modest sum that supports entire families. The suspension had followed the disappearance of foreign aid and a severe economic crunch, with Taliban authorities prioritising security spending and cutting salaries across the civil service. Observers note that the pension system was already under strain before the Taliban takeover, with insufficient domestic revenue to sustain payments. Public sector pensions provide lifelines for around 1,50,000 families, nearly a million people, according to the Afghanistan Analysts Network. Recipients describe relief at the reinstatement, though many continue to face poverty and high unemployment, reflecting broader economic challenges in the country.



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

1. Fifty Rights Groups Urge Protection for Afghan Journalists in Neighbouring Countries ([Khaama Press, August 16](#))

Fifty human rights organisations have issued a joint appeal for urgent protection of Afghan journalists residing in Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The groups voiced support for an expanding campaign to safeguard reporters facing arrest, deportation, and harassment in these countries. The statement condemned the forced deportations of Afghan journalists, warning that such actions contravene international obligations towards migrants and refugees. It further underlined the escalating threats to press freedom and personal safety confronting those who fled Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power. The organisations called for a thorough review of all cases concerning Afghan journalists currently under threat, urging host governments to enable their safe relocation to secure countries. They also appealed to international journalist-support networks to document violations and raise global awareness of the dangers these reporters continue to endure. Additionally, the activists pressed the United Nations to establish an emergency programme for the resettlement and protection of Afghan journalists in Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, cautioning that inaction would amount to a betrayal of both freedom and human dignity.

2. UN Sanctions Hit ISIS and al-Qaeda Financiers with Afghan Links ([Times of Israel, August 16](#); [Khaama Press, August 23](#))

The United Nations Security Council has sanctioned five individuals from Libya, Tunisia, Kuwait, and Tajikistan for financing and recruiting on behalf of ISIS and al-Qaeda, highlighting their longstanding ties to extremist groups active in Afghanistan. The designations impose an asset freeze, global travel ban, and arms embargo under UN counterterrorism measures. Among those named is Gulmurod Khalimov, a former Tajik police commander who became a senior ISIS military leader and was linked to directing fighters and funds into Afghanistan. UN investigators said the individuals played key roles in organising transnational networks that channelled money, weapons, and foreign recruits to ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) and al-Qaeda affiliates operating in Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya. Their activities sustained

militant operations in Afghanistan, where ISIS-K continues to pose one of the most serious security threats since the Taliban takeover. Experts note that cutting off extremist financing is critical to preventing Afghanistan from being used as a hub for global terror networks. While sanctions alone cannot dismantle these groups, they are intended to restrict access to international banking systems and disrupt recruitment pipelines feeding militants into Afghanistan's conflict.

3. Developments with Pakistan

a. Afrasiab Khattak Accuses Pakistan's Military of Exploiting Afghan Refugees (Khaama Press, August 16)

Former senator and Awami National Party leader Afrasiab Khattak has accused Pakistan's military of exploiting Afghan refugees for decades to sustain what he described as its "war economy." Speaking at an event marking the fourth anniversary of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Khattak claimed refugees were used as "cannon fodder" in regional conflicts, while senior generals allegedly diverted international aid intended for displaced Afghans into militant training programmes. He argued that the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban are essentially one movement, portraying their rise as part of a long-term project directed from Pakistan. Khattak warned that this has entrenched instability on both sides of the border, and cautioned against a new wave of "Talibanisation," pointing to Pakistani madrassas opening branches inside Afghanistan and the potential spread of extremism into Central Asia. The veteran politician criticised global powers for neglecting Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, noting that China seeks mineral resources, Russia has recognised the Taliban without investment, and the United States, alongside others, has left the group political space.

b. Pakistan's Army Chief Warns Kabul Over Cross-Border Militancy (Khaama Press, August 17)

Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has urged the Taliban to end policies that destabilise Pakistan, warning that the group bears responsibility for the blood of Pakistani citizens. Speaking in Brussels on August 16, Munir voiced Islamabad's concerns over cross-border militancy and accused the Taliban of fuelling unrest inside Pakistan. He emphasised

that such instability not only endangers Pakistani citizens but also threatens broader regional stability. Addressing Pakistan's foreign relations, Munir said Islamabad would pursue balanced ties with both China and the United States, stressing that one partnership would not come at the expense of the other. Munir expressed support for US efforts to end the war in Ukraine and noted that Pakistan was the first to endorse Donald Trump's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. His comments come as tensions persist along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, with Islamabad repeatedly accusing the Taliban of sheltering militant groups operating against Pakistan. Analysts caution that without genuine cooperation from Kabul, cross-border violence is likely to escalate, further straining regional security and complicating Pakistan's diplomatic positioning.

c. Pakistani Drone Strikes Kill and Wound Civilians in Khost and Nangarhar
(Tolo News, August 28, Reuters, August 29)

Pakistani drones once again targeted Afghan territory, striking parts of Khost and Nangarhar provinces. Local authorities and residents report that the attacks caused civilian casualties and widespread fear. In the Spera district, Khost, three children were killed and five others were wounded. In Ghanikhel district, Nangarhar, six members of a single family were injured when their home was struck. Residents described the attack as devastating. Shah Sawar, whose house was destroyed in Ghanikhel, said his wife and five children were injured while they slept. Villagers recounted spending the night in terror, with children crying until dawn and families fleeing their homes in nearby areas. The Deputy Governor of Nangarhar, Azizullah Mustafa, confirmed that Pakistani drones carried out two rocket attacks, leaving one home in ruins and several civilians wounded. This is not the first such incident. Earlier strikes by Pakistan in Barmal district of Paktika killed over fifty civilians, including women and children, highlighting a pattern of cross-border military actions that continue to threaten Afghan lives and fuel tensions.

4. Afghanistan, Uzbekistan Seal Major Power Projects to Tackle Energy Shortages
(Ariana News Afghanistan, August 17; Tolo News, August 17; Astana Times, August 19)

Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) has signed contracts with two Uzbek companies for four large-scale electricity transmission and distribution projects, a move officials say will significantly ease Afghanistan's chronic energy deficit. The agreements were inked in the presence of senior officials from both countries. DABS CEO Abdul Bari Omar stressed that a reliable electricity supply is central to Afghanistan's development, calling the projects a gateway to industrial, agricultural, and economic transformation. "These projects are not only crucial for electricity transmission and lighting up the country but also for creating a major scientific, industrial, and economic transformation, as well as for strengthening bilateral economic and trade relations between the two countries," he said.

Once completed, the projects will enable Afghanistan to import between 800 and 1,000 megawatts of electricity from Uzbekistan, boosting industrial parks, modernising agricultural facilities, and creating thousands of jobs, particularly in eastern provinces. Omar said the added capacity would help Afghanistan take a step toward industrial self-sufficiency. The four contracts include:

- 500 kV Surkhan–Dasht-e Alwan transmission line (1,000 MW capacity)
- Expansion of Arghandi substation (800 MVA)
- 220 kV Kabul–Sheikh Mesri transmission line (800 MW capacity)
- Construction of Sheikh Mesri substation in Nangarhar (126 MVA)

Uzbekistan's Minister of Energy, Jurabek Mirzamakhmudov, said the projects reflect strong political will at the leadership level, emphasising Tashkent's commitment to a stable Afghanistan. "Our leadership has supported Afghanistan and its people so that it becomes a stable and advanced country. This project, along every route it passes, will play an important role in the growth of Afghanistan's industry," he said. Afghanistan has long depended on imported power, with domestic generation covering only a fraction of demand. DABS officials said they are also pursuing agreements with other countries alongside domestic projects to diversify supply and secure long-term energy stability. The contracts mark one of the most significant recent steps toward addressing Afghanistan's energy crisis, signalling growing regional cooperation between Kabul and Tashkent.

5. Kyrgyzstan's Fuel Exports to Afghanistan Soar in 2025 ([Khaama Press, August 18](#))

Kyrgyzstan's gasoline exports to Afghanistan have surged twenty-three-fold in the first five months of 2025, reaching more than 57 million litres worth \$26.1 million, according to the National Statistics Committee. Afghanistan has now become the main buyer of Kyrgyz motor fuel, accounting for nearly 94 per cent of the country's total gasoline exports. The figures mark a sharp rise compared to 2024, when fuel exports to Afghanistan remained relatively low. The increase comes amid volatility in Afghanistan's fuel market, where authorities have repeatedly rejected Iranian gasoline and oil shipments over alleged poor quality, a claim disputed by Tehran. Analysts suggest that the surge in Kyrgyz supplies could strengthen Bishkek's foothold in Afghanistan's energy market as Kabul seeks to diversify imports. The trend also reflects shifting regional trade dynamics, with Afghanistan becoming increasingly dependent on Central Asian exporters to meet its fuel needs.

6. Pakistan, China, and Taliban Hold Kabul Talks on Security and CPEC Expansion ([Khaama Press, August 20](#); [Tolo News, August 20](#); [Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 21](#))

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry has announced that the sixth round of trilateral talks between the foreign ministers of Pakistan, China, and the Taliban in Kabul focused on strengthening political, economic, and security cooperation, with counterterrorism and trade high on the agenda. A key outcome of the dialogue was an agreement to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan, with all three sides reaffirming their commitment to regional connectivity, trade, transit, development, health, education, culture, and drug control. The move is seen as a step towards deeper integration, though its success depends on ensuring stability and curbing militancy.

Taliban acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi described the trilateral framework as a "practical platform" for enhancing cooperation, while China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said ties with the Taliban were "developing," with collaboration expanding across multiple fields. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar called the talks "important," though he cautioned that

while political and commercial ties were progressing, counterterrorism efforts continued to lag. Dar highlighted a surge in attacks inside Pakistan, blaming groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)/Majeed Brigade, which Islamabad claims operate from Afghan soil. He urged the Taliban to take “concrete and verifiable measures” against these entities. A recent UN report estimated the TTP maintains around 6,000 fighters in Afghanistan, though the Taliban deny harbouring them.

The talks also come amid growing Chinese involvement in regional diplomacy, with sources indicating Beijing has helped ease tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This was Wang Yi’s first visit to Kabul since the Taliban took power in 2021, while it marked Dar’s third trip since April. The dialogue builds on earlier discussions in Beijing in May, where ministers first agreed on CPEC’s extension into Afghanistan. The reaffirmation comes ahead of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s scheduled visit to China for the SCO summit, where the second phase of CPEC is expected to be launched.

7. Afghanistan Faces Drop in Russian Gasoline Supplies; Belarus Steps In ([Baird Maritime, August 20](#))

Russia’s gasoline shipments to Afghanistan fell sharply in July, dropping to 9,500 tonnes from 33,950 tonnes in June, even before Moscow officially restricted fuel exports to ensure domestic supply. Shipments to Turkmenistan also declined, falling to 19,800 tonnes from 39,700 tonnes. To offset the shortfall, Belarus increased gasoline deliveries to Afghanistan, with transit rising to 29,000 tonnes in July from 8,100 tonnes in June. Supply to Turkmenistan from Belarus, however, decreased to 31,540 tonnes from 51,000 tonnes. The decline comes amid Russia’s export restrictions and operational challenges caused by Ukraine’s drone attacks on Russian oil refineries, as well as geopolitical tensions affecting fuel supply from Iran. Traders note that combined gasoline deliveries from Russia and Belarus to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan had reached record levels in June due to prior regional supply uncertainties.

8. Qatar Opens 3,000 New Job Opportunities for Afghan Workers ([Tolo News, August 20](#))

For the second time in recent months, Qatar has announced 3,000 job opportunities for Afghan workers, offering a rare lifeline for many struggling with unemployment at home. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Afghan workers will be recruited across 23 professions and deployed after completing the necessary registration and documentation. The programme covers all 34 provinces, though quotas are limited for each region. In Charikar, Parwan province, dozens of young Afghans queued to register, hoping to be among those selected. Officials in Parwan confirmed that 400 slots have been allocated for the province. Qudratullah Zakir, head of the provincial Labor and Social Affairs Department, noted the overwhelming response: “In 13 fields, we have 400 candidates registering. The demand is high. We are trying to carry out the registration process in an orderly manner.” This is not Qatar’s first such initiative. Earlier this year, Doha had offered 2,000 job opportunities for Afghans, part of its broader engagement with Afghanistan amid economic hardships and mass unemployment. Analysts say such opportunities are vital for Afghanistan, where job scarcity has driven many to attempt risky migration routes. For many families, overseas employment remains a key source of income through remittances, making Qatar’s openings highly sought after.

9. Developments with the United States of America

a. US Congress Introduces Bill to Revive Afghan Relocation Program (Kabul Now, August 20; Tolo News, August 20; Afghanistan International, August 25;

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers has introduced the Enduring Welcome Act, a bill that would make the relocation of former Afghan allies a legal obligation of the US government. The legislation seeks to reinstate and formalise the Special Coordination Office for Afghan Relocation, create a database to track cases, and mandate faster processing for Afghans who worked with U.S. forces. It specifically covers Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, P1 and P2 refugee groups, separated families, individuals with temporary residence status, and Afghan refugees already in the US seeking family reunification. If passed, the act would ensure continuity of relocation and resettlement programmes for at least five more years. Analysts note that this reflects ongoing concerns in Washington about unfinished commitments from the 2021 US withdrawal and the lingering uncertainty faced by thousands of Afghans stranded in third countries.

b. Leadership Change at U.S. Embassy for Afghanistan in Doha (Tolo News, August 22)

The US Embassy for Afghanistan in Doha has seen a leadership transition, with Karen Decker concluding her three-year tenure as Chargé d’Affaires and Don Brown, the embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission since 2023, taking over the role on an interim basis. The shift comes as Washington continues to shape its Afghanistan policy from outside the country, balancing humanitarian assistance, migration issues, and diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to respect human rights. Decker was known for maintaining dialogue with Afghans on migration, women’s rights, and humanitarian relief, while avoiding direct political recognition of the Taliban. Brown is expected to continue this cautious engagement, with emphasis on protecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and returnee migrants. The transition signals continuity in US policy: maintaining humanitarian and rights-focused engagement with Afghanistan, while keeping diplomatic leverage at arm’s length from the Taliban authorities.

c. US Revokes Security Clearance of Former Afghanistan Envoy Tom West and 36 Officials (Khaama Press, August 22)

The US National Intelligence Agency has revoked the security clearances of former Afghanistan envoy Tom West and 36 other current and former officials, citing misuse of intelligence, politicisation, unauthorised disclosures, and breaches of professional standards. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard stated that those who place personal interests above their oath to the Constitution “destroy the sacred trust” entrusted to them. She emphasised that security clearance is a privilege, not a right, and highlighted serious lapses in professional conduct. Tom West, who served as Special Representative for Afghanistan following Zalmay Khalilzad’s departure, had faced criticism from human rights and women’s rights groups for allegedly facilitating engagement with the Taliban. He resigned in 2024 and now works with the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The move underscores Washington’s increasing focus on accountability and safeguarding sensitive intelligence.

d. US Official Acknowledges Limited Counterterrorism Cooperation with Taliban (Tolo News, August 23)

For the first time since Donald Trump’s return to the presidency, a senior US official has publicly described the Taliban as “moderately cooperative” partners in counterterrorism.

Sebastian Gorka, Deputy Assistant to the President and member of the National Security Council, confirmed that Washington and the Taliban have worked together against certain militant groups that also threaten the Taliban's rule. His remarks highlight a paradox: while the US lost direct oversight in Afghanistan after the 2021 withdrawal, it continues to engage indirectly with the Taliban on shared security concerns, including the presence of transnational militant networks and cases of detained American citizens. The Islamic Emirate has not responded, but it has consistently denied the existence of foreign terrorist groups on Afghan soil. The comments underscore a reluctant convergence of interests between Washington and Kabul, driven less by trust and more by overlapping threats within Afghanistan.

10. Developments with the United Kingdom

a. Afghan Asylum Approvals Plummet in UK, Amnesty Warns of Harmful Policies (Amnesty International UK, August 21)

Amnesty International UK has raised alarm over a steep decline in asylum approvals for Afghans, warning that Britain's new immigration laws are leaving vulnerable people unprotected. According to the rights group, only 44 per cent of Afghan applicants were granted asylum this year, a dramatic fall from 98 per cent in 2024. The drop comes despite Afghanistan's ongoing humanitarian crisis and escalating restrictions under Taliban rule, which continue to force many Afghans to flee persecution. Steve Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty's Refugee and Migrant Rights Director, described the shift as "flawed and unfair," stressing that Afghans escaping conflict and repression now face heightened risks of rejection. He added that the new approach is likely to fuel case backlogs, increase public costs, and undermine the UK's obligations under the Refugee Convention. Amnesty also linked the fall in approval rates to the Nationality and Borders Act of 2022, which tightened eligibility rules for asylum. Rights groups argue that the legislation is eroding long-standing humanitarian commitments and weakening Britain's role as a safe haven for those fleeing war and persecution. For Afghans in particular, the new data represents a sharp reversal: once among the most likely to receive protection in the UK, they are now being denied at much higher rates even as Taliban crackdowns on women, minorities, and civil society intensify.

b. UK Defence Ministry Admits 49 Data Breaches in Afghan Relocation Schemes (BBC, August 21; Khaama Press, August 21)

The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) has admitted to 49 data breaches within the unit handling Afghan relocation applications over the past four years, sparking sharp criticism from lawyers and campaigners who say repeated failures endangered vulnerable Afghans. [A BBC investigation](#) revealed that some of the breaches were already known, including a major 2022 incident in which an Excel file containing details of nearly 19,000 Afghan citizens was mistakenly disclosed. The leak, kept secret until last month when a High Court order was lifted, led to the covert transfer of thousands of Afghans to Britain. At the time, the Information Commissioner's Office described it as a "one-off mistake," though lawyers now argue the new figures point to systemic failings. While the MoD has not detailed each breach, earlier cases included personal data and email addresses being wrongly shared with third parties. In September 2021, more than 250 Afghans were copied into a single email, exposing 265 addresses and resulting in a £350,000 government fine. The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), launched in April 2021 to help those who worked with British forces, ended in July this year. Despite enabling thousands to escape Taliban persecution, the programme has faced ongoing criticism for poor data security that compromised those it aimed to protect. The disclosures have reignited scrutiny of the UK government's handling of Afghan relocation efforts, with growing calls to overhaul data protection standards, improve oversight, and ensure that future asylum and relocation schemes avoid such life-threatening errors.

11. Taliban Envoys in Belarus Review Afghan Prisoners' Situation (Tolo News, August 24)

The Embassy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Moscow has dispatched a delegation to Belarus to inspect the condition of Afghan prisoners and hold talks with local judicial authorities. The visit focused on addressing detainees' problems, including the possibility of transferring them back to Afghanistan. The move highlights a recurring challenge: many Afghans are imprisoned in regional countries for offences ranging from drug trafficking to immigration violations, yet there is no clear legal framework for their repatriation. This has left their futures uncertain. Analysts argue that Afghan diplomats abroad must take stronger action to defend the rights of migrants and detainees, and push for repatriation agreements with host

countries. The issue ties into Afghanistan's wider humanitarian crisis, as migration pressures and legal vulnerabilities continue to leave Afghans exposed in foreign states.

12. Taliban Welcomes New Central Asian Contact Group on Afghanistan **([Tolo News, August 27](#); [Times of Central Asia, August 29](#))**

The Islamic Emirate has welcomed the creation of a regional contact group composed of the special representatives of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, calling it an “effective” step for regional cooperation. Kabul stressed Afghanistan's role as a hub for connectivity and trade in Central Asia, expressing its intent to expand political, economic, and cultural ties with neighbouring states. The group, which held its first meeting in Tashkent, emphasised the need for coordinated regional strategies on Afghanistan, including security, stability, and development. Discussions also covered counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational crime. Unlike the broader “Afghanistan's neighbours” format that includes Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran, this new group reflects a Central Asia-centric initiative designed to operate independently of outside powers. Analysts suggest it could enhance Afghanistan's role as a bridge for regional cooperation if matched with concrete steps.

13. Afghanistan to Feature Prominently at Upcoming SCO Consultative Meeting ([Tolo News, August 30](#))

Afghanistan remains a central focus in regional diplomacy nearly four years after the Islamic Emirate's return to power. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has announced a consultative meeting scheduled for September 11-12 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with Afghanistan as a key agenda item. SCO Secretary-General Nurlan Yermekbayev described Afghanistan's situation as “challenging,” noting that while some economic improvements are visible, longstanding social and humanitarian issues, including women's rights, remain unresolved. Security cooperation with the Taliban is expected to be a primary discussion point.

Political analysts emphasise that the Dushanbe summit offers member states a chance to clarify their collective stance on Afghanistan, particularly in terms of security, political, and economic

cooperation. Experts also highlighted Afghanistan's potential for regional integration, suggesting that SCO member states could support the country in addressing terrorism and economic challenges without external interference. Afghanistan has previously played an observer role in SCO meetings, but some analysts advocate for the country to obtain permanent membership within the organisation, reflecting its strategic importance in Central and South Asia. In parallel, an SCO session in Tianjin, China, is scheduled to involve representatives from 20 countries and multiple international organisations, underscoring continued regional engagement on Afghanistan-related issues.



AFGHANISTAN'S RETURNEE CRISIS

1. Iran to Deport Two Million Undocumented Afghan Migrants ([Khaama Press, August 18](#))

Iran has announced plans to deport around two million undocumented Afghan migrants, with officials insisting the process will be conducted legally and with dignity amid mounting regional pressure on refugees. Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said in Mashhad that the first phase of the programme will target Afghans who entered the country without legal documents. He noted that more than six million Afghans currently live in Iran, adding that managing such numbers requires significant national and international cooperation. Momeni stressed that the initiative should not be regarded as anti-immigrant, stating that all countries are entitled to enforce their own regulations regarding foreign nationals. He confirmed that the National Migration Organisation will oversee the process to ensure deportations are conducted through legal channels and with respect for human dignity. Most of the returns are expected to take place through the Khorasan Razavi border, a key crossing point between Iran and Afghanistan.

2. Deadly Bus Crash Kills 79 Afghan Returnees from Iran ([Arab News, August 19](#))

At least 79 people, including 17 children, were killed in western Afghanistan when an overcrowded bus carrying Afghans expelled from Iran crashed and caught fire on the Herat-Kabul highway. The accident involved a bus, a truck, and a motorcycle, occurring about 30 minutes outside Herat. Authorities say the bus was transporting Afghan returnees as part of a growing exodus from Iran. Video footage from the scene showed the bus engulfed in flames, leaving only a charred skeleton behind. Afghan officials, including Ministry of Interior spokesperson Abdul Mateen Qanee, emphasised the scale of the tragedy, while government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid urged authorities to investigate and report the cause of the accident promptly. Road accidents are common in Afghanistan due to poor infrastructure, decades of conflict, and weak enforcement of traffic rules. Herat, bordering Iran and

Turkmenistan, currently hosts tens of thousands of deported Afghan migrants, highlighting the broader challenges of managing mass returns.

3. Taliban Delegation in Geneva to Identify Afghans for Deportation **([Khaama Press, August 23](#); [Tolo News, August 23](#))**

Swiss authorities have confirmed that four Taliban diplomats recently travelled to Geneva to identify Afghan nationals convicted of crimes in Switzerland, calling the move “sensitive but necessary” to enable deportations with valid Kabul-issued documents. According to the Federal Office for Migration, the two-day mission focused on confirming the identities of 11 convicted offenders and two Afghans who had volunteered to return. The Taliban envoys remained confined to Geneva airport and were only authorised to conduct identification procedures. Most cases were verified successfully, paving the way for deportations, though further checks are pending in some instances. Officials explained that the Taliban now only recognise documents issued by their own authorities, rendering papers from Afghanistan’s former embassy in Bern invalid. The initiative follows a policy introduced last year requiring Afghan offenders to be deported after serving their prison terms. Switzerland had previously carried out five such deportations, but the process stalled when the Taliban demanded Kabul-issued documentation. The development comes as European governments grapple with how to handle deportations without formally recognising the Taliban. Germany recently allowed two Taliban consular staff to assist with deportation flights, though Switzerland stressed it has no plans to permit a permanent Taliban presence.

About the Author

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