

CENTER OF DEFENSE, ENERGY AND
GEOPOLITICAL RESEARCH (CEDEG)
Director: Dr. Ioannis Vidakis



PROFILES OF THE TALIBAN CABINET MINISTERS

Author

John Karkazis

Ever Excelling
Seber Excellens

September 2021

1. THE NEW TALIBAN CABINET AND INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

AJ: aljazeera.com
SF: southfront.org
RW: republicworld.com
BM: bulgarianmilitary.com

On 27/8/21 AJ reported that Taliban sources disclosed that the government will include leaders from all ethnicities and tribal backgrounds. This disclosure, if not coming from Mullah Baradar, was probably a staged one to establish a positive climate in the interior of the country and also abroad in a critical period for the consolidation of Taliban's rule in the country.

On 2/9/21 AJ reported that former Taliban political bureau chief, Sayed Muhammad Tayyab Agha, urged group to form an inclusive government.

Also, on 4/9/21 AJ reported that Mullah Baradar promised an 'inclusive' government in an interview with it. One cannot exclude the possibility that Baradar, being a moderate politician, could have in mind the formation of an inclusive government but later hardliners as Haqqani forcefully rejected it.

On 6/9/21 Taliban announced the new government of Afghanistan led by Mahammad Hasan Akhud. All members of the cabinet are Pashtun and also pro-Pakistani except for Baradar and possibly Muttaqi, the only moderate members of it. Women were excluded from the cabinet.

On 8/9/21 AJ reported that China welcomed the new Taliban government whereas West expressed concerns.

On 8/9/21 BM reported the following: "The Taliban's Afghan government is unlikely to be automatically recognized by Russia, it must demonstrate that it is ready to follow the country's civilized path of development". Also, the head of the Committee on International Affairs at the Federation Council Vladimir Jabarov stated the following:

“Automatic recognition of the new government is hardly possible. This should show in practice how ready it is to defend freedom, to carry out the civilized development of the country”.

On 9/9/21 AJ reported that the Iranian government has not directly criticised the Taliban for its interim cabinet, but has signalled concern.

On 20/9/21 SF reported that India wants QUAD to get more involved in Afghanistan. Also reported the following: "The US has announced the Quad's first-ever Leaders' Summit to take place at Washington D.C. on September 24. Last Friday, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) held summit meetings at Dushanbe, Tajikistan. India was represented in the latter occasion and shall be in the former also. Currently Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and its evolving situation and regional security implications is a major topic in both summits. The Quad and the Taliban being mentioned in the same paragraph in many analyses and news pieces, however, is something new".

On 23/9/21 AJ reported that the Turkish President said the Taliban lacking 'inclusive, encompassing leadership' and that Ankara is willing to work with Taliban if the armed group formed a more encompassing government.

On 26/9/21 AJ reported that Italy rules out recognising a Taliban government in Afghanistan and that Italy's FM urges foreign governments to prevent financial collapse that would result in a massive flow of migrants. It also reported also that Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that it is essential Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers keep their 'promises'.

The new Cabinet

Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhud, acting Prime Minister

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, acting Deputy Prime Minister

Sirajuddin Haqqani, acting Minister of Interior

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, acting Minister of Defense

Amir Khan Muttaqi, acting Minister of Foreign Affair

2. PROFILES OF THE SUPREME LEADER OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW TALIBAN GOVERNMENT

IEA: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

MEI: Middle East Institute (USA)

NRF: National Resistance Force

2.1 Hibatullah Akhundzada

- He was born in the Kandahar Province and he is a Pashtun.
- After the Soviet invasion his family migrated to Quetta in the Balochistan province of Pakistan where he followed Islamic seminar at one of the famous madrassas there. Later he actively participated in the armed resistance against the Soviets in Afghanistan.
- In the first Taliban government he was appointed deputy head of the Supreme Court and later he was appointed instructor at the prestigious Jihadi Madrassa in Afghanistan operating under the supervision of Mullah Omar.
- Following the fall of Taliban government in 2001 he was appointed Chief Justice of the Sharia Courts of the IEA, advisor to Mullah Omar and a senior member of Taliban's powerful Council of the Leaders (Quetta Shura).
- On 2016 he was appointed Supreme Leader of the IEA with Mullah Yaqoob and Sirajuddin Haqqani serving as his deputies.
- In the period 2012-2020 two attempts were made to assassinate Akhundzada, both in Pakistan (Balochistan, one in Quetta).
- Following the fall of Kabul to Taliban in August 2021 he ordered the release of all political detainees from all prisons of Afghanistan, ISIL and al-Qaeda members included, and also ordered the strict application of sharia in the country. Akhundzada disappeared for a while producing rumors that either he was assassinated or he was kept under the protection of Pakistani Army.
- He is considered as a hardliner and pro-Pakistani.

2.2 Mullah Mohammad Akhud

- He is 70 years old.
- He is a Pashtun descending, according to Al Jazeera, from Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founder of the Durrani Empire in 1747. He was born (according to UN Security Council) in the tribal Kandahar Province in central Afghanistan populated mainly by Pashtuns but with a strong presence of Baloch, Hazaras and Tajiks.
- He studied in various madrassas of Afghanistan following radical Islamic seminars.
- He was a close associate of Mullah Omar, the founder of Taliban movement.
- He served as the foreign minister and deputy prime minister in the first Taliban government (1996-2001). Then he served as the head of Taliban's powerful leadership council Quetta (or Rabbari) Shura.
- At the beginning of September 2021 he was appointed acting prime minister of the IEA.
- According to western sources (BBC and US Institute for Peace) Akhund is primarily a political person exerting strong influence on Taliban's religious affairs and much less on military ones. He was one of the few Taliban leaders that did not participate in the Soviet-Afghan War. He is also considered by American think tanks (MEI) as pro-Pakistani

2.3 Mullah Abdul Baradar

- He is 52 years old.
- He is coming from a tribal group of Pashtun, born in the Province of Uruzgan, in central Afghanistan, populated mainly by Pashtun but with a strong presence of (mainly pro-Iranian) Hazaras and with record levels of opium poppy crops that Karzai government failed to eradicate. Several Taliban leaders coming from this province cooperated with the Karzai government, one of them serving as governor of the Province.
- He fought side-by-side with Mullah Omar against the Soviets, becoming then his deputy and co-founder of the Taliban movement. His surname 'Barader', meaning 'Brother', was given to him as a 'nom de guerre' by Mullah Omar. Later was also known by the honorific title of "Mullah".
- He held senior positions in the Taliban government during the period 1996-2001.
- After the collapse of Taliban government in 2001 Baradar was appointed head of the organization Quetta Shura in Pakistan becoming the de facto leader of the Taliban. On the

other hand, coming from a province where Taliban leaders developed reconciliation policies with Afghanistan's new regime, together with a small group of Taliban members, he entered into secret negotiations with Karzai aiming at promoting a peace deal and recognition of his regime without the involvement of Pakistan. The powerful Pakistani secret services took notice of Baradar's secret pursuits and Islamabad ordered his imprisonment in 2010.

- Following strong American pressures, Baradar was released from the custodian imprisonment in Pakistan and moved to Qatar where he was appointed head of Taliban's political office overseeing the troop withdrawal agreement with the US. The support to Baradar was most probably the result of Washington's worries regarding the suffocating control of Islamabad on the Taliban regime and its aim to balance it with a pro-Iranian leading figure. Indicative of these worries are among other a paper of MEI (author V. Kaura, 10/9/21) titled "The Pakistani stamp on the Taliban cabinet". The author argues that "The selection of the interim Afghan government led by Mullah Hasan Akhund has the unmistakable stamp of Pakistan's security establishment. Islamabad has always wanted the international community to believe that the Taliban are a nationalistic Pashtun force that has a legitimate claim to rule the country, but the manner in which the new government has been announced is a testament to the fact that the Taliban are also a proxy force for Pakistan". The above worries and concerns were also depicted in a MEI seminar organized in November 2021 under the title "What are Pakistan's aims at Afghanistan?" and the following working questions/themes:

How relevant currently is the concept of "strategic depth"? What kind of regime would Pakistan prefer in Kabul? What is the nature of Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban and how much influence does it exercise over the insurgency's political wing? How important to the course of the Afghan conflict today are Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan?

- On February 2021 Baradar, heading a Taliban delegation, visited Tehran and had a meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif. It is, most probably, that this event enhanced his pro-Iranian profile adding fuel to the mounting disagreements with the other pro-Pakistani Taliban leaders.

- During the process of formation of the new Taliban government he was involved in serious disagreements and conflicts with other, mainly pro-Pakistani, Taliban leaders among them the hardcore radical Islamist Haqqani. He then disappeared for a while from the political scene, after having moved to his stronghold Kandahar (to avoid possibly an assassination attempt).

- At the beginning of September 2021 he was appointed first deputy prime minister of the IEA.
- Time magazine gave an overall assessment of Baradar by including him on 15/9/21 in the list of the "100 Most Influential People In 2021".

2.4 Sirajuddin Haqqani

- He was born sometime between 1973 and 1980
- Haqqani is a Pashtun and son of the famous Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani who took a leading part in the war against the Soviets and who also was the founder and first leader of the Haqqani Network, a guerrilla insurgent group being a semi-autonomous offshoot of Taliban designated by US as a "terror group".
- From an early age he developed close ties and contacts with Pakistan. During his childhood he stayed in North Waziristan, a province of western Pakistan bordering with Afghanistan. Later he attended Darul Uloom Haqqania Deobandi, the famous Islamic seminar in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan.
- At the beginning of September 2021 he was appointed acting minister of the interior.
- He is considered as pro-Pakistani.
- He is an advocate of extremely radical practices, like beheadings and suicide bombings, that paved his path towards the ministry of interior.

2.5 Mullah Mohammed Yaqoob

- He is 31 years old
- Yaqoob is a Pashtun and son of the famous founder Taliban movement Mullah Omar.
- As with the case of Haqqani, from an early age he developed close ties with Pakistan, receiving religious education in various madrassas in Karachi.
- In 2016, he was appointed head of the powerful Taliban military commission and member of Rahbari Shura (the Taliban's powerful decision-making council) and also second deputy of Hibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme commander of the IEA.
- At the beginning of September 2021 he was appointed acting minister of defense.
- He is considered as moderate personality, supporter of peace and pro-Saudi having, as rumored, ties with the Saudi regime as well as with the former government of Afghanistan.

2.6 Amir Khan Muttaqi

- He is 51 years old.
- He is probably a Pashtun, born in the mostly tribal province of Helmand in southern Afghanistan bordering with Pakistan. The predominant ethnic group of the province is the Pashtun with Balochis representing a significant minority.
- During the first government of Taliban (1996-2001) he served as the minister of culture and information and also as a minister of education. Some years later he was appointed representative of Taliban government in the UN led talks on Afghanistan.
- Later he was appointed by Taliban member of the peace commission and negotiation team and was dispatched to Qatar together with Baradar to hold talks with US.
- After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban it was reported that Muttaqi was holding talks with non-Taliban politicians, among them Abdullah Abdullah (chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation) and Karzai. Also he held (finally failed) talks with NRF for a peaceful settlement of hostilities in the Province of Panjshir.
- At the beginning of September 2021 he was appointed acting minister of foreign affairs.
- He is considered as a moderate politician.