

Afghanistan: Taliban name all-male Afghan cabinet including minister wanted by FBI

Thursday 9 September 2021, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#), [MAKOII Akhtar Mohammad](#) (Date first published: 7 September 2021).

Country will once again be officially known as an Islamic emirate, as at least two people killed in protests.

The [Taliban](#) have announced an all-male caretaker government including an interior minister wanted by the FBI, on a day when at least two people were killed by violent policing of street protests against the new authorities.

The leadership unveiled on Tuesday is drawn entirely from Taliban ranks, despite promises of an inclusive cabinet, and many of its senior figures are on UN sanctions lists, which is likely to complicate the group's search for international recognition.

Late on Tuesday, a US State Department spokesman said: "We note the announced list of names consists exclusively of individuals who are members of the Taliban or their close associates and no women. We also are concerned by the affiliations and track records of some of the individuals."

"We understand that the Taliban has presented this as a caretaker cabinet. However, we will judge the Taliban by its actions, not words."

The State Department renewed its call on the Taliban to offer safe passage to US citizens as well as Afghans looking to leave.

Afghanistan will once more be officially known as an Islamic emirate, as it was under Taliban rule in the 1990s, and its chief, Hibatullah Akhundzada, will be supreme leader.

The Taliban have also brought back the ministry for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, a notorious enforcement body that was one of the most hated institutions when they last controlled Afghanistan. Its main function was to police the Taliban's [extreme interpretation](#) of Islamic law.

The prime minister will be Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, one of the founding members of the group who was close to its original leader, one-eyed [Mullah Mohammed Omar](#).

He has had far less international exposure than other senior Taliban leaders, but as head of the group's powerful leadership council he is one of its most influential members. Mullah Omar's son Mullah Yaqoob will be defence minister, and the acting interior minister is Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is on the FBI wanted list with a \$5m (£3.6m) bounty on his head.

In his first statement since the Taliban seized power last month, Akhundzada said Afghanistan's new rulers were committed to all international laws, treaties and commitments not in conflict with Islamic law.

"In the future, all matters of governance and life in Afghanistan will be regulated by the laws of the holy Sharia," he said.

The Taliban face a major economic crisis, domestic pressure from political opponents and an uprising in the Panjshir valley that has not been entirely stamped out [despite their capture of the provincial capital](#).

The internal pressures were highlighted by protests in Kabul that drew hundreds of people and which – although initially peaceful – ended in the Taliban firing guns into the air, beating protesters and journalists, seizing equipment and detaining some people.

A smaller protest in western Herat ended with two dead and at least four injured, according to the Afghan newspaper Etilaatroz. The Guardian saw video of Taliban dispersing protesters with gunfire.

With domestic reserves frozen, and the country long dependent on international aid, there is also a desperate search for international legitimacy that may allow funds to keep flowing. The government lineup is unlikely to offer progress on any of those fronts.

Instead it appears primarily designed to prevent internal fractures within the movement, after weeks of heated internal discussions about power sharing, said Haroun Rahimi, a law professor at the American University of Afghanistan.

"It won't help with domestic legitimacy, it won't help with international recognition, it will not help ease the resistance, and they will not help government run more smoothly," he said, pointing out that few ministers had expertise in their portfolios.

"So I have to conclude that the only reason they chose this kind of makeup was to make sure there will be no internal fractures."

The new cabinet is also heavily dominated by the Pashtun ethnic group that formed the Taliban's original power base but which makes up only about 40% of Afghanistan's population. Just three appointees appeared to be from other ethnic groups.

It was unveiled by the government spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid. Asked about the lack of inclusivity, he could offer only vague promises that the minor portfolios outstanding may be awarded in a way that broadens the government.

"Some ministries and deputies and many top positions are remaining. We will try to include people from across the country into it. It's not a permanent cabinet and we will try to make it more inclusive," he said.

In another sign that Taliban promises of change, including respect for media freedom, were being tested by the reality of governing, Mujahid said people should not be protesting because the country "had recently emerged from a crisis".

He also suggested that some protesters were incited "from abroad", a possible reaction to the fact that many of those on the streets were attacking the Taliban as an instrument of the Pakistani government.

For two decades Pakistan provided the Taliban with safe haven, and the head of its influential Inter-Services Intelligence agency spent three days in Kabul this week as negotiations about the new government were hammered out, but the Taliban and Islamabad deny any significant ties.

There was no immediate response to the new government from the countries that have bankrolled Afghanistan's aid in the past, and now face the prospect of engaging with a leadership dominated by figures who are on UN sanctions lists for terrorist activities.

There is pressure for the international community to work with the Taliban to try to stave off disaster for the most vulnerable of the country's 38 million inhabitants. The [United Nations](#) has warned that access to food aid and other life-saving services is [close to running out](#), as concerns mount that the country is facing a looming [humanitarian catastrophe](#).

The grim assessment from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs came amid an appeal for an extra \$200m in emergency funding in [Afghanistan](#) after the Taliban's takeover sparked a host of new problems.

The UN says 18 million people are facing a humanitarian disaster, and a further 18 million could quickly join them.

Emma Graham-Harrison in Kabul and **Akhtar Mohammad Makoii**

P.S.

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