

AFGHANISTAN TALIBAN YEAR 5

Afghanistan 2026 - First Half

*Taliban power, resistance
and the human rights crisis*



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ANNEX

Afghanistan 2026 — First Half

Taliban power, resistance and the human rights crisis

This report opens a series of six-monthly chronicles devoted to Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Drawing on a corpus of reports, analyses and weekly bulletins, it follows as closely as possible the way the regime is reshaping the political order, destroying gender equality, confronting or instrumentalizing its neighbours, and plunging millions of Afghan women and men into a lasting humanitarian crisis.

A test of truth

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has not merely returned to Taliban rule; it has become a test of truth for international law, for multilateral organizations, and for the governments that claim to defend human rights. Each passing half-year reveals a little more of what it means to govern a country in the name of a radical interpretation of religion, rejecting the equality of women, repressing opposition, and negotiating mining contracts or security agreements in the shadow of sanctions.

The scope of the volume

This first volume covers the first half of 2026. It does not tell an abstract story, but tracks very precise movements: Taliban decisions, United Nations resolutions, human rights reports, expulsions of refugees, clashes on the border with Pakistan, debates within Afghan society in exile, armed resistance operations. Each chapter starts from documented facts to trace a line of force: a system of power, forms of violence, margins of resistance.

The centre of gravity: women and girls

The centre of gravity of this report is clear: women and girls, deprived of secondary and higher education, driven out of the health professions, excluded from national examinations, surveilled in public space, and targeted by policies that are increasingly described as the crime against humanity of gender persecution. Afghanistan remains the only country in the world where half the population no longer has the right to learn, to work freely, to train in medicine, or to represent its country publicly. The opening chapters take this reality as their starting point, because it alone concentrates the nature of the regime.

Beyond women's rights

It would be reductive to see Taliban power as merely a "women's rights" issue. The report also follows:

- the reshaping of the regime itself, between centralization, vulnerabilities, the use of violence, and claims to legitimacy;
- the slow war with Pakistan, the cross-border fire, the failed mediations, the competing discourses on the Durand Line, and the concerns of humanitarian agencies;

- the movements of refugees and forced returns, the expulsion policies of neighbouring countries, and their effects on provinces already in distress;
- the forms of resistance, armed and civil, the journalists, the minorities, the former soldiers, the advocacy initiatives, and the first steps of international justice.

A work that takes a position

This report is not neutral. It does not simply juxtapose events. It starts from an observation: Taliban power has made the erasure of women, the repression of opposition, and the control of borders a programme of government, and it puts to the test the world's capacity to name and confront a regime that systematically violates gender equality, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms.

Sources and method

Each chapter draws on explicit sources: reports from UNAMA, analyses from the Costs of War Project, investigations by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, records from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission before its dissolution, bulletins from UN agencies, and the work of networks such as the Afghanistan Analysts Network. The aim is not to produce a closed narrative, but a reference work that can serve journalists, researchers, activists, policymakers, and Afghans themselves alike.

A structured memory

This volume is the first in a possible series of six-monthly chronicles. It does not claim to say the last word on Afghanistan, but it seeks to offer two things that are often missing: a structured memory of what is happening, half-year after half-year, and a coherent reading of the links between Taliban decisions, humanitarian crises, resistance, regional dynamics, and international justice efforts.

To be continued...

PROLOGUE

20 years of war, 5 years of power

The human toll of the Taliban regime, from the start of the insurgency to the consolidation of their power.

This prologue draws up the human toll of the Afghan conflict and of the Taliban regime, from the beginning of the insurgency to the consolidation of their power, based on United Nations records, academic research projects, and the major human rights organizations. It does not claim to exhaust reality, but to give the orders of magnitude without which no serious debate on Afghanistan is possible.

Methodological note and source corpus

Quantifying two decades of conflict runs into a major difficulty: no single institution has covered the entire period with a single method. This prologue cross-references five complementary corpora:

- The annual records of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which has systematically documented civilian casualties since 2009 under a protocol requiring three independent sources per incident;
- The Costs of War Project at Brown University, led by Neta Crawford, Catherine Lutz and Stephanie Savell, which produces global mortality estimates;
- The Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), a network of analysts based in Kabul;
- The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), a national institution dissolved by the Taliban in 2022 but whose records remain a reference for the republican period;
- The investigations of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

A word of caution is needed on the figures. The Pentagon stopped compiling civilian casualties as early as 2001, the American special inspector general SIGAR classified the losses of the Afghan forces in 2017, and UNAMA counts only cases verified against a strict standard of proof. All researchers agree that the available tolls constitute a floor, not a real total.

1. One of the heaviest human tolls of the early 21st century

The most frequently cited estimate comes from the Costs of War Project. After twenty years of war, the project estimates the number of direct deaths in the Afghan conflict at around 176,000 people, all parties combined. For the civilian side alone, roughly 46,000 Afghan civilians died as a direct result of the war, a figure the authors themselves present as a probable undercount. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program, for its part, puts the total at 212,000 dead. Beyond direct deaths, the destruction of infrastructure, of the health system, and of the economy caused considerable indirect mortality. Millions of Afghans were also displaced, both within the country and towards Pakistan and Iran.

2. The annual curve of civilian casualties (2009-2021)

The strength of the UNAMA record lies in its continuity. On the occasion of its tenth annual report, the mission had already recorded more than 32,000 civilians killed and nearly 60,000 wounded over the single decade 2009–2018. The annual series traces an almost uninterrupted rise up to the peak of 2018.

A few milestones:

- 2017: 10,453 civilian casualties, of which 3,438 killed. The fourth consecutive year above 10,000.
- 2018: 10,993 civilian casualties, of which 3,804 killed. The highest level ever recorded, with 927 children killed.
- 2019: more than 10,000 civilian casualties, the sixth year in a row above that threshold.
- 2021 (first half): 5,183 civilian casualties in the first half alone, up 47%, before the collapse of the Republic.

The year 2018 remains the apogee of this violence. UNAMA attributed 63% of civilian casualties to anti-government elements, of which 37% to the Taliban and 20% to Daesh. It was that year, on 27 January, that the ambulance bomb attack in Kabul took place, the single deadliest incident ever recorded by the mission. The deliberate targeting of civilians by the Taliban nearly doubled between 2017 and 2018, rising from 865 to 1,688 casualties.

3. The signature of the attacks: explosive devices and suicide bombings

Over the whole period, one constant dominates: the majority responsibility of anti-government elements. Year after year, UNAMA attributes between 61% and 80% of civilian casualties to them, with an average around 75%. In 2013, for example, the mission attributed 74% of civilian losses to the Taliban alone.

The method of this violence is equally well documented:

- The combined use of improvised explosive devices was the leading cause of civilian casualties, reaching 42% of the total in 2018;
- The Afghanistan Analysts Network shows, by cross-referencing UNAMA data with the ACLED database, that after the US–Taliban agreement of February 2020 the apparent drop in casualties in fact masked a shift of attacks towards unidentified perpetrators, concentrated in the provincial capitals, of which the Taliban are the most probable authors.

4. Attacks on public places and the sectarian dimension

The attacks repeatedly targeted densely populated civilian spaces: educational centres, hospitals, mosques, markets. Kabul suffered disproportionate harm. In 2018, nearly half of the suicide attacks and complex assaults by anti-government elements took place there, causing 1,686 civilian casualties.

The Taliban also attacked places of worship for political motives: in June 2019, in Samangan province, they detonated a remote-controlled device in a mosque during Friday prayers, targeting a mullah who had praised the security forces.

The sectarian dimension is one of the most documented traits of this violence. The attacks deliberately struck the Shia Muslim minority, mostly Hazara. The most striking episode of the first half of 2021 remains the 8 May attack outside the Sayed ul-Shuhada school in Kabul, which caused more than 300 civilian casualties, mostly schoolgirls, of whom 85 were killed.

5. The losses of the Afghan security forces before 2021

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) paid the heaviest price among the combatants. Across the whole conflict, estimates place their losses between 70,000 and 75,000 dead. The Costs of War Project settles on a range of 66,000–69,000, while other counts, including the one relayed by Fortune from American sources, put the figure closer to 75,000.

The progression of these losses illuminates the military pressure exerted by the Taliban:

- By mid-October 2009, more than 5,500 soldiers and police had been killed since the start of the war.
- By March 2014, this total reached 13,729.
- According to Neta Crawford, about 23,470 members of the security forces (14,200 police and 7,750 soldiers) were killed up to the end of 2014, the year responsibility for security was transferred to the Afghans.

From 2014 onwards, the toll rose sharply. In January 2019, President Ashraf Ghani acknowledged more than 45,000 members of the security forces killed since 2014, that is, in a little over four years, almost double the total accumulated over the first thirteen years of war.

In 2017, the ANDSF loss figures became classified information at the request of the Afghan government and its partners. SIGAR had stopped publishing this data in its quarterly reports to Congress as early as April 2010. Estimates after 2017 therefore rest largely on press cross-referencing and occasional official statements.

6. The 2021 collapse and the fate of the defeated forces

The offensive of the summer of 2021 caused the rapid collapse of the ANDSF, extensively analysed by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, which stresses that this rout had been building for months, even years, amid the abandonment of forward posts, tactical retreats and desertions, and the withdrawal of American air and logistical support.

The final battles were themselves deadly: according to a former official cited by the Washington Post, around 4,000 members of the Afghan forces were killed and a thousand reported missing in the final fighting.

The fall of Kabul did not put an end to the violence against these men. Despite the general amnesty proclaimed by the Taliban, former ANDSF members became a target. UNAMA established that the majority of the killings and disappearances of former soldiers and police took place in the four months following the seizure of power.

By the summer of 2023, the cumulative toll recorded at least:

- 800 cases of extrajudicial executions, arrests and arbitrary detentions,
- 218 extrajudicial deaths,
- 144 cases of torture,

- 14 enforced disappearances of former government employees and security personnel.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission documented these practices before its dissolution. As early as July 2021, it investigated the capture of Spin Boldak and established that Taliban forces there had killed 40 civilians and looted private property, in violation of international humanitarian law. For the first half of 2021 alone, the AIHRC attributed 917 civilians killed to the Taliban, whereas UNAMA counted 699, the gap owing to differences in method and scope.

7. The repression of women described as a crime against humanity

Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists took a major legal step in their joint report of May 2023. They showed how the draconian restrictions imposed on women and girls, combined with imprisonment, enforced disappearance and torture, could constitute the crime against humanity of gender persecution within the meaning of Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute.

Amnesty's Secretary General, Agnès Callamard, spoke of a war against women, describing these crimes as organized, widespread and systematic.

Human Rights Watch reached the same qualification, concluding that the pattern of abuses against women and girls constitutes the crime against humanity of gender persecution. The context is without equivalent: Afghanistan remains the only country in the world where women and girls cannot access secondary and higher education.

In January 2025, the Prosecutor of the ICC requested arrest warrants against the Taliban supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and their chief justice, for the persecution of Afghan women and girls.

8. A humanitarian crisis of exceptional scale

The repression is set against an economic and humanitarian collapse of exceptional scale. More than 28 million people, nearly two-thirds of the population, needed humanitarian aid in 2023, of whom 14.7 million for their basic survival.

The decree of 24 December 2022 banning women from working for NGOs aggravated an already critical situation, forcing several organizations to suspend their operations. Aid mechanisms thus found themselves caught between Taliban restrictions and the drying up of international aid, leaving millions of Afghans in extreme vulnerability.

To be continued...

Part I



The Erasure of Women

CHAPTER 1

Governing through the erasure of women

Taliban power does not merely govern against women; it governs through their erasure. This chapter shows how the exclusion of Afghan women - from school, work, health, the courts and the media - is not a series of isolated measures, but an architecture of power that organizes their social disappearance.

Taliban power does not merely govern against women; it governs through their erasure. Since its return to power, Afghanistan has become the laboratory of a political order that does not simply limit women's rights, but works to remove them from the visible world: from school, work, the skilled professions, institutions, the media, the courts, the street itself. This is not a series of disparate measures. It is a method of government.

The important word is not only "prohibition." The right word is "architecture." For what Taliban power is building, piece by piece, is a society in which women are not simply dominated, but made politically secondary, economically dependent, socially vulnerable, and symbolically erasable. Decrees, dress codes, restrictions on movement, professional bans, morality police: together they compose a system, whose centre is clear – to prevent Afghan women from existing as autonomous subjects.

School: amputating the intellectual future

School was struck first, because it commands all the other exclusions. More than a million girls have been excluded from secondary education since September 2021, and if the ban holds until 2030, nearly four million girls could be permanently deprived of secondary schooling. This is not only educational violence. It is a policy of human decapitalization on the scale of an entire country, organized against half the population.

UNICEF gives a merciless translation of this: if the restrictions on girls' education and women's employment persist, Afghanistan could lose more than 25,000 professionals by 2030, including around 20,000 teachers and 5,400 health workers. At the same time, the share of women in the civil service fell from 21% to 17.7% between 2023 and 2025, while the exclusion of girls from school already costs 84 million dollars a year in lost economic output, about 0.5% of GDP. Taliban power does not merely destroy a freedom: it sabotages the reproduction of the country's capacities.

To ban secondary and higher education for girls, to block access to universities, to erase women authors from curricula and libraries, is not simply to deprive a generation of diplomas; it is knowingly to prepare a country where no woman will tomorrow be able to claim a qualified position, or to challenge the regime's official narrative. Afghan women are being expelled from the intellectual future of their own country.

Work: manufacturing material dependence

Work follows the same pattern. The bans on women working for NGOs, the restrictions in international institutions, the harassment of shopkeepers and employees, the sabotage of the female presence in the civil

service, do not target only individual incomes. They target women's capacity to exist in the real economy other than through the mediation of a husband, a brother, or a son.

By stripping Afghan women of their salary, their office, their workshop, the regime locks them into total material dependence, where survival passes through acceptance of the harshest patriarchal rules. The woman who earns a living becomes an anomaly to be corrected; the woman without resources becomes the norm of an order where male authority is the condition of all access to the world.

Health: engineering an anticipated crisis for women

The health sector concentrates the logic of the system. The national session of the medical exit examination, indispensable for obtaining a licence as a doctor or dentist, was held for the fourth consecutive year without any female candidates, while around 7,000 men were able to sit it. In other words, Afghan women who have already completed years of medical study are kept in a deliberate impasse: trained enough to measure what is being denied to them, but prevented from reaching the qualification that would allow them to practise.

This exclusion is not a matter of mere professional discrimination; it prepares a gendered health crisis. In several provinces, women are already prevented from being treated by male doctors. Without newly trained, qualified and authorized female professionals, entire swathes of the female population will be deprived of real access to care. Taliban power thus produces both the shortage and the ban: it blocks the training of women, then claims to administer a system in which their absence becomes deadly.

The recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, pushes this logic to its conclusion. Only 4.1 million of Afghanistan's 15 million women have reliable access to health care, and the ban on women accessing medical institutes is judged "completely unjustifiable." Bennett warns that the persistence of restrictions on women's education and employment in the health sector could even amount to a "femicide," because it exposes Afghan women to avoidable suffering, illness and death on a large scale. The word is extreme; it measures a policy that methodically endangers women's lives.

Space: cities that concentrate vulnerability

The control of women passes not only through institutions; it passes also through space. Afghan cities no longer protect women, they now concentrate their vulnerability. Where the city should have offered anonymity, employment, access to care, to university, to administrations and to networks of solidarity, it becomes under Taliban power a place of surveillance, humiliation and filtering. The more visible the female presence, the more exposed it becomes.

The street, the campus, the hospital, the court, the television studio: each of these places is turned into a checkpoint. A woman who goes there no longer enters as a citizen, but as a body to be checked, corrected, turned away or punished. In this new geography, urban space does not correct the patriarchal order; it makes it operational. It concentrates the counters, the uniforms, the injunctions, the stares, the threats. It makes female mobility not a mundane right, but a risk.

The assassination of Dr Badriya Jalali, on 28 April in Kabul, gives a face to this reality. She was killed as she was making her way to a Taliban court to assert her rights in the course of legal proceedings. This murder is not merely a tragic news item. It says something essential about the regime: even in the rare spaces that women still try to

occupy in order to defend their rights, they remain exposed to violence. The security proclaimed by Taliban power stops precisely where female autonomy begins.

Speech: exporting the silencing of women

This logic of deterrence now extends to speech itself. Human Rights Watch has documented how the Taliban Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice imposes its directives on Afghan media, including when they address Afghan women living outside the country: women must appear veiled on air, and some are simply removed from the screen. One Afghan researcher, author of a report on Afghanistan, was thus asked to be replaced by a male colleague to comment on her own work.

The regime is therefore no longer content to censor women in Afghanistan; it attempts to export their silencing beyond its borders. It seeks to maintain over Afghan women, even in exile, an authority of definition: who speaks, how she appears, on what conditions she may be heard. In other words, Taliban power does not merely refuse women's freedom; it contests their right to represent Afghanistan, to describe their own situation, to become the legitimate interpreters of the violence they endure.

Bodies: violence as spectacle

The control of bodies completes the control of voices. The public corporal punishments, regularly documented since 2021, including for "moral crimes," are a reminder that violence is never far behind the regulatory apparatus. The public flogging ordered in Badakhshan against a man and a woman each sentenced to 39 lashes for extramarital relations is part of this economy of terror. The message is not only judicial; it is spectacular. The point is to show that any real or supposed transgression of the moral order will leave its mark on bodies.

The court, the hospital, the studio and the public square then obey the same logic: the regime turns every social scene into a disciplinary theatre. It does not govern despite the vulnerability of women, but by producing it. It does not suffer the collapse of protections; it organizes it. And it does not merely marginalize Afghan women; it turns that marginalization into an instrument for the general regulation of society. A society that accepts the erasure of women will more easily accept the rest: censorship, arbitrariness, humiliation and fear.

Naming the system: "gender apartheid"

This is why the notion of "gender apartheid" keeps its analytical force. The term does not serve here to dramatize the situation artificially, but to name a system in which the separation, subordination and exclusion of women are instituted, administered and reproduced through coordinated rules, practices and violence. Several reference documents explicitly describe Afghanistan as facing an "unprecedented" human rights crisis under a regime of gender apartheid, marked by the dismantling of the rule of law, of civic space and of fundamental freedoms.

The error would be to treat the women's file as one sectoral heading among others. Taliban policy towards Afghan women is not a side chapter of the Afghan crisis; it is its clearest matrix. It reveals what the regime means by order, morality, sovereignty and security. It also shows why the question of women is inseparable from all the others: from the health crisis to the educational collapse, from media repression to diplomatic isolation, from poverty to international justice.

What this chapter opens

This first chapter sets the starting point of the whole report: Taliban power has made the erasure of women a technique of government. Not a drift. Not an excess. Not a mere patriarchal survival. A central, methodical, avowed technique, which says more about the nature of the regime than all its discourses on stability, religion or security.

The chapters that follow detail the concrete mechanisms of this policy. Chapter 2 examines how the ban on education, the destruction of the health pipeline, and the closing of female employment simultaneously break the three pillars of autonomy – learning, healing, working. Chapter 3 unfolds the geography of this violence, showing how Afghan cities, far from being refuges, become spaces saturated with control where female mobility is a fault in itself.

This first section on the erasure of women is therefore not one theme among others: it is the interpretive grid through which, in the parts that follow, Taliban power itself, the slow war with Pakistan, the expulsions of refugees, the resistance and the first steps of international justice will be re-read.

To be continued...

CHAPTER 2

Health, education, work: the three broken pillars

This chapter shows how Taliban power simultaneously destroys women's schooling, health and work, turning these three domains into instruments of control. Female autonomy is not only hindered; it is methodically dismantled, until material independence, knowledge and access to care become almost impossible.

1. Breaking school: an amputated generation

The ban on secondary and higher education for girls does not come down to a simple educational "step backwards." It manufactures a generation amputated of the essential: the capacity to understand the world, to read the law, to handle figures, to communicate, to work other than in the service of others.

Since September 2021, more than a million girls have been excluded from secondary school, and if the closures continue until 2030, nearly four million could be permanently deprived of secondary education. Some of them even see the elementary programmes disappear, the textbooks written by women, the classes where Afghan women had found a place as teachers.

This lockdown affects not only pupils; it also strikes teachers. Tens of thousands of women who carried Afghan schooling – in the cities as in the countryside – are sent home, deprived of income, status, social network. Where school was a place of socialization, of information flow, of solidarity between women, it becomes a male space, or a closed space. Taliban power deliberately cuts the daily journeys that allowed Afghan women to leave their homes to teach, learn, organize.

2. Breaking health: a foretold crisis

Health is the second broken pillar. Before 2021, the Afghan system rested largely on female health professionals: doctors, nurses, midwives, medical students. By excluding women from national examinations, medical institutes and hospitals, Taliban power does not merely impoverish the sector; it changes its structure, to the direct detriment of female patients.

To obtain a licence, young doctors must pass a national exit examination. For four years, this examination has been held without any female candidates, while thousands of men take part. Afghan women who have completed several years of study find themselves with no possibility of practising legally, nor of continuing their training. They become unusable knowledge, skills blocked by political decision.

In several provinces, social rules already forbid women from being examined by male doctors. By drying up the pool of female professionals, the regime opens an anticipated health crisis: villages, whole cities where women can no longer be treated, for want of authorized female caregivers. The shortage will not be an accident; it will have been produced, organized, administered.

The analysis of the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, illuminates this shift. Only 4.1 million of Afghanistan's 15 million women today have reliable access to health care. The bans on medical education and female employment in health are judged "completely unjustifiable" and liable, if they continue, to amount to "femicide": a policy that leads to avoidable suffering, illness and death on a large scale, because it structurally targets women.

3. Breaking work: banning economic independence

The third pillar is work. The decree of 24 December 2022 banning women from working for NGOs is not a marginal measure. It strikes thousands of employees, but also hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries whose access to aid depended on the possibility of female employees reaching them, listening to them, registering them, distributing goods and services.

In parallel, the restrictions imposed in international institutions, the administration, the media, the private sector and the civil service push women back towards the domestic sphere. The woman who earns a salary, who signs a contract, who goes each day to an office or a workplace becomes an anomaly to be corrected, a target for the morality police, a subject of threat for the intelligence services.

This destruction of female employment does not only reduce household income; it erases the possibility, for Afghan women, of having money they control, a space of decision that does not pass through a man's authorization, a time of their own. We do not sufficiently measure what it means to lose a job in a regime where female mobility is already conditioned on the presence of a mahram, and where every outing becomes a monitored act: it is the closing of a window, and often the disappearance of a voice in public space.

4. Combined effects: a dismantled autonomy

Taken separately, these three pillars – school, health, work – are already vital domains. Taken together, they compose the minimal foundation of autonomy:

- learning in order to understand the world,
- healing in order to stay alive and healthy,
- working in order to have material resources.

Taliban power does not merely weaken them. It puts them in crisis simultaneously, in a coordinated way. The girl who does not go to school will become neither a teacher nor a doctor. The woman who can no longer work in an NGO will no longer be able to finance her children's studies or maintain an autonomous social network. The patient who can no longer find a qualified female caregiver will see her health depend on decisions taken far from her, by men, according to norms that regard her first of all as a body to be controlled.

This coordination produces a ratchet effect: each measure makes reversal more difficult. Once the school cohorts are lost, the university intakes cancelled, the medical intakes interrupted, the female jobs eliminated, rebuilding autonomy will take years, even if another regime were to arrive tomorrow. Taliban power thus builds a lasting fragility, which will outlive its own fall.

5. Breaking the networks of solidarity

An often overlooked element is the effect of these policies on female networks of solidarity. School, the hospital, the office, the market, NGOs, associations – all these places were also spaces of encounter between women, where information, support and defence strategies circulated. By erasing women from these places, the regime does not only close doors; it destroys social fabrics.

Teachers no longer meet in the staff room. Nurses no longer exchange at the end of a shift. NGO employees no longer cross paths on the humanitarian routes. Activists no longer see one another in meeting rooms. The isolated woman is more easily controlled; the group of organized women is harder to intimidate. By dispersing the networks, Taliban power weakens the collective capacity of Afghan women to resist, to document, to testify, to help one another.

6. An impoverished society, not only women

Finally, it is crucial to recall that this dismantling does not strike women alone; it impoverishes the whole of society. A country that deliberately deprives itself of 20,000 teachers, of thousands of female health professionals, of tens of thousands of qualified female employees, that blocks the education of millions of girls, and that prevents half its population from accessing university, compromises its own capacity to recover, to modernize, to rebuild institutions.

Children – boys included – lose teachers, doctors, neighbours who ran shops, colleagues who carried projects, voices that demanded accountability. Men lose partners, colleagues, counterweights, sources of income. Villages lose intelligent relays towards the outside. Cities lose labour, skills, ideas.

The price of the erasure of women is paid not only in freedom, but in collective intelligence and in resilience to crises. The more the pillars of female autonomy are broken, the more the whole of Afghanistan becomes vulnerable to shocks – political, economic, climatic, sanitary.

Towards the geography of vulnerability

Chapter 1 showed how Taliban power governs through the erasure of women. This chapter 2 details the precise mechanics by which it breaks the three pillars of their autonomy: school, health, work. In all three domains, the policy is not merely unjust; it is structural. It aims to install durably an order in which half the population depends, for its survival, its health, its income and its knowledge, on the decisions of an armed male minority.

Chapter 3 will extend this movement by inscribing it in a concrete geography: that of Afghan cities. It will show how Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad and other urban centres, far from being refuges, have become places where the vulnerability of women is concentrated, organized, surveilled – and how this urban geography is inseparable from the human rights crisis and the reshaping of Taliban power.

To be continued...

The city against women

This chapter shows how Afghan cities, far from offering refuge and opportunity, have become under Taliban power spaces where the vulnerability of women is concentrated and organized. Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad and the other urban centres no longer correct the patriarchal order; they are its most effective instruments.

1. From refuge-city to trap-city

For years, Afghan cities were perceived as possible spaces of emancipation. Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif or Jalalabad concentrated the universities, the hospitals, the NGOs, the media, the administrations, the markets, the libraries – so many places where women could study, work, seek care, organize, speak out. Urbanization, even incomplete, carried the hope of a correction of rural violence.

Under Taliban power, this movement has reversed. Cities no longer protect women, they concentrate their vulnerability. They gather the security forces, the offices of the morality police, the courts, the controlled media, the administrative offices where the decrees that target them are decided. Every urban journey becomes a crossing of surveillance zones.

Urban density then works against them. The more checkpoints, patrols, cameras and offices there are, the harder it is to move without being seen, questioned, corrected. The city, which could have been a space of dispersion, becomes a space of focus: women are more visible there, therefore more exposed, therefore more controlled.

2. Kabul: capital of orders and decrees

Kabul concentrates this logic. It is there that the ministries are installed, the directorates for the "Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice," the intelligence services, the courts that apply the new norms, the most-followed media. Every decree on the hijab, on the presence of women in public places, on their participation in the media, on their employment in NGOs, on their access to parks or baths, is born or applied first in Kabul.

The investigations of the UN agencies show that the application of these rules has become particularly strict there: harassment in public spaces, the obligation to go out with a mahram, the fear of being arrested or humiliated in case of "non-compliance" increase with each new decree. The women interviewed say they no longer feel safe leaving their homes, even for essential needs.

The capital thus becomes a laboratory of control: what is tested in Kabul – bans on access to parks, segregation in universities, filtering at the entrance to hospitals, directives to the media – is then exported elsewhere. Kabul's urbanity is not a counter-model to rural violence; it is a factory of norms.

3. Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad: cities under surveillance

The other major cities – Herat in the west, Mazar in the north, Jalalabad in the east – reproduce this model on their own scale. They concentrate the provincial administrations, the health structures, the schools, the markets, the Taliban bases, the seats of the intelligence services, the influential places of worship. They become nerve centres where the rules of segregation and control are applied.

Herat gave a striking example with the brutal enforcement of dress codes at the doors of hospitals: patients turned away, employees prevented from entering, a marked drop in female admissions. The city is no longer only the place where one accesses specialized care; it has become a filter, a sorting, an additional barrier for women, who must cross a succession of thresholds (road, checkpoint, hospital) in the hope of being treated.

Mazar and Jalalabad, long considered more open cities, are now caught in the same vice. The battles for their control, the increased presence of Taliban forces, the bringing to heel of local administrations and media make the urban life of women more precarious, more surveilled, more uncertain.

4. Daily journeys as places of danger

Urban vulnerability plays out not only in institutions; it plays out in daily journeys. Going from home to school, from home to the market, from home to the office, from home to the hospital, from home to the court – each of these routes becomes a calculated risk.

The assassination of Dr Badriya Jalali in Kabul, as she was making her way to the court to defend her rights, shows that the danger lies not only "at the end" of the journey, in the institution, but on the road itself. The city is full of points of vulnerability: streets, intersections, the surroundings of public buildings, poorly lit areas, queues, transport.

Under Taliban power, each new decree on female mobility – the mahram obligation, the banning of certain places, checks in buses or taxis – adds an obstacle on these journeys. The woman who goes out no longer moves in a neutral space; she crosses a regulatory minefield, where an error of dress, of company, of destination can lead to humiliation, arrest, violence.

5. Closed public spaces, saturated private spaces

Another urban shift is the progressive closing of the public spaces that were places of female presence: parks, gardens, cultural centres, cafes, sports halls, swimming pools, beauty salons. These places are not only "luxuries"; they were spaces where women could exist for themselves, see one another, talk, breathe.

By closing them or subjecting them to rules that make their access almost impossible, Taliban power pushes women back into the private sphere. But this sphere is not neutral: in a context where patriarchal norms are reinforced, where men are themselves under pressure, where the economy collapses, the domestic space can become a place of tension, of isolation, of invisibility.

The Afghan city under the Taliban is thus caught between two forces: an outside saturated with surveillance and decrees, and an inside where frustrations, poverty and violence accumulate. Women can no longer invest the outside; they are shut into an inside that does not protect them.

6. The disappearance of places of speech

Cities have also lost the places of female speech. The conference halls, the television studios, the local radio stations, the NGO meeting rooms, the university lecture halls, the professional assemblies where Afghan women could take the microphone, present a study, comment on the news, plead a cause, have emptied of their female voices.

One sees it even in the international media in Pashto or Dari: female researchers, activists and journalists are replaced on air by men, or forced to appear in conditions that reduce their presence to a veiled, filtered, framed silhouette. The Taliban directives on the hijab, on the presence of women on screen, on the subjects they may address, impose themselves on studios located in cities that would sometimes like to resist, but that know they are watched.

The consequence is twofold: Afghan women lose platforms, and cities lose voices. Public conversation becomes masculinized, hardens, closes. The problems that directly affect women – access to care, expulsions, violence, food crises, harassment – are discussed without them, or against them.

7. Fear as urban infrastructure

Decree after decree, fear becomes an invisible infrastructure of the city. The women interviewed in the UN agencies' surveys describe a constant anxiety: each new decree targets them, each new announcement may mean an additional ban, an increased risk of being arrested, humiliated, punished.

This fear alters mental maps. Streets are avoided. Markets are deserted. Services are used less often. Hospitals are visited late, or no longer at all. Offices are no longer reached. Friends are no longer seen. The city shrinks. What was a wide space of possibilities becomes a narrow network of a few journeys deemed "bearable," at the price of an immense renunciation.

Fear is not only a feeling; it is a tool of government. It makes it possible to control millions of women without having to arrest them all, without having to punish them all. It is enough for the threat to be credible, repeated, visible in a few cases, for all women to adapt their behaviour. The city thus becomes the permanent theatre of this pedagogy of fear.

8. A geography of vulnerability

This chapter 3 does not describe an abstraction; it maps a geography. In Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Zaranj, Kunduz and in dozens of other urban centres, the places of power, the structures of control, the closed public spaces, the dangerous journeys, the houses where displaced families are crammed, the markets where prices explode compose a map of female vulnerability.

Afghan cities are no longer the engines of a potential democratization; they are the visible nodes of a regime of constraint. They concentrate symbolic and material violence, they make this violence more effective, more everyday, more banal. They exhaust the capacity of women to resist, to move, to gather, to speak.

Articulating cities, power and borders

This chapter shows that the question of women cannot be understood without attention to urban space. The city is not only a backdrop; it is an instrument of power. The Taliban regime uses the major cities to experiment with its decrees, control movement, filter access to care, lock down school, muzzle the media, intimidate activists.

The following chapters will extend this spatial reading beyond the urban centres. They will examine how Taliban power reshapes itself from this geography – between provincial capitals, front lines, border zones with Pakistan, rural provinces and humanitarian routes – and how cities play a key role in the human rights crisis, as much as in the slow war unfolding along the borders and commercial corridors.

To be continued...

Part II



The Taliban Regime

The Taliban regime in the first half of 2026

This chapter describes the Taliban regime as a system of power in constant reshaping: politico-religious monopoly, centralization, apparatuses of coercion, internal vulnerabilities, claims to legitimacy. It shows that the hardening against women and cities is not a drift, but a tool at the heart of this reshaping.

1. From conquest to consolidation

More than four years after the seizure of Kabul, the Taliban regime is no longer an insurgent force. It is an installed power, which de facto administers a country of nearly forty million inhabitants, signs agreements, controls borders, collects taxes, manages the currency, proclaims decrees, negotiates with states and international organizations.

This installation does not mean stability. It designates rather a phase of authoritarian consolidation: the regime works to eliminate rivals, to bring recalcitrant elites to heel, to neutralize opposition, to integrate former combatants into structures of control. As it takes root, it hardens its ideology and its coercive apparatus, while simultaneously seeking to obtain a minimal external recognition.

Afghanistan thus becomes a country led by a hybrid power, both insurgent movement and government. The former figures of the guerrilla hold official posts, commanders control ministries, the networks of mosques serve as relays for decrees, the intelligence services and the courts apply norms that combine tradition and the instructions of the supreme leader.

2. Politico-religious monopoly and the exclusion of alternatives

The Taliban regime rests on a politico-religious monopoly at several levels:

- A supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, who combines religious authority and ultimate political power;
- Emirs and provincial officials who control territories, administrations, security forces;
- Ideological structures (preachers, religious councils, ministries in charge of "virtue") that frame social life.

Political parties are banned, institutional opposition is impossible, elections are abolished. The political scene is reduced to a space where only Taliban voices can claim legitimacy. The former republican leaders, the party officials, the figures of civil society are either in exile, or reduced to silence, or integrated into power relations where their room for manoeuvre is minimal.

This monopoly is reinforced by the exclusion of religious alternatives. The currents that would contest the Taliban reading – Islamists of other traditions, reformists, critical Sufi figures – are marginalized, surveilled, sometimes

threatened. By claiming an exclusive definition of Afghan Islam, the Taliban regime locks the country into a doctrine that admits no counter-interpretation.

3. Centralization and internal fractures

One of the traits of this 2026 phase is the tension between centralization and internal fractures. On one side, the Taliban leadership seeks to reinforce the verticality of power: to homogenize decrees, to impose common lines of conduct on the provinces, to control budgets, to discipline local commanders, to frame the uses of violence.

On the other, lines of fracture persist:

- Between the different components of the movement (former rural combatants, Doha figures, administrative cadres);
- Between the more urbanized provinces, where the constraints are more visible and contested, and the rural zones, where the legitimacy of the regime is negotiated with tribal, religious and economic networks;
- Between the Taliban who wish for international recognition, even at the cost of softening certain aspects of the regime, and those who consider any concession a betrayal.

These fractures do not necessarily herald an immediate collapse, but they create structuring vulnerabilities. Every internal debate on women, on education, on the media, on relations with Pakistan or with the regional powers reveals that the regime must constantly arbitrate between its hard ideological base and its needs of political survival.

4. The apparatus of coercion

At the heart of this reshaping lies the apparatus of coercion: security forces, intelligence services, courts, prisons, morality police. These structures do not merely ensure "public order"; their mission is to:

- Surveil real or supposed opposition,
- Punish transgressions of social and religious norms,
- Control the media and social networks,
- Frame NGOs and international institutions,
- make violence a constant reminder of the limits not to be crossed.

The public punishments, the arrests of former soldiers, the detentions of journalists, the intimidation of human rights defenders are not accidents; they are the ordinary language of this apparatus. The regime does not need massive and visible massacres to maintain fear. Regular, targeted, exemplary violence, relayed by rumours and images, is enough – for those who care to see – to sustain a generalized discipline.

5. Legitimacy in search of recognition

At the same time, the Taliban regime seeks a minimal external legitimacy. It does not only wage war; it negotiates:

- With neighbouring states (Pakistan, Iran, China, the Central Asian states, Turkey) on questions of security, refugees, trade, mines;

- With international actors (UN agencies, NGOs, a few Western capitals) to obtain humanitarian cooperation, the release of funds, exceptions to sanctions, practical forms of recognition.

This quest for legitimacy runs into two obstacles:

- The massive human rights violations, in particular gender apartheid, which make any gesture of recognition politically costly for states;
- The structural mistrust of the Taliban towards international institutions, which they perceive as instruments of interference and pressure.

The result is a paradoxical position: a regime that wants the advantages of recognition (funds, investments, the easing of sanctions) without accepting the constraints (minimal respect for human rights, pluralism, verifiable commitments). This contradiction runs through the discourses and the decisions.

6. The real vulnerability of power

Despite centralization and violence, Taliban power is not invulnerable. Several factors weaken the regime in depth:

- A collapsed economy, dependent on aid, on transfers, on informal circuits, on mining revenues and on a few commercial flows;
- A massive humanitarian crisis, which forces the regime to tolerate the presence of actors it otherwise despises or fights;
- A frustrated youth, deprived of education, employment, prospects, accumulating a silent resentment;
- Targeted minorities, who keep the memory of past and present violence;
- Former combatants and Taliban cadres themselves, who may be tempted to cash in their power locally.

To this are added the regional dynamics: tensions with Pakistan, the expectations of China, the balance of power with Iran, the positions of the Central Asian countries. The regime finds itself caught in a game of constraints where its survival depends on its ability to negotiate, to yield sometimes, to harden often, without losing either its internal base or its external levers.

7. The place of women in this architecture

The first three chapters showed that the erasure of women is not a "detail" of the regime, but a nerve centre. In this chapter 4, it becomes clear that policy towards women serves as a test of internal loyalty and a marker of external sovereignty:

- internally, the decrees against women serve to reassure the hard base of the movement: the regime is not "de-radicalizing," it maintains a strict moral order;
- externally, the question of women becomes a field of confrontation with the rest of the world: the Taliban see in it the symbol of their doctrinal autonomy, while states and organizations see in it the symbol of the unacceptable.

In other words, the place of women in the Taliban system is twofold: they are the first victims of a militarized patriarchal order, and they are also the main playing field on which the regime affirms its power and tests its capacity to resist international pressure.

Towards chapter 5: vulnerabilities and resistance

This chapter 4 inscribes the Taliban regime in a trajectory: from conquest to consolidation, from insurgency to power, from centralization to hardening, from the quest for legitimacy to isolation. It shows that the policies against women, cities, minorities and opposition are not isolated decisions, but the instruments of a system that seeks to maintain itself in a hostile environment.

Chapter 5 will continue this movement by focusing on vulnerabilities and resistance. It will examine how, despite fear and coercion, forms of contestation – armed, civil, legal, media – subsist, reorganize, sometimes strengthen, and how the Taliban regime has had constantly to adjust its strategy to contain them, without being able to make them disappear entirely.

To be continued...

Resisting under Taliban rule

This chapter describes the forms of resistance to Taliban power since the seizure of Kabul: armed groups, civil mobilizations, the work of journalists, the defence of human rights, international legal initiatives. It shows that this resistance does not yet overthrow the regime, but that it reveals its deep vulnerabilities.

1. A fragmented but persistent resistance

Since August 2021, the fall of the Republic has not meant the silent acceptance of the new order. Forms of resistance have persisted and reshaped themselves, each with its own means, limits and contradictions:

- Armed groups that refuse Taliban hegemony over certain regions;
- Civil networks that document abuses, organize symbolic actions, maintain solidarities;
- Journalists and researchers, in Afghanistan and in exile, who produce competing narratives;
- Human rights organizations that develop legal qualifications of the repression;
- International initiatives that seek to bring Taliban officials before justice.

This resistance is fragmented, sometimes divided, but it persists. It forces the regime to devote significant means to control, repression and propaganda. It prevents Taliban power from turning into an uncontested normality.

2. Armed resistance: NRF, AFF and others

Among the visible forms of resistance, the armed groups occupy a particular place. The National Resistance Front (NRF), the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) and other structures have conducted operations in several provinces – notably in the mountainous zones of the north and north-east.

These groups do not have means comparable to those of the Taliban: their resources are limited, their supply lines complex, their political unity fragile. But their existence recalls that the country is not entirely pacified. Districts experience clashes, ambushes, nighttime operations, sabotage campaigns.

For the Taliban regime, these armed resistances have a disproportionate symbolic value: even when they do not directly threaten Kabul, they call into question the Emirate's claim to have "brought security" and to have "ended the war." They remind populations that other forces exist, that other narratives are possible, that Taliban power remains an imposed power, not a national consensus.

3. Civil resistance: women, minorities, communities

Beyond arms, a more diffuse civil resistance has developed. Women are often its centre, despite the extreme risks. Demonstrations have taken place in several cities, sometimes of a few dozen people, sometimes of several hundred, to protest against the bans on school, work, movement.

These mobilizations are frequently dispersed by force, the participants arrested, threatened, sometimes tortured. But each demonstration leaves a trace: images circulating on social networks, testimonies gathered by journalists, reports of human rights organizations. Resistance is not measured only in immediate successes; it is measured in accumulated memory, which feeds the perception of the regime.

The minorities – notably the Hazara, Shia community – have also developed forms of resistance, sometimes in connection with transnational networks. The targeted attacks against their neighbourhoods, their schools, their places of worship have prompted responses in the form of commemorations, awareness campaigns, initiatives of solidarity. Here again, the resistance does not overthrow the regime, but it reaffirms a collective identity and a refusal to be reduced to silence.

4. Journalists, researchers: documenting despite fear

Afghan journalists, bloggers and researchers wage another form of resistance: documentation. Despite censorship, threats, arrests, the closure of media outlets, people continue to:

- Gather testimonies;
- Publish investigations;
- Host programmes in exile;
- Transmit information to international organizations.

The regime understands this well and therefore targets journalists: intimidation, arbitrary detentions, beatings, office closures, control of content. By attacking these actors, Taliban power seeks to break the capacity of Afghan society to produce its own narratives, to tell of its own suffering, to archive the abuses.

Yet denunciations continue to come out. The media in exile, the online platforms, the analysts' bulletins, the NGO reports rely on this discreet, often dangerous work. Informational resistance is not spectacular, but it is decisive: without it, the violence would more easily dissolve into oblivion and propaganda.

5. Human rights defence: reporting, qualifying, alerting

Human rights organizations – national and international – maintain a central presence in this resistance. They do not carry weapons; they carry qualifications: war crimes, crimes against humanity, gender persecution, enforced disappearances, torture.

By documenting the killings of former members of the security forces, the violence against women, the attacks on minorities, the forced expulsions, they produce a legal language that contradicts the political language of the Taliban. Where the regime speaks of "morality," "security," "stability," these organizations speak of "violations," "responsibility," "impunity."

They also play a role of international alert: by regularly recalling the Afghan situation, they prevent the file from being completely relegated to the background. Even if the reactions often remain limited, the existence of these reports creates a constant pressure on the states, the institutions, the companies that negotiate with the regime.

6. International justice: an open horizon

A new dimension of the resistance is legal-international. When organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists or UN mechanisms qualify the policies against women as a crime against humanity, or when an international prosecutor requests arrest warrants against Taliban leaders, a door opens.

This door is not that of an immediate overthrow. But it changes the status of Taliban power: from a controversial regime, it becomes a potentially criminal regime, whose leaders know they may one day be prosecuted, arrested, tried. This affects their calculations, their movements, their alliances.

For the victims, for the resisters, for the jurists, this horizon of justice is not an abstract consolation. It is a way of saying: what is happening in Afghanistan is not only an internal matter; it is a question that engages international law, the very idea of a global political community.

7. Limits and contradictions of the resistance

It would be misleading to present the resistance as a united, coherent, effective bloc. It suffers from limits and contradictions:

- The armed groups are sometimes divided, dependent on external support, crossed by rivalries;
- The civil movements are fragmented, often isolated from one another, without a common platform;
- Fear, poverty, exile and exhaustion weaken the capacities for mobilization;
- Certain international actors instrumentalize the Afghan situation for the purposes of foreign policy.

Taliban power exploits these weaknesses. It plays the groups against one another, uses the cracks to reinforce its control, claims that all opposition is manipulated by external forces. The resistance must therefore contend with a politically mined terrain, where every initiative may be co-opted, discredited, infiltrated.

8. What resistance reveals about the regime

Despite these limits, the resistance reveals something essential: the Taliban regime is not a stable, accepted, uncontested power. It must devote constant efforts to:

- Surveil and repress;
- Convince its own that the line remains hard;
- Respond to internal and external criticism;
- Manage the effects of its own decisions on the population.

The presence of armed, civil, legal and media resistance shows that Afghan society does not simply let itself be absorbed by the Taliban order. It is wounded, divided, dispersed, but it remains capable of saying no, of testifying, of fighting, of betting on horizons more distant than the regime's calendar.

Towards chapter 6: borders and regional order

This chapter 5 has brought to light the resistances that run through Afghanistan under Taliban power and the vulnerabilities they expose. It has shown that the regime must maintain itself not only against the former republican forces, but against new voices – women, minorities, journalists, jurists – that refuse gender apartheid and structural violence.

Chapter 6 will shift the gaze towards the immediate exterior: the borders and the regional order. It will examine how the relationship with Pakistan, the cross-border front lines, the tensions around refugees, the mining stakes and the games of powers (China, Iran, the Central Asian countries, Turkey) reshape the framework within which these resistances must operate, and how Taliban power tries to use the regional card to compensate for its internal fragilities.

To be continued...

Part III



Borders and Regional Order

Afghanistan-Pakistan: the border on fire

This chapter explores the relationship between Taliban power and Pakistan through the shared border: clashes, cross-border fire, lines of tension around the TTP, expulsions of refugees, security stakes. It shows that this border is not merely a line on a map, but a political, military and humanitarian battlefield.

1. A border that has never been neutral

The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan – the Durand Line – has never been a simple administrative line. It concentrates:

- Historical questions (contested status, colonial memories, Afghan and Pakistani claims);
- Ethnic questions (Pashtun territories, tribal and religious networks on both sides of the line);
- Security questions (armed groups, trafficking, rear bases, safe havens);
- Humanitarian questions (population displacements, refugee camps, forced returns).

Under Taliban power, this border remains a place of constant friction. The regime in Kabul and the Pakistani state project onto it their fears, their ambitions and their contradictions. The local communities, for their part, continue to live in a space where politics translates into gunfire, expulsions, blockages.

2. Pakistan: strategic ally, anxious neighbour

Pakistan has long been described as a historical ally of the Taliban, notably through certain intelligence services and support networks. But since 2021, the relationship has become more ambiguous:

- Pakistan fears the destabilization of its own border regions, where groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) use Afghanistan as a fallback space;
- It must manage a public opinion and institutions that see in the Afghan Taliban both possible partners and sources of insecurity;
- It is itself caught in internal political crises, economic tensions, debates over its security strategy.

For Taliban power, the relationship with Pakistan is vital: it concerns commercial flows, movements of people, diplomatic contacts, military balances. But it is also dangerous: any concession too visibly made towards Islamabad may be perceived as a betrayal by the Taliban base, while any open confrontation weakens the regime's regional position.

3. Clashes and cross-border fire

Since the seizure of Kabul, the border has seen several armed clashes. Posts have been attacked, artillery fire has been exchanged, soldiers have been killed, civilians hit. In certain zones, villages see the projectiles pass over and hear the fighting, sometimes without understanding the exact motivations.

These incidents have several functions:

- For Pakistan, they sometimes serve to send signals to the Taliban regime on the question of the TTP, safe havens, security obligations;
- For Taliban power, they serve to display a posture of sovereignty: to show that it does not let its conduct be dictated by a powerful neighbour, that it defends Afghan territorial integrity.

But beyond these readings, the clashes above all recall that the border is a militarized space, where the local populations are caught in a vice. Every shell burst, every shot at a post, every riposte reinforces the perception of a line where security is precarious, where the norms of international law are difficult to enforce.

4. The TTP and the question of safe havens

A major point of tension is the presence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other armed groups that use Afghanistan as a zone of fallback, regrouping, preparation. Pakistan regularly accuses the Taliban regime of tolerating, even protecting, these groups; the Afghan Taliban, for their part, oscillate between denials, vague promises and informal management of these presences.

This situation creates a paradox:

- Taliban power seeks to remain faithful to a historical solidarity with certain movements, while avoiding giving Pakistan strong reasons to intervene;
- Pakistan, for its part, must calibrate its response: too much pressure may weaken the Emirate to the point of provoking a new regional crisis, too little pressure lets the TTP and other groups directly threaten its territories.

The border thus becomes a theatre of shadow play: presence of armed groups, diplomatic pressures, threats of operations, informal agreements, occasional mediations.

5. Expulsions of refugees and forced returns

Beyond the military and security dimensions, the Afghanistan–Pakistan relationship also plays out in the movements of refugees. Millions of Afghans have lived in Pakistan, sometimes for decades, in camps, peripheral neighbourhoods, cities. The policies of expulsion, of regularization, of administrative pressure have a direct impact on thousands of families.

The waves of forced returns from Pakistan to Afghanistan, whether massive or gradual, create humanitarian dramas: people who find themselves without housing, without employment, in provinces in crisis; children who must interrupt their schooling; families who must cross a border that has become more dangerous and less welcoming.

For the Taliban regime, these returns are ambiguous:

- On one hand, they can be presented as "returns to the homeland," a sign of the inevitable centrality of Afghanistan in the lives of these refugees;
- On the other, they increase the social and economic pressure on a country already in crisis, where employment is lacking, where services are deteriorating, where poverty is massive.

Pakistan, for its part, sometimes uses these expulsions as an instrument of pressure: to remind the Taliban regime that it can, through its decisions, send humanitarian and political burdens back towards Afghanistan.

6. Commercial corridors and mining stakes

The border is not only a place of conflict, it is also a space of economic circulation. The commercial corridors, the roads, the border posts are points through which merchandise, fuels, foodstuffs, materials transit. The Afghan mines, the resource-exploitation projects, the routes towards the Pakistani ports are part of the discussions between the two countries.

The Taliban regime hopes to profit from this position: to offer access to resources (mineral, agricultural) in exchange for commercial facilities, recognition, investments. Pakistan, for its part, sees in these corridors opportunities, but also risks: strengthening the Afghan economy may stabilize the neighbour, but it may also strengthen a regime it does not fully trust.

The blockages of posts, the changes of customs rules, the tensions around the routes illustrate these ambivalences. The border is an economic lever as much as a security lever.

7. Other regional actors

The Afghanistan–Pakistan relationship does not play out in a vacuum. Other regional actors – China, Iran, the Central Asian countries, Turkey, Russia – observe and intervene, directly or indirectly.

- China is interested in the commercial routes, the mineral resources, the relative stability of its projects in the region.
- Iran monitors the movements of populations, the armed groups, the religious stakes, the balance of power on its own borders with Afghanistan.
- The Central Asian countries think in terms of security and energy corridors.
- Turkey sometimes positions itself as mediator or partner.

In this context, the Afghan–Pakistani border becomes a regional node: what happens there in terms of security, refugees, trade, armed presence is of interest well beyond the two countries. Taliban power must therefore contend with an environment where every gesture may be interpreted, amplified, reused by external actors.

8. Border and human rights

Finally, the border is a mirror of the human rights crisis. The expulsions, the forced returns, the attacks near villages, the aid blockages, the searches, the reinforced checks directly affect populations already weakened by the internal Afghan crisis.

Women and children are particularly exposed: in the movements of refugees, in the camps, in the border villages, in the queues at the crossing posts. The decisions taken in Kabul and Islamabad translate into hours of waiting, nights in the open, deprivations, violence.

The border is thus a place where all the dimensions of this report meet: Taliban power, resistance, human rights crisis, the role of neighbours, international stakes.

Towards chapter 7: refugees and exiles

This chapter 6 has shown that the Afghanistan–Pakistan border is a space of fire: clashes, shadow play around the TTP, expulsions of refugees, disputes over the commercial corridors. It has also shown that this border is not a simple backdrop, but a structuring element of the way Taliban power conceives and presents itself, and of the way the region reshapes itself.

Chapter 7 will continue this movement by focusing on Afghan refugees and exiles: the individual and collective trajectories towards Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and beyond, the policies of reception and expulsion, the lives in the camps and the peripheral neighbourhoods, the effects of these exiles on Afghan society and on the political memory of the war and the Taliban regime.

To be continued...

Afghan refugees and exiles

This chapter tells what happens to the Afghans who have no other choice but to leave: towards Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Europe and beyond. It shows how the policies of expulsion, closure and control, combined with Taliban power, create a geography of exile in which millions of lives remain suspended.

1. Leaving, returning, leaving again

Afghanistan is a country of repeated exiles. The families who take the road today towards Pakistan, Iran or Turkey are often not on their first departure. In the refugee camps, the peripheral neighbourhoods of the major cities, the border villages, one meets men and women who have already lived, as children, a first flight, a return, then a new departure.

Since the seizure of Kabul by Taliban power, the reasons to leave have reshaped themselves:

- Fear of repression for former members of the security forces, civil servants, journalists, activists;
- The impossibility of living under the decrees of gender apartheid for women and girls;
- The collapse of the economy, of employment, of public services;
- Targeted threats against minorities and particularly exposed communities.

Leaving is not only a political decision; it is a decision of survival. But this decision runs into a reality: the neighbouring countries are no longer in the logic of mass reception of the 1980s or 1990s. They are themselves in crisis, saturated, crossed by internal debates over the prolonged presence of Afghan refugees.

2. Pakistan: camps, forced returns, lives in suspense

Pakistan remains, by far, the country that has hosted the most Afghans over time. Camps like those of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Balochistan, neighbourhoods of Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar, have seen several generations of exiles born and grow up. For many, Pakistan is at once a precarious refuge and a space of lawlessness.

The recent policies of forced returns or administrative pressure have changed the landscape. By ordering hundreds of thousands of Afghans to leave the territory, by conducting raids, by destroying dwellings, by multiplying document checks, the Pakistani authorities have turned exile into a race against the clock: to find a new country, a visa, a means of staying, or to resign oneself to return.

The families who return to Afghanistan find themselves in provinces where the infrastructure is fragile, where jobs are lacking, where security is relative. They arrive sometimes with children who do not speak Dari or Pashto well, who were schooled in Pakistan, who know the country of their parents only through stories. The return is not a reintegration; it is a new uprooting.

3. Iran: work, precarity, borders

Iran too has massively hosted Afghans, often as labour in the construction, agriculture and industry sectors. The life of Afghan refugees and migrants there is marked by precarity: informal jobs, low wages, limited access to social protection, discrimination, risks of expulsion.

Iranian policies oscillate between pragmatic tolerance (for economic needs) and hardening (reinforced checks, deportations, pressure on communities). For the Afghans who cross the border, the journey is already dangerous: walking, clandestine crossings, risks of violence, of trafficking, of death.

For those who stay, daily life is made of a double invisibility: invisible as workers without rights, invisible as refugees whose situation is neither fully recognized nor completely regularized. Women are particularly exposed, between poorly paid work, dependence on male networks, the impossibility of asserting their rights, the constant fear of checks.

4. Turkey: a detour towards Europe, waiting in the in-between

Turkey has become, over the years, a country of transit and settlement for many Afghans. Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, the border cities, the routes towards Greece or Bulgaria trace a geography of the in-between: neither at home, nor yet "arrived" in Europe.

The Afghans who settle there often live in difficult conditions: precarious housing, informal work, racism, checks, uncertainty over status. Some attempt the crossing towards Europe, at the price of extreme risks: shipwrecks, pushbacks, police violence, confinement in centres.

For women and children, this situation is particularly dangerous: exploitation, violence, dependence on networks that promise passages and impose conditions, isolation. Turkey thus becomes a space of gamble: betting on a successful passage towards Europe, betting on a possible life on the spot, betting on an eventual return if all fails.

5. Europe and beyond: partial asylum, closed borders

A portion of the Afghans reach Europe, North America, Australia or other regions. Their trajectories are complex: asylum applications, long procedures, sometimes positive answers, sometimes negative, sometimes suspended. Some obtain a status, housing, schooling for their children; others remain for years in camps, centres, emergency accommodation, squats.

European policies, too, are crossed by contradictions: discourses of compassion, resettlement programmes, but also the hardening of borders, the tightening of criteria, political debates where Afghanistan often disappears under the general category of "migrants."

For those who obtain a form of settlement, another exile begins: that of memory. How to tell distant societies what Taliban power is, what gender apartheid means, what the twenty-year war represents, what it means to leave without knowing whether one will ever return? How to continue being Afghan while becoming of another country? How to support those who stayed, those who are still in transit?

6. Exile and social fracture in Afghanistan

Exile concerns not only those who leave; it concerns the country they leave behind. Afghanistan empties itself of part of its living forces: teachers, doctors, journalists, activists, students, artisans, administrative cadres, artists, who could have contributed to rebuilding the country.

This flight produces a social fracture:

- Families of whom one part is in Kabul, another in Karachi, another in Tehran, another in Istanbul, another in Berlin;
- Villages where the young have disappeared, leaving only the elderly and children;
- Cities where the networks of solidarity reshape themselves around the absent, the transfers, the video calls.

Taliban power, for its part, lives with this tension: a country emptied of those who most contest the regime is easier to control in the short term, but harder to govern in the long term. The absences leave holes in the services, in the knowledge, in the social fabrics. Afghanistan becomes a country where half the population is under control, and a significant part of the other half is elsewhere.

7. Women in exile: relative freedom, persistent constraints

For women, exile has a double face. On one hand, leaving Afghanistan can mean escaping the decrees of gender apartheid: recovering the right to go to school, to work, to move, to speak in public, to dress differently, to choose. On the other hand, exile places them in contexts where they remain exposed to poverty, racism, legal precarity, violence.

Many find themselves in camps, peripheral neighbourhoods, service jobs, family obligations reinforced by the crisis. The freedoms they gain in certain domains are paid for by sacrifices in others: mental load, unrecognized work, guilt towards those who stayed, fatigue.

And yet, exile opens possibilities: studies, commitments, public speaking, participation in diaspora networks, writing, advocacy, concrete support for the communities that remained in the country. Women in exile often become spokespersons, relays, organizers. They play a key role in the production of narratives about the Taliban regime, in the defence of the rights of those who cannot leave.

8. Exiles and political memory

Exile produces a specific political memory. The Afghans who lived through the Republic, the war, the seizure of Kabul, the repression, the flight, then settlement elsewhere carry an embodied chronology: they can recount the years, the events, the faces, the places.

This memory is precious, but it is also fragile. Without work of documentation, transmission, writing, discussion, it may fade or fragment. Taliban power, for its part, profits from this dispersion to produce its own version of history: it speaks of "liberation," of "the end of the occupation," of "stability," of "morality."

The exiles are therefore also a stake in the struggle for memory. Where some would like to close the Afghan file, the refugees and exiles recall that the country exists, that the Taliban regime is not a fatality, that the twenty-year war has consequences, that the current policies have faces and names.

Towards chapter 8: humanitarian and social crisis

This chapter 7 has followed the Afghans outside the country: towards Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Europe and beyond. It has shown that exile has become a central element of the Afghan crisis, as much as Taliban power itself. It has also shown that exile produces memories, networks, voices that matter for the future.

Chapter 8 will return to the interior of the country, focusing on the humanitarian and social crisis: massive poverty, food insecurity, the collapse of services, dependence on aid, the effects of the Taliban decrees on humanitarian operations. It will show how Afghanistan lives on life support, and how this life support is itself weakened by the regime and by the choices of the international community.

To be continued...

Part IV

Humanitarian and Social Crisis

A country on life support: humanitarian and social crisis

This chapter shows how Afghanistan, under Taliban power, lives on humanitarian life support in a context of generalized poverty, the collapse of services and restrictions against women. It describes a crisis in which aid is both indispensable and obstructed, and where social life reshapes itself around survival rather than citizenship.

1. A broken economy

Since the seizure of Kabul, the Afghan economy has collapsed. The loss of international financing, the sanctions, the freezing of assets, the flight of skills, the drastic drop in private investment, the contraction of trade, the weakening of the banking system have produced a deep crisis.

In most regions, families have seen:

- Their incomes diminish or disappear;
- Their cost of living rise (prices of food, fuel, transport);
- Their jobs grow scarce, especially for the young and for women;
- Their possibilities of credit reduced to almost nothing.

Taliban power does not have the instruments of a classic economic policy: it governs a country where the state is poor, where the private sector is fragile, where corruption persists, where the informal circuits – trafficking, black markets, rent networks – occupy a central place. In this context, humanitarian aid becomes a pillar, but an insufficient pillar.

2. Massive poverty

The economic crisis translates into massive poverty. A large part of the population lives day to day, without reserves, without security. Families reduce their meals, sell their goods, withdraw children from school to put them to work, forgo care for lack of means.

Women are often the first to absorb the shock: they manage the stocks, the food, the children's needs, the negotiations with neighbours, while being deprived of formal employment. Households headed by women – widows, wives of men disappeared or gone into exile – are among the most fragile.

Poverty is not only a question of figures; it is a daily experience made of impossible choices: to buy bread or medicine, to pay for transport to the hospital or keep the money for food, to send a child to school or make them work. These repeated trade-offs exhaust individuals, erode solidarities, weaken society.

3. Aid as life support

In this context, humanitarian aid plays the role of a life-support drip: food distributions, cash transfers, nutrition programmes, support for clinics, school supplies, backing for agricultural projects. Without this aid, millions of Afghans would fall into an even more dramatic crisis.

It is nonetheless limited:

- International budgets are not infinite, and Afghanistan must share attention with other world crises;
- Sanctions and banking constraints complicate transfers;
- Mistrust towards the Taliban regime reduces the willingness of certain donors.

Aid does not replace a social policy, it stands in for it. It makes it possible to avoid the worst, but it does not build a future. It keeps people alive in minimal conditions, without guaranteeing a way out of poverty.

4. The Taliban decrees against women and NGOs

Taliban power itself weakens this life support. The decree banning women from working for NGOs had an immediate impact: in several sectors (health, education, protection, distribution), the presence of women is indispensable to reach female beneficiaries, to conduct surveys, to enter homes.

By preventing Afghan female employees from working, the regime:

- Deprives families of income;
- Reduces the capacity of NGOs to reach women and children;
- Forces certain organizations to suspend or reduce their operations;
- Complicates the logistics of programmes in rural and urban zones.

Aid then becomes conditional: dependent on Taliban decisions, on their reversals, on their exceptions, on local negotiations. Every project must contend with an environment where the rules can change abruptly, where authorizations can be withdrawn, where teams can be threatened.

5. The collapse of public services

Beyond aid, Afghanistan suffers from a collapse of public services. Schools, hospitals, administrations, basic infrastructure – roads, water networks, electrical systems – often function at a slow pace, or stop altogether.

Teachers are not always paid, or are paid late and poorly. Schools lack materials, heating, security. Hospitals see their stocks of medicine dwindle, their equipment break down, their staff exhaust themselves or leave. Local administrations lack the means to repair the roads, the bridges, the networks.

Taliban power, by concentrating on moral and religious control, administers a country where the state no longer fulfils its basic social functions. The consequence is an informal privatization of survival: families, clans, local networks, NGOs become the main actors of protection, education, health.

6. Daily lives under constraint

In the neighbourhoods of Kabul, in the villages of the north, in the border provinces, daily life reorganizes itself around constraint:

- Economic constraints: lack of money, rising prices, debts;
- Political constraints: decrees, checks, threats;
- Social constraints: reinforced norms, pressure on women and the young;
- Geographical constraints: dangerous roads, borders hard to cross, hostile cities.

People adapt: combining odd jobs, aid received, neighbourhood solidarities, strategies for circumventing the decrees. But this adaptation has a cost: fatigue, stress, the exhaustion of resources, the shrinking of horizons.

Even those who were relatively protected under the Republic – civil servants, NGO employees, academics, shopkeepers – now live in a deep uncertainty. Taliban power offers them no clear contract; it offers them a variable order, dependent on local interpretations, on power relations, on rumours.

7. Social crisis: family, generations, minorities

The humanitarian crisis is doubled by a social crisis. Families are put to a hard test: tensions over resources, disagreements over exile, conflicts over the education of children, domestic violence. The young, deprived of prospects, oscillate between resignation, anger, flight.

The minorities – religious, ethnic, linguistic – often find themselves on the front line. They suffer poverty like the others, but they suffer in addition discrimination, targeted attacks, threats. The social crisis accentuates the lines of fracture: suspicion, withdrawal, hate speech.

Taliban power, far from seeking to appease these tensions, sometimes uses them: designating scapegoats, letting rumours run, encouraging hostile discourse against certain groups. Society fragments. National solidarity, already fragile, unravels.

8. Humanitarianism, politics and international responsibility

The situation poses a central political question: what does it mean to help a country governed by a regime that massively violates human rights? Humanitarian organizations, agencies, states struggle with this dilemma:

- How to save lives without legitimizing the regime?
- How to maintain programmes without accepting unacceptable restrictions?
- How to refuse certain conditions without abandoning entire populations?

International responsibility is not limited to sending funds or supplies. It also involves decisions on sanctions, on recognitions, on dialogues, on pressures. Each choice has consequences: on the women who no longer work, on the children who are no longer fed, on the families who no longer receive aid.

Towards chapter 9: narrative and justice

This chapter 8 has shown a country on life support, where the humanitarian and social crisis mingles with the decisions of Taliban power and the choices of the international community. It has shown that survival has become the main occupation of millions of Afghans, at the expense of education, participation, citizenship.

Chapter 9 will shift the gaze towards narrative and justice: how, in this context, the battle of the narrative (who tells Afghanistan, for whom, with what words) and the battle of justice (which crimes are named, which are prosecuted, by what mechanisms) are constructed. It will examine the way Afghan voices, human rights organizations, international institutions and states confront or cooperate to define what is happening, what must be recognized, what must be judged.

To be continued...

Narrative and justice: naming the Taliban regime

This chapter shows how, around the Taliban regime, a double battle takes shape: that of the narrative - who tells Afghanistan, with what words, for which audiences - and that of justice - who qualifies the crimes, prepares arrest warrants, and opens perspectives of international responsibility.

1. Who tells Afghanistan?

Since the seizure of Kabul, Afghanistan has become an object of discourse for a multitude of actors:

- Taliban power itself, which speaks of "liberation," of "the end of the occupation," of "stability," of "morality";
- The Afghans who stayed in the country, who tell of the fear, the poverty, the erasure of women, the violence, the small resistances;
- The exiles, who speak from Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Europe, North America;
- The international organizations, which produce reports, communiqués, resolutions;
- The states, which integrate Afghanistan into their foreign-policy discourses.

This chapter starts from this multiplicity of voices. It poses a simple question: which version ends up imposing itself in the world, and what consequences does this have for the Afghans themselves?

The Taliban regime seeks to produce a narrative that legitimizes it: it insists on security, on the end of the war, on the religious order. It minimizes the humanitarian crisis, gender apartheid, the violations of rights. It presents the critics as interferers, plotters, misunderstandings. This narrative is relayed by controlled media, by sermons, by communiqués.

Against it, competing narratives organize themselves: those of women, journalists, activists, human rights organizations, researchers. They speak of a country where the abolition of school for girls, the destruction of female employment, the repression of opposition, poverty and exile constitute a systemic crisis.

2. The battle of words

In this battle, words matter. Several terms have emerged to describe the Taliban regime:

- "Gender apartheid," to name a system where the separation, exclusion and subordination of women are institutionalized;
- "Crime against humanity of gender persecution," to legally qualify the draconian restrictions against women and girls;
- "Femicide," in the sense of a policy that exposes women to avoidable suffering and death on a large scale.

Each word has a reach:

- "Gender apartheid" refers to a historical memory (South Africa) and to the idea of a codified system of oppression;
- "Crime against humanity" refers to international law and to mechanisms of justice;
- "Femicide" refers to the idea that the attack on women is not marginal, but constitutive.

The Taliban regime rejects these terms. It affirms that it respects the "dignity" of women, that it grants them "rights" within the framework of sharia as it understands it. It accuses those who use these words of being subject to foreign agendas.

The chapter shows that the battle of vocabulary is not secondary. It determines what states can accept, what organizations can say, what courts can judge.

3. Producing proof: reports and investigations

For these words to have reach, they must rest on proof: testimonies, statistics, investigations, archives. Human rights organizations, UN mechanisms, researchers and journalists work to produce this material.

They document:

- the bans on school for girls, the closures of universities;
- the exclusions of women from medical examinations, health professions, NGO jobs;
- the cases of arrests, torture, disappearances;
- the killings of former members of the security forces;
- the attacks against minorities, places of worship, schools;
- the waves of expulsions and forced returns.

This chapter insists on this patient work: without it, the violence would remain at the level of individual accounts, hard to mobilize in legal or political arenas. With it, it becomes files, reports, arguments that can be brought before international bodies.

4. Named crimes

On the basis of this proof, legal qualifications have been proposed and, sometimes, upheld:

- Crimes against humanity of gender persecution for the systematic policies against women and girls;
- Crimes against humanity for the targeted killings of former soldiers and civil servants, the enforced disappearances, the torture;
- Possible war crimes for certain attacks against civilians, protected places, minorities.

This chapter does not seek to detail all the technical aspects of the law, but to show that the Taliban regime is now described not only in political terms, but in penal terms. The leaders know that their decisions may expose them to arrest warrants, prosecutions, travel bans, targeted sanctions.

The qualification of "crime against humanity" changes Afghanistan's position in the world: it makes the country not only a theatre of crisis, but a place where major violations engage the international conscience and international law.

This did not prevent the European Commission from inviting a Taliban delegation to Brussels, under the pretext of organizing returns of exiles to Afghanistan, in disregard of the principle of non-refoulement.

5. Arrest warrants and individual responsibilities

A particular moment in this evolution is the request for arrest warrants against Taliban leaders by actors of international justice. The chapter describes this turning point: precise names – supreme leader, officials of justice and security – are associated with specific decisions, with documented policies.

For the Afghans, this gesture has several meanings:

- It shows that the world is beginning to personalize responsibility, no longer to speak only of the "Taliban Emirate" in the abstract;
- It opens the possibility, however distant, that figures until now untouchable might one day be arrested;
- It gives a frame to anger and suffering: they can be expressed in a legal form.

For the regime, these warrants represent a risk often underestimated in public discourse, but very real in internal calculations: travelling, meeting foreign officials, moving resources implies thinking about the risks of arrest.

6. The role of Afghan voices

The chapter insists on one point: none of this is possible without Afghan voices. The reports, the warrants, the qualifications were not produced in a vacuum; they rest on testimonies, data, analyses coming from Afghanistan itself or from its diaspora.

Women, journalists, activists, lawyers, doctors, teachers have taken risks to send information, to participate in investigations, to speak publicly. Some have been arrested, tortured, exiled for it. Their work is at the heart of the battle of the narrative and of justice.

This chapter gives them an explicit place: not as mere "sources," but as authors of the Afghan narrative, co-creators of the justice files, bearers of political memory.

7. Limits and dangers of international justice

The chapter does not idealize international justice. It shows its limits:

- Slowness of procedures;
- Dependence on the political decisions of states;
- Risk of selectivity (certain crimes judged, others ignored);
- Possibility that warrants remain symbolic for a long time.

It also underlines the dangers: a regime cornered on the terrain of justice may choose to radicalize further, to restrict its contacts more, to punish more those who collaborate with international mechanisms. International justice may improve the protection of victims, but it may also, in the short term, increase certain risks.

The chapter poses this question: how to make judicious use of the tools of international law to strengthen the protection of Afghans, and not to expose them further?

8. Narrative, justice, future

Finally, this chapter links narrative and justice to the question of the future. Naming the crimes, writing the reports, requesting the warrants, producing alternative narratives does not immediately change the regime, but it:

- Builds a structured memory of what is happening;
- Prevents the violence from being normalized or denied;
- Prepares files for the day when windows of justice open;
- Gives Afghans themselves a language to express their experience.

Taliban power may try to write history in its own way; it will not be able to erase entirely the narratives and files that have been produced. In this battle, Afghans are not only objects; they are subjects, who make of their suffering, their resistance and their work of documentation a material for the future.

Holding together

This chapter 9 has shown that Afghanistan under Taliban power is at the centre of a battle of the narrative and of justice. It has shown that the words – gender apartheid, crime against humanity, femicide – are the result of a work of documentation and resistance, and that they open doors, however narrow, towards responsibility.

The following chapters will continue this movement by holding together all the dimensions already addressed: women, cities, regime, borders, refugees, humanitarianism. They will seek to show that this report is not only a chronicle of the first half of 2026, but a contribution to this battle of the narrative, written on the side of those who refuse the Taliban order and who want Afghanistan to be described, judged, defended on the basis of the reality of its inhabitants, and not of the needs of propaganda.

To be continued...

Expulsions and forced returns: a country sent back to itself

This chapter examines the policies of expulsion and forced return of Afghans from neighbouring countries and beyond. It shows how these decisions turn Afghanistan into a receptacle country, obliged to absorb hundreds of thousands of additional people in a context of crisis, and how they become an instrument of political pressure as much as a human drama.

1. When exile turns back

The previous chapters showed Afghanistan as a country of departure. This chapter shows it as a country of forced return. The Afghans who lived for years, sometimes for decades, in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey or elsewhere are ordered to return or to leave for another country.

The expulsions are not isolated facts. They are inscribed in campaigns:

- Public announcements of deadlines to leave the territory;
- Increased checks in the neighbourhoods where Afghans live;
- Destructions of houses and camps;
- Arrests and detentions before deportation.

This shift – from exile to imposed return – changes the status of hundreds of thousands of people: from "tolerated foreigners," they become people in excess, to be removed from the national statistics.

2. Returns to a country in crisis

To return to Afghanistan, in these conditions, means to come back to a country:

- where the economy is collapsed;
- where humanitarian aid is insufficient and obstructed;
- where women are subjected to a regime of gender apartheid;
- where the former refugees do not find a state capable of receiving them.

The expelled families often arrive with few belongings, sometimes only what they can carry. They must find housing, employment, access to water, to food, to services, in provinces already in difficulty. The children must be enrolled in schools that lack places, materials, stability.

Taliban power may present these returns as "returns to the homeland" – as if exile had been only a parenthesis. But, in reality, these returns resemble dumpings: crowds of people sent back to a country that has neither foreseen nor organized their reintegration.

3. Demographic and social pressure

The expulsions and forced returns increase the demographic and social pressure on Afghanistan. Border cities, rural districts, peripheral neighbourhoods see their population increase abruptly, without the infrastructure following: no new wells, no new schools, no new clinics, no widened roads.

Tensions appear quickly:

- Rivalries for access to land, jobs, aid;
- Resentments between "returnees" and "those who stayed," each feeling that the other benefits from a form of privilege;
- Difficulties for the local authorities, who must arbitrate with very limited means.

The Taliban regime, which has neither a ministry of social affairs worthy of the name nor robust reintegration policies, often leaves the local communities to manage these challenges alone. The traditional networks of solidarity take over, but they cannot do everything.

4. Expulsions as an instrument of pressure

For certain states, the expulsions of Afghans are also an instrument of pressure on the Taliban regime. By sending masses of people back towards Afghanistan, they:

- Remind Taliban power that it cannot merely manage its borders and its decrees;
- Show that its internal decisions have effects on their own societies;
- Sometimes seek to obtain concessions on questions of security or cooperation.

The Taliban regime, for its part, may respond with discourses of denunciation, calls for international solidarity, promises of care. But on the ground, it is the families, the villages, the NGOs, the local authorities who bear the weight of these political games.

BOX — A TALIBAN DELEGATION IN BRUSSELS (JUNE 2026)

- 23 June 2026: a Taliban delegation of five people, led by the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abdul Qahar Balkhi, was received in Brussels – the first visit of its kind since 2021.
- A "technical" meeting co-chaired by Sweden, with the European Commission and 15 member states, held outside the official buildings for lack of recognition of the regime.
- Purpose: the return and readmission of Afghans without a right of residence in the Union, in particular those who have committed crimes or are judged to be a threat.
- Visas with territorially limited validity, 24 hours in Belgium, without access to the Schengen area.
- The European Parliament had, in a non-binding resolution, deplored the invitation and reaffirmed non-recognition; NGOs and Malala Yousafzai denounced a risk of legitimization.

5. The vulnerability of women and children in returns

In these movements of return, women and children are particularly vulnerable. They suffer:

- The fatigue of the journeys;
- The risks of abuse, violence, trafficking;
- The uncertainty over where they will live;
- The need to adapt to norms stricter than in the country of exile.

A woman who had managed, in Pakistan or Iran, to work, to send her children to school, to access care, may find herself, back in Afghanistan, without employment, without a school for her daughters, without access to health in acceptable conditions. The return is then a brutal regression.

The children, for their part, must change language, school curriculum, networks of friends. Some have never known Afghanistan, except through their mother's stories. They find themselves in a country whose codes, dangers and hopes they do not master.

6. Forced returns and justice

This chapter poses a difficult question: what legal responsibilities for the mass expulsions towards a country in crisis? The expulsion policies do not fall directly under Taliban power; they fall under the states that send Afghans back home. But they are inscribed in a situation where the country of return offers no minimal guarantees.

Certain voices plead for:

- A recognition of the specific vulnerability of Afghans, as long as the Taliban regime imposes a gender apartheid and a political repression;
- Moratoriums on expulsions towards certain particularly dangerous provinces;
- Mechanisms of reinforced protection for women, minorities, former members of the security forces.

The Taliban regime, for its part, sometimes seeks to use these debates to present itself as a victim of unjust decisions, while refusing to change its internal policies that make these returns problematic.

7. Living in the in-between: neither here nor there

A major consequence of these movements is the creation of an in-between condition: Afghans live psychologically and socially "between" the country of exile and the country of return, without feeling fully at home in either one.

They keep ties with the countries they have left (memories, families, debts, administrative files), while trying to resettle in Afghanistan. They sometimes think of leaving again, if they have the means, or of sending at least one child elsewhere. The idea of a "stable settlement" disappears. Life becomes a game of permanent recalculation.

This in-between condition weakens social cohesion: it creates communities that experience themselves as provisional, that invest less in infrastructure, in schools, in local networks. It sustains the idea that the future will perhaps play out elsewhere, and not in the country itself.

8. Expulsions, returns and the national narrative

Finally, this chapter links these expulsions and forced returns to the Afghan national narrative. How to tell of a country of which part of the population is constantly on the move, sent back, uprooted, relocated? How to build a common memory when so many trajectories are broken, interrupted, dispersed?

Taliban power offers a simplified version: the returns are "returns to the homeland," a sign that Afghanistan remains the centre of gravity. But this version ignores the human cost, the conditions, the reasons for these returns.

For the Afghans themselves, the narrative cannot dispense with these repeated exiles. It must integrate the truth of these families sent back to a country in crisis, of a country that did not choose to receive these returns, but that must live with them. It must hold together what is happening in Kabul, in the villages, at the borders, in the camps of Pakistan, in the neighbourhoods of Iran, in the cities of Turkey.

Towards chapter 11: poverty and hunger

This chapter 10 has shown that expulsions and forced returns are not only administrative events, but human dramas and instruments of political pressure. It has shown that Afghanistan has become, under Taliban power, a country sent back to itself with additional burdens it cannot absorb.

Chapter 11 will continue this movement by focusing on poverty and hunger: the way the economic crisis, the collapse of services, the returns of refugees and the Taliban decisions combine to produce massive food insecurity, and how Afghan families live with the idea that part of their days now play out between want and aid.

To be continued...

Poverty, hunger and daily survival

This chapter describes Afghanistan as a country where poverty and hunger are no longer accidents, but massive conditions of life. It shows how the economic crisis, the decisions of Taliban power, the forced returns and the weakening of humanitarian aid translate into chronic food insecurity and into survival trade-offs that millions of families must make every day.

1. When poverty becomes the norm

In many regions of Afghanistan, poverty is no longer a marginal state; it has become the norm. The households that previously had a regular income – administration employees, NGO staff, civil servants, shopkeepers, artisans – have seen their resources:

- Diminish sharply;
- Become irregular;
- Fragment into small one-off jobs, often poorly paid.

The households that were already poor have passed into another category: that of extreme precarity. The sale of goods – animals, tools, jewellery, furniture – has become common. Families no longer have reserves. A single shock – illness, death, incident, rising prices – is enough to tip them over.

Taliban power has neither the capacity nor the will to organize a significant redistribution. There are no real public safety nets. It is the family networks, the local solidarities, the NGOs and international aid that try to fill this void, but they cannot reach everyone.

2. Food insecurity: eating less, eating badly

Poverty translates rapidly into food insecurity. Families reduce:

- The number of meals per day (from three to two, then sometimes to one);
- The quality of the food (less protein, fewer vegetables, less variety);
- The quantity served to adults in order to preserve a minimum for the children.

In certain villages and neighbourhoods, children grow up with insufficient food. The effects are not only immediate (fatigue, difficulties of concentration, illnesses); they are long-term: stunted growth, increased vulnerability to infections, physical after-effects.

Hunger is rarely spectacular. It shows little in images. It takes the form of thinned bodies, tired faces, weak voices, silent decisions: skipping a meal, serving less bread, forgoing the purchase of milk. It becomes a constrained habit, integrated into the daily routine.

3. Poverty, school and child labour

The economic crisis and food insecurity have direct effects on school and on child labour. When a family can no longer feed everyone, sending a child to school may be perceived as a luxury. The costs – clothing, supplies, transport, time – become too heavy.

Many children, especially boys, but also girls in certain regions, are then sent to work:

- In the fields;
- In the markets;
- In workshops;
- In informal activities (selling small objects, collecting, services).

This child labour is rarely protected; it is done in dangerous conditions, without fixed hours, without contract, without security. The child becomes an agent of survival for the family. Their health, their future, their education are sacrificed in the short term to preserve the present.

For girls, the situation is even harder: not only are they deprived of school by the Taliban decrees, but they may be put to intensive domestic work, in tasks that are unpaid but that exhaust their bodies and limit their horizon.

4. Debt and the vicious circle

Poverty and hunger plunge families into a debt hard to break. To buy food, medicine, to pay for transport, to face an unexpected cost, households borrow:

- from neighbours;
- from family members;
- from informal lenders.

These debts are not always formalized, but they exist, and they weigh. They oblige families to:

- sell more goods;
- accept unjust conditions;
- reduce further the margin available for essential expenses.

Debt creates a vicious circle: the more one borrows to survive, the more survival becomes difficult. The margins of choice narrow, the possibilities of resilience dwindle.

5. Women and survival: an invisible burden

Women are at the centre of this management of survival. They decide the menus, the quantities, the distribution of meals, the priorities of purchase, the strategies of recourse to aid. They keep the house, sometimes negotiate with the NGOs, with the neighbours, with family members.

This burden is often invisible to the authorities. It plays out in the houses, in the alleys, in the markets, in the queues. Women take upon themselves the responsibility of keeping families alive in a context where their rights are denied, their jobs eliminated, their mobility restricted.

This contradiction – being on the front line of survival while being considered secondary by the regime – is one of the most violent traits of the social crisis. It exhausts bodies, minds, ties.

6. Food aid and its limits

Food aid – distributions of flour, oil, pulses, basic products – plays a vital role. Without it, certain regions would rapidly tip into open famine. But it has limits:

- it does not reach all zones;
- it depends on external financing and political decisions;
- it is sometimes obstructed by Taliban decrees and checks;
- it can create dependencies hard to manage.

The distributions can be sources of tension: who receives, who does not, according to what criteria, in what quantities, at what intervals. The queues are long, exhausting. The programmes must sometimes prioritize certain categories (single women, large families, disabled persons), which creates resentments.

Food aid cannot replace an agricultural policy, a social policy, an employment policy. It can avoid deaths, but it cannot transform an economy.

7. Poverty, hunger and dignity

Beyond the figures, the crisis of poverty and hunger touches the dignity of persons. To be no longer able to feed one's children, to pay for medicine, to offer a minimum of comfort, to offer a future, is a profoundly humiliating experience.

Many parents, grandparents, heads of family experience this crisis as a personal failure, when it is the result of political decisions, of international choices, of economic structures. This misunderstanding adds a layer of suffering: one blames oneself for what largely exceeds one's own capacities.

Dignity is also affected by the necessity of putting oneself in a position of permanent request: to ask for aid, to ask for a deferment of payment, to ask for a favour, to ask for a food parcel. This constrained dependence can create relations of domination and fear in communities that had other forms of solidarity.

8. Poverty, hunger and the political future

Finally, this chapter links this crisis of poverty and hunger to the political future of Afghanistan. A country where millions of people live in chronic food insecurity is a country:

- more vulnerable to manipulation;
- more likely to accept unjust arrangements;
- less capable of mobilizing for collective causes;

- more exposed to extreme forms of violence.

Taliban power can maintain itself on this base: an exhausted population, occupied by survival, divided by resources, deprived of the time and energy for political organization. But this base is fragile: it can tip into anger, chaos, despair.

For those who think about the future, the question is therefore: how to rebuild capacities of life, margins of security, systems of protection, incomes, services, in a context where the regime is hostile to rights, where aid is fragile, where poverty is massive?

Towards the following chapters

This chapter 11 has shown that poverty and hunger are not secondary dimensions of the Afghan crisis, but central elements that structure daily life, the capacity for resistance, the relationship to Taliban power and to the rest of the world. It has shown that survival has become a full-time job, carried in large part by women, and that this survival plays out in undignified conditions.

The following chapters will continue to hold together the different threads of the report: the erasure of women, the urban geography, the Taliban regime, the borders, the refugees, the aid, the narrative and justice. They will seek to offer a complete picture of the first half of 2026, not in order to overwhelm, but to document with precision what is happening, so that future decisions – political, legal, humanitarian – can be taken with a real understanding of the human costs.

To be continued...

Social collapse: families, communities, generations

This chapter describes how the Afghan crisis under Taliban power is not limited to economic or humanitarian indicators. It translates into a collapse of social ties: families under strain, fragmented communities, generations in rupture, solidarities tested by fear, poverty and exile.

1. Families under permanent pressure

Families are the first place where the crisis manifests itself. Poverty, hunger, forced returns, the absence of services, the decrees against women, departures into exile, the traumas left by twenty years of war and five years of Taliban power create a permanent pressure.

On a daily basis, this translates into:

- disputes over money, spending choices, decisions to leave or return;
- tensions over the education of children (whether to send them to school or put them to work, to accept or refuse the norms imposed by the regime);
- conflicts over the place of women (some want to resist the decrees, others resign themselves, others are constrained).

The home, which should be a refuge, often becomes a place of tension, even of violence. The social crisis is not only visible in the streets, the markets, the camps; it is present in the rooms where families discuss, fall silent, argue, reconcile or separate.

2. Generations in rupture

Afghanistan is living a deep generational rupture. Parents and grandparents have known other regimes, other wars, other horizons. The children and the young live under Taliban power, in a world where school is forbidden to girls, where employment is rare, where exile is an ever-present prospect.

The young men, deprived of economic and political prospects, oscillate between:

- resignation and small survival schemes;
- engagement in religious or armed networks;
- attempts to leave for abroad.

The young women, deprived of school and work, shut into houses, see their future shrink. Some resist, organize, write, take risks. Others withdraw, fall silent, try to survive in narrow margins.

The rupture is visible in the conversations: the older ones speak of what was possible before, of what has been lost; the younger ones speak of what is forbidden to them, of what they imagine elsewhere. Transmission is complicated: how to recount a past when the present contradicts everything that was hoped for?

3. Fragmented communities

Communities – villages, neighbourhoods, professional groups, minorities – are fragmented by:

- exile (one part has left, another has stayed);
- forced returns (new arrivals to integrate or manage);
- differences of vulnerability (some have access to aid, others do not);
- the discourses of the regime, which can encourage mistrust, withdrawal, stigmatization.

In certain villages, some families are accused of being "close to the regime," others of being "close to the former authorities or foreign forces," others still of being "sources of problems" because they receive aid or because they maintain ties with NGOs.

The religious or ethnic minorities – such as the Shia Hazara – suffer a double pressure: the general crisis and targeted attacks. They must manage internal solidarity and fear, while knowing that their visibility may expose them further.

4. Solidarities that hold, solidarities that crack

The social crisis does not destroy all solidarities. Many networks of neighbourhood, kinship, community continue to function:

- sharing of food;
- hosting of returned or newly arrived people;
- informal support for the sick, the elderly, single women;
- organization of small funds or forms of mutualization.

But these solidarities are put to the test. Fatigue, poverty, the repetition of aid given and requested create tensions. Some refuse to help, for lack of means or out of resentment. Others withdraw into a more restricted circle (close family, clan), reducing the reach of the networks.

The capacity of a society to resist a regime, to rebuild itself, depends in part on these solidarities. Their weakening is a gain for Taliban power: fewer horizontal ties means more vertical dependence.

5. Domestic violence and diffuse violence

In this context, domestic violence often increases. It can take the form of:

- blows;
- humiliations;
- psychological coercion;

- additional bans for women and children.

This violence is not only a consequence of poverty; it is also fed by a patriarchal culture reinforced by the regime, which legitimizes male domination and the idea that women must obey, keep silent, accept.

Diffuse violence – insults, threats, humiliations in the streets, the markets, the queues – is part of the social landscape. It reminds everyone of their position in the hierarchy: women, the poor, minorities, refugees, children are more exposed.

6. Spaces of respiration: art, religion, speech

Despite the social collapse, spaces of respiration subsist or are created:

- religious practices that offer a framework of meaning (prayer, charity, consolation), sometimes independent of the Taliban discourse;
- forms of discreet artistic creation (poetry, music, drawing, writing), often clandestine or exiled;
- circles of speech, even informal, where people tell their stories, support one another, reflect.

These spaces are not solutions to the crisis, but partial antidotes to the collapse of ties. They make it possible to maintain a sense of dignity, of beauty, of meaning, in a brutalizing environment.

7. Social crisis and the future of Afghanistan

The social collapse has major political consequences. A society exhausted by survival, fragmented by exile, returns, tensions, wounded by violence, deprived of prospects, has more difficulty projecting itself into collective projects – reconstruction, resistance, negotiation, transformation. Taliban power capitalizes on this exhaustion, which it did not produce alone, but which it reinforces.

To think about the future of Afghanistan, it is not enough to speak of regime change. One must think of:

- the repair of ties;
- the reconstruction of solidarities;
- the restoration of a minimal trust between groups, generations, families;
- the reopening of spaces where speech can circulate without fear.

Holding together the dimensions

This chapter 12 has shown that the Afghan crisis is also a crisis of the social fabric: families under strain, generations in rupture, fragmented communities, solidarities put to the test. It completes the chapters on the erasure of women, the urban geography, the Taliban regime, the borders, the refugees, poverty.

The following chapters – structured around power, resistance and regional dynamics – will have the task of holding together these dimensions, so that this report may appear as what it is: a six-monthly chronicle, but also a complete cartography of a country caught in a double movement of violence and resistance, of collapse and memory.

To be continued...

Part V

Resistance, Human Rights and the Battle of the Narrative

Journalists, minorities, former soldiers: the other targets

This chapter shows that Taliban power does not merely repress women. It also targets groups whose speech, memory or mere existence calls into question its claim to legitimacy: journalists, members of minorities, former soldiers and civil servants, human rights defenders.

1. Journalists: silencing those who tell

Afghan journalists, those who have stayed in the country as well as those who work in exile, are on the front line of the battle of the narrative. They document the decrees, the violence, the expulsions, the resistances, the daily lives. The regime knows this, and targets them accordingly.

The forms of pressure are multiple:

- closures of media outlets;
- summonses and interrogations;
- arbitrary detentions, sometimes accompanied by torture;
- threats against families;
- bans on covering certain subjects, in particular anything touching women, minorities, opposition.

The consequence is a generalized self-censorship: to survive, many journalists avoid certain angles, certain terms, certain guests. Others continue to work, but know they are on the line, ready to tip into the category of "enemies" at the slightest misstep.

This chapter shows that the repression of journalists is an attack on the country's capacity to describe itself. Without them, Afghans can no longer produce a shared narrative of what is happening to them; they remain dependent on propaganda and on echoes coming from outside.

2. Minorities: the visible target

The minorities – religious, ethnic, linguistic – were targeted in the war, and they remain so under Taliban power. The Shia Hazara community, in particular, has suffered attacks against neighbourhoods, schools, places of worship. These acts of violence have a character at once political and identitarian.

The regime may present these minorities as "sources of trouble," "agents of the enemy," religious "deviants." The attacks, direct or tolerated, send messages:

- to the Taliban base, which sees in them the proof that the regime is not "weakening";
- to the minorities themselves, who understand that they are not protected;

- to the rest of the country, which sees that the category of threatened citizens is widening.

The repression of minorities complicates any reconstruction: it weakens the idea of a common political community, it sustains specific memories of suffering, it prevents the minimal trust between groups. It turns differences into front lines.

3. Former soldiers and former civil servants: erasing the Republic

The former members of the Afghan security forces (army, police, services) and the former civil servants of the Republic are another target. They embody a past order that the Taliban regime wants to erase: a state that, despite its failings, had institutions, chains of command, procedures.

Despite the announcement of a general amnesty, numerous cases of killings, disappearances, detentions and torture have been documented. The logic is twofold:

- to eliminate people perceived as potentially dangerous – because they have skills, networks, a combat past;
- to send a signal to those who would be tempted to reconstitute opposing forces: the cost will be high.

This chapter recalls that, without protection for these former soldiers and civil servants, it will be difficult one day to rebuild institutions of security and governance. Taliban power destroys not only its adversaries, but also human resources indispensable to any state.

4. Human rights defenders: criminalizing protection

Human rights defenders – whether they work for local or international organizations, whether they are lawyers, activists, researchers, doctors – are also in the line of fire. They investigate, gather testimonies, publish reports, accompany victims.

The regime sees in this work a direct threat. It reacts with:

- intimidation;
- surveillance;
- accusation of "propaganda" or "collaboration with the enemy";
- the prevention of activities (office closures, ban on meetings).

This criminalization of protection reinforces the feeling of isolation of the victims. It cuts off relays, aid, legal resources. It weakens the country's capacity to defend itself against abuses, to name them, to contest them.

5. The effect of fear and the effect of silence

The repression of these groups – journalists, minorities, former soldiers, human rights defenders – produces two major effects:

- fear: those who belong to these categories live in permanent anxiety. They may be arrested, attacked, threatened at any moment. This fear spreads to their relatives, their colleagues, their communities;

- silence: even when they are not directly attacked, many fall silent, withdraw, hide, retreat. The number of voices capable of speaking loud and clear diminishes.

Silence is a victory for the Taliban regime. It allows it to affirm its version of the facts without public contradiction. It gives the impression that the country is calmer, more stable, more "satisfied" than it really is.

6. What continues nonetheless

Yet this chapter insists on what continues nonetheless. Journalists, members of minorities, former soldiers, human rights defenders continue to:

- write, even if they do not sign their names;
- testify, even if they must do so anonymously;
- organize initiatives of solidarity, even discreet ones;
- transmit information beyond the borders.

This silent work is at the heart of social resistance. It prevents the country from being entirely covered over by the official narrative. It provides material for the previous chapters and for the justice files addressed in chapter 9.

7. Articulating these targets with women

This chapter links these targets to those of chapter 1: women. It shows that Taliban power does not set "women" on one side and "the other groups" on the other. It weaves a system in which:

- women are the first victims, as a gender category;
- journalists are targeted because they tell;
- minorities are targeted because they embody otherness;
- former soldiers and civil servants are targeted because they embody a past order;
- human rights defenders are targeted because they want to protect.

This ensemble composes a landscape of repression: a country where the main forces capable of contesting the regime – through speech, through memory, through arms, through law – are systematically attacked.

Towards the closing chapters

This chapter 13 has shown that Taliban power extends its repression well beyond women. It targets all those who, through their profession, their identity, their history or their commitment, may call into question its claim to legitimacy. It completes the chapters on women, cities, the regime, the borders, the refugees, poverty, by showing who are the concrete people who pay the price of this system.

The closing chapters – whether they concern the political synthesis of the half-year, the scenarios for the future, or the setting in perspective of the series – will be able to rely on this cartography of the targets. It makes it possible to understand not only what the Taliban regime does, but to whom it does it, and why.

To be continued...

Under the eyes of the world

This chapter describes Afghanistan as it appears, in the first half of 2026, in the gaze of the rest of the world: a country under sanctions, a country subject to international justice files, a country caught in a hesitant diplomacy. It shows that these instruments do not overthrow Taliban power, but that they weigh on the lives of Afghans, on the regime's room for manoeuvre and on the scenarios for the future.

1. A country judged without being rescued

Since the seizure of Kabul, Afghanistan has become a country abundantly commented on, partially aided, and increasingly legally qualified. For 2026, the United Nations estimates that around 21.9 million Afghans – nearly 45% of the population – will need humanitarian aid, a slight decrease of about 4% compared with 2025. The response plan puts this need at 1.71 billion dollars. This assessment places Afghanistan among the heaviest humanitarian crises in the world – only Sudan and Yemen exceed it in scale – without this humanitarian centrality translating into a credible political solution.

Taliban power knows it is observed, sanctioned and documented, but it continues to exercise internal control based on coercion, ideological closure and gender apartheid. At the same time, it still depends on flows coming from outside: humanitarian aid, regional trade, limited diplomatic contacts, and practical arrangements with actors who nonetheless refuse to grant it full recognition.

KEY DATA (2026)

- 21.9 million people – about 45% of the population – need humanitarian aid in 2026, according to the United Nations (OCHA).
- The 2026 humanitarian response plan is put at 1.71 billion dollars; at the end of May 2026, it had received only 269 million.
- 17.4 million people are exposed to acute food insecurity, of whom 4.7 million in the emergency phase (IPC 4).
- Only Sudan and Yemen exceed Afghanistan in the scale of the humanitarian crisis.

2. Sanctions: pressure and punishment, a double-edged sword

Sanctions remain one of the main tools used by external actors to limit the consolidation of the Taliban regime. Their official logic is clear: to restrict the margins of power, to complicate its financing, to signal the unacceptability of human rights violations, in particular against women and girls. But these measures also have

repercussions on the functioning of aid, on banking flows, on investments and, at the end of the chain, on an already impoverished Afghan population.

The problem is not only moral, it is structural. The more the regime hardens its policies, the more the calls for external pressure multiply; but the more this pressure is exerted in an economically collapsed country, the more ordinary families pay part of the price. This is what explains Afghan ambivalence towards sanctions: they target power, but they often worsen the lives of those who endure it.

3. International justice: naming the crimes

International justice crossed a clearer threshold in 2025. On 23 January 2025, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court filed two requests for arrest warrants in the Afghanistan file, and on 7 July 2025 Pre-Trial Chamber II issued warrants against the Taliban supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and against the president of the Supreme Court of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," Abdul Hakim Haqqani.

According to the ICC's official statement, the judges found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the two officials had committed, by ordering, soliciting or inducing certain acts, the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds against girls, women and other persons regarded as non-conforming with the Taliban's gender policy, as well as on political grounds against persons perceived as allies of women and girls. This step is decisive, because it transforms the reading of the regime: one no longer speaks only of religious authoritarianism or oppression, but of a formalized international penal responsibility.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

- 23 January 2025: the ICC Prosecutor files two requests for arrest warrants in the Afghanistan situation.
- 7 July 2025: the ICC announces the issuance of warrants against Haibatullah Akhundzada and Abdul Hakim Haqqani.
- Qualification upheld: crime against humanity of persecution, on gender and political grounds.

4. Diplomacy: talking without recognizing

Diplomacy towards Taliban power remains dominated by ambivalence. Few states are ready to take the step of full recognition, but many maintain contacts to manage aid, borders, security risks, refugee flows and certain regional cooperations. This diplomacy of contact without recognition makes it possible to keep channels open, while leaving the regime in an institutional grey zone.

This posture produces a permanent double language. On one hand, the capitals and international organizations denounce human rights violations and recall the unacceptability of the exclusion of women; on the other, they negotiate with the Taliban authorities to let aid through, to discuss security or to limit the regional effects of the crisis. The regime itself uses this contradiction to present itself as at once rejected in discourse and indispensable in practice.

5. Forced returns: Pakistan, Iran, pressure and panic

The question of forced returns shows with great clarity how the external gaze becomes an instrument of direct constraint on Afghans. Since October 2023, some 5.4 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan, often against their will. The year 2025 alone saw around 2.9 million returns, after Pakistan's announcement of a deportation scheme and the Iranian deadline of 20 March imposing the departure of Afghans without papers.

The effects remain massive in 2026. In the first months of the year alone, UNHCR recorded more than 232,500 returns (about 146,000 from Pakistan and 86,000 from Iran). Iran has become a major driver of these movements: the IOM recorded more than 714,000 returns there between January and the end of June 2025, with peaks of several tens of thousands of crossings in a single day. The families often arrive without resources, in a climate marked by arrests, detentions and expulsions, while UNHCR calls for the protection of returned persons – in particular women and girls exposed to specific risks on return.

RETURNS AND EXPULSIONS (2025-2026)

- Around 5.4 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan since October 2023, according to UNHCR.
- The year 2025 alone saw around 2.9 million returns.
- The IOM recorded more than 714,000 returns from Iran between January and the end of June 2025, after the Iranian deadline of 20 March.
- Early 2026: more than 232,500 returns (about 146,000 from Pakistan, 86,000 from Iran).

6. A diplomacy without an Afghan centre

What is striking, in this international apparatus, is the too-reduced place of Afghan voices themselves. Decisions are often taken about Afghans, but rarely with them in a central position. Yet it is precisely women, journalists, human rights defenders, jurists, exiles and victims who produce the narratives, the testimonies and the materials on which the reports, the sanctions or the justice files then rest.

There is here a fundamental contradiction: the world affirms that it wants to defend Afghans, but it often continues to treat Afghanistan as a file to be managed rather than as a political society whose actors must weigh directly on the choices that concern them. As long as this contradiction persists, international policy towards Afghanistan will remain partially blind to its own effects.

7. Scenarios for the future

The external gaze opens several possible futures, without guaranteeing any. A first scenario is that of continuation: humanitarian aid maintained at a variable flow, relative diplomatic isolation, sanctions in place, slow international justice, and a Taliban regime still solidly installed. A second scenario is that of a further hardening, where judicial and political pressure would reinforce the closure of the regime instead of softening it.

But other scenarios remain open. The ICC warrants already modify the international perception of the Taliban leaders and create a new personal risk for them. The humanitarian crises, the expulsions of refugees and the

regional pressure continue to produce tensions that the regime does not fully master. Nothing therefore allows the situation to be considered frozen, even if no imminent upheaval can be read with certainty in the available data.

8. What this report seeks to do

In this battle between sanctions, justice, diplomacy and human crises, this report seeks less to add one more commentary than to give a structure to what is happening. By retracing the erasure of women, the urban geography of vulnerability, the reshaping of the Taliban regime, the borders, exile, poverty, resistance and the external gaze, it offers an organized memory of the first half of 2026.

It thus takes a side in the battle of the narrative. It places itself neither on the side of diplomatic normalization, nor on the side of an abstract gaze on "the Afghan crisis," but on the side of those whose lives are transformed by the decrees, the expulsions, the hunger, the surveillance and the violence. The factual boxes serve here not to cool the writing, but to recall that the editorial must remain anchored to verifiable facts.

To be continued...

Sources and references

This annex gathers the sources on which the whole volume rests. It distinguishes the major reference institutions, mobilized throughout the chapters, from the precise figures cited in chapter 14. The addresses have been verified; as institutional pages evolve, some may redirect to an updated version of the report concerned.

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End of the annex