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میکانیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولنې د ملاتړ تگلاره

Homeland: Scenarios for the future of Afghan civil society



Funded by the European Union

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Foreword

On August 15, 2021 a new period began in Afghanistan, with the flight of former President Ashraf Ghani and the take-over of power by the Taliban. The change created a myriad of uncertainties about the future of our country, our people, and each of us.

In this uncertainty many domains of life for the people of Afghanistan have been profoundly disrupted. Thousands have left the country, while the livelihoods and day-to-day lives of those men and women who remain in the country have become harder to sustain. In this disrupted state, it has been difficult for many of us to know how to move forward.

In light of this new reality, there was a need for a space where Afghan civil society leaders, experts, and representatives of civil society could come together and jointly take stock of these abrupt developments, and assess their implications for the future of civil society in Afghanistan. While there is broad agreement across most actors involved in Afghanistan on the need to sustain civil society, there has been a broader spectrum of conflicting views on which shape it should take, which functions it should serve, and what relationship, if any, it should have with the de facto authorities.

It was in this context that we, a group of 30 Afghans who are leaders or experts in civil society, decided to engage in a Transformative Scenarios Process for the future of Afghan Civil Society to develop a set of stories about possible futures.

Together, we in the scenario team have, imagined different possible futures, at the edge of what might be plausible, in order to consider what we might have to face, adapt to, and what we might be able to influence. Our shared aim has been to develop and share understanding of the changed context of our country and what that context could mean for civil society. These scenarios are being shared in order to trigger critical thinking about the future of Afghanistan, particularly through the lens of civil society. It enables us all to look strategically at the challenging choices that lie ahead, and hopefully to move forward with open eyes and greater wisdom.

Signed,

the scenarios team

Preface

“Homeland: Scenarios for the future of Afghan civil society” was created by a team of 30 committed and knowledgeable members of Afghan civil society. This team is diverse in terms of expertise, age, gender, ethnicity, language and regional backgrounds, and combines perspectives from the old and new Afghan diaspora. They are the authors and co-creators of the scenarios introduced in this report. A scenario editor has helped to produce the text based on their work, with a commitment to staying true to their voice, and with their approval. The scenarios are based on the sharing of their experience and understanding of Afghan civil society, as well as consultation that they held with colleagues currently inside the country.

To create the scenarios, each member of the group engaged in a one-on-one interview to share their perspectives, and the group then came together for a five day presential workshop and several online sessions. The process applied an approach called Transformative Scenarios Process, whereby a group of diverse actors work together collaboratively to create scenarios for the future of a situation that they themselves are a part of. The intention of such a process is not only to understand an evolving context so as to adapt to it, but also to discover ways to transform the situation and influence the direction of the future.

These scenarios are stories about what could happen over the coming years based on the current reality and the dynamics around key certainties and uncertainties. They are not forecasts or predictions of what will happen. Neither are they visions, preferences, or recommendations of what should happen.

These scenarios are anchored in the current situation of Afghan civil society. They offer different stories of how the future could play out. The scenarios are relevant, challenging, credible, and clear. They are stories that are at the edge of what the group could imagine to be plausible, pushing their and our imaginations beyond what we might expect. They support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities faced by Afghan civil society.

In a complex, conflictual, and uncertain situation like the current situation of Afghanistan, scenario development can be helpful as a way to lift the gaze beyond the current reality and to broaden perspectives beyond the most probable or feared trajectory. Scenarios can help to expand the imagination, to discover different possibilities, and to restore a sense of hope and agency. Further, the task of developing multiple narratives about the future allows for exploring the full space of future potential, without requiring agreement and without committing to specific positions. Scenarios enable us to deal with the reality that – although we cannot predict or control the future – we can work with and influence it.

These scenarios are intended to stimulate dialogue and action among actors involved in different ways with Afghan civil society. These actors may include civil society within the country and in the diaspora, as well as with the international community. Such dialogue may begin with considering, for each scenario: “If this scenario occurred, what would it mean for us?” and “If this scenario occurred, what could we do? What options would we have?” Secondly, looking at the set of scenarios, consider “Given these multiple possible futures, what shall we do?”

Scenario overview

As uncertain as the future of Afghan civil society is, there are some certainties: civil society will be active, the actions of the Taliban and international actors will be influential, and the way ahead will not be easy.

There are uncertainties too: the status of women, access to education and information, wellbeing of the Afghan people, and the level of violence and social cohesion are among the uncertainties that most concerned the scenario team.

There are many possible directions in which the future may go for Afghanistan and its civil society. The Scenario Team has chosen four as the most useful to explore.



The first scenario, Shutters, is a cautionary story. It is the story of what would happen if fear, isolation, and violence are left to prevail.

In this scenario, like a shuttered room, Afghanistan is closed off from the rest of the world, and within the country the people are disconnected from one another. The de facto authority refuses to bend to the demands of its people or of other countries, leaving it unrecognized and with limited access to political and material resources. Instead the more extreme elements of the de facto authority take the lead, and keep all institutions in line with

its interpretation of religious teaching. As a result, the conditions of daily life are increasingly poor. The basic needs of life are difficult to come by, and there is very little access to services. These increasingly desperate conditions lead to fear, hostility, and violence. Terrorism increases, as does interethnic conflict and violence. By 2030 it seems as if the country may fracture.

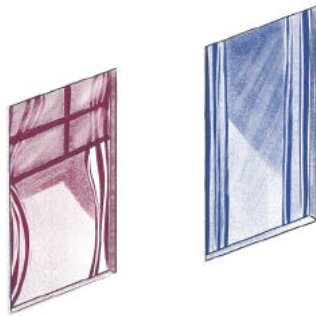


The second scenario, Light through the cracks, describes a world that is not drastically different from that of today. For many Afghans, like a room with shuttered windows, there is a stifling feeling. There is little change, little movement, but there are also some cracks in the shutters, letting in rays of light.

In this scenario the de facto authority has managed to create fragile calm in the country. This condition is established and maintained by limiting the flow of ideas and criticism, restricting political opposition, and by attempting to maintain a basic level of wellbeing for people in Afghanistan. Civil society is permitted to be active in the country in ways that directly support the survival of the people. Other activities, for example advocacy, capacity building, or education are officially not permitted. However, there is some permissiveness by the de facto authorities, and in different regions and communities, a larger role for civil society is tolerated, as long as it

does not threaten the authorities. Donor countries provide funds and push for some reforms. However, other countries largely refrain from meddling in Afghanistan.

As a result of these conditions, many people in Afghanistan experience day-to-day life as difficult, but survivable. Underneath a seeming peace on the surface are many tensions that could erupt.



The third and fourth scenarios are Breeze of Change and Open Curtains. It is possible to imagine elements of these two scenarios existing at the same time. In both of them civil society takes an active role in creating the future of the country. Like in the other two scenarios, conditions are very difficult in the beginning. However, in both of these scenarios, civil society takes a highly active role, not just in meeting the daily needs of the people of Afghanistan, but in pushing for a different future. In Breeze of Change, this push takes the form of a popular uprising against the de facto authority, whereas in Open Curtains, dialogue between all of the parties is the strategy that helps to move the country forward. None of the scenarios ends with a clear, easy, and prosperous future. Nevertheless, Breeze of Change and Open Curtains paint pictures of how civil society might lay foundations for such a future to become possible.

In Breeze of Change, like opening a window and letting in a breeze, there is movement and change. In this scenario a closed and ineffective de facto authority fails to meet the needs of its people, while simultaneously limiting their rights. With time, larger and larger numbers of people become discontented. Effective organizing by Afghan civil society leaders, many of whom are women, inside and outside the country helps to turn this discontent into a social movement for change. While there are opportunities for the de facto authority to choose reform, rather than revolution, these opportunities are not acted on. Further, terrorist violence spreading to neighboring countries and potentially beyond the region engages the support of other countries to support a change in government. By 2030 a revolutionary change is looking very likely.

In the final scenario, Open Curtains, like opening the curtains to look outside, there is a growing ability to see, understand, connect, and change. A small group of diverse, moderate Afghan leaders come together for dialogue, national reconciliation, and moving forward together.

While these groups have very different ideas of what the future of Afghanistan should look like, as well as strong feelings of anger and resentment about the past, there is agreement that the best way forward would be together. A slow process of dialogue and reconciliation moves the country towards an inclusive way forward.

International actors are highly involved in creating the conditions for this dialogue and reconciliation to take place, but also focus on ensuring that the process is owned by Afghans themselves. The living conditions of people in Afghanistan are slowly improving through increased rights, increased access to the needs of life, and increasing social cohesion.

Comparative table

The future may well include a combination of all four of these scenarios and of others. Nevertheless, in order to see – and discuss – these complex dynamics more clearly, we differentiate them into distinctly different scenarios. The following tables compare simplified versions of key elements of the scenarios.

Scenario essence				
	Shutters	Light through the cracks	Breeze of change	Open curtains
What is the essence of this scenario	Fear and resentment reign. Division and disagreement cause disintegration	High levels of control with some local flexibility leads to fragile calm	Profoundly discontented with the situation, the people organize to change the government	Slow dialogue leads to increasing peace
Key characteristics	Conflict and breakdown	Inconsistency and constraint	Social movement for change	Dialogue and reconciliation
Strategies and objectives of key actors				
Primary objective of civil society	Survive	Meet the basic need of the Afghan people and of civil society	Ensure human rights	Build an inclusive society
Dominant strategies employed by civil society	International advocacy and awareness raising	Politically impartial service provision and underground activism in the country, continuing advocacy outside of the country	Movement building and service provision	Capacity building for dialogue and peacebuilding, formal and informal dialogue
Characteristic actions of the government	Consistently forcing a tight and uncompromising hold, attempting to control terrorism and armed elements	Trying to maintain a fragile stability through moderate permissiveness	More conservative elements try to maintain a tight and uncompromising hold	Engaging in dialogue towards inclusive governance, supporting development
Characteristic actions of international actors	External countries provide funds and weapons to different armed civilian groups who are opposed to the de facto authority	Pressuring for some minor changes regarding the status of women, some donor funds support meeting people's basic needs, humanitarian assistance	Providing donor funds, influencing the de facto authority through requirements for funds, politically supporting either the de facto authority or the resistance movement	Highly involved, providing donor funds, providing platforms for dialogue, supporting development, providing capacity building, and providing peacekeeping forces

Comparative table

Experience of people living in Afghanistan				
	Shutters	Light through the cracks	Breeze of change	Open Curtains
The status of women	Largely poor, uneducated, unemployed, isolated, repressed, and increasingly affected by violent conflict, including taking up arms	Receiving limited education, able to access limited jobs, significant experiences of poverty and domestic violence	Slowly improving access to educations and jobs, leading the resistance movement	Increasingly educated and employed, engaging in dialogue
The wellbeing of people in Afghanistan	Consistently deteriorating including poor access to basic needs and safety	Able to survive, not thriving	People are in dire conditions in the beginning but experience slow improvement	Increasingly well, safe, and secure
Access to information and ideas	No freedom of speech and access to information is highly restricted	Very little freedom of speech or assembly; access to information is limited for all, with conventional media being highly restricted and social media somewhat unreliable	Very little freedom of speech or assembly, but social media is accessible	Growing access to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly
Ethnic differences	Existing tensions boil over in the form of individual and group conflicts	Different ethnic groups are treated differently	Ethnic differences are largely downplayed, except in ensuring adequately diverse representation in key decision making	Different ethnic identities are highlighted and discussed

Shutters

Imagine a fully shuttered room. It is dark and isolated. There is little sense of time or of connection to what is happening outside.

In this scenario Afghanistan is closed off from the rest of the world, and within the country, the people are disconnected from one another. In this scenario the de facto authority refuses to bend to the demands of its people or of other countries, leaving it unrecognized and with limited access to political and material resources. Instead the more extreme elements of the governing authority take the lead, and keep all institutions in line with its interpretation of religious teaching. As a result, the conditions of daily life are increasingly poor. Basic needs are difficult to meet, and there is very little access to services. These increasingly desperate conditions lead to fear, hostility, and violence. There is ongoing increase in drug and poppy cultivation as well as intensification of armed-anti Taliban activity across the country, which leads to poor security and a rise in the number of displaced people. Terrorism increases, as does interethnic conflict. By 2030 it seems as if the country may fracture.



Timeline

In 2022 there has been little change in the relationship between the de facto authority of Afghanistan and the rest of the world. The de facto authority is not recognized as legitimate by any other countries and no donor support is entering the country other than in the form of emergency aid. At the same time terrorist violence continues with bombings happening at least weekly in different parts of the country. It is difficult to find a job and as a result of challenges with the banking system and limited domestic economic activities, the national currency begins to lose value. Further, trade with other countries is very limited and as a result people in Afghanistan have a difficult time affording even everyday goods. As a result of all of these factors, hundreds of Afghans continue to leave the country every month. Fear, frustration, and isolation are commonly experienced by Afghans inside and outside of the country.



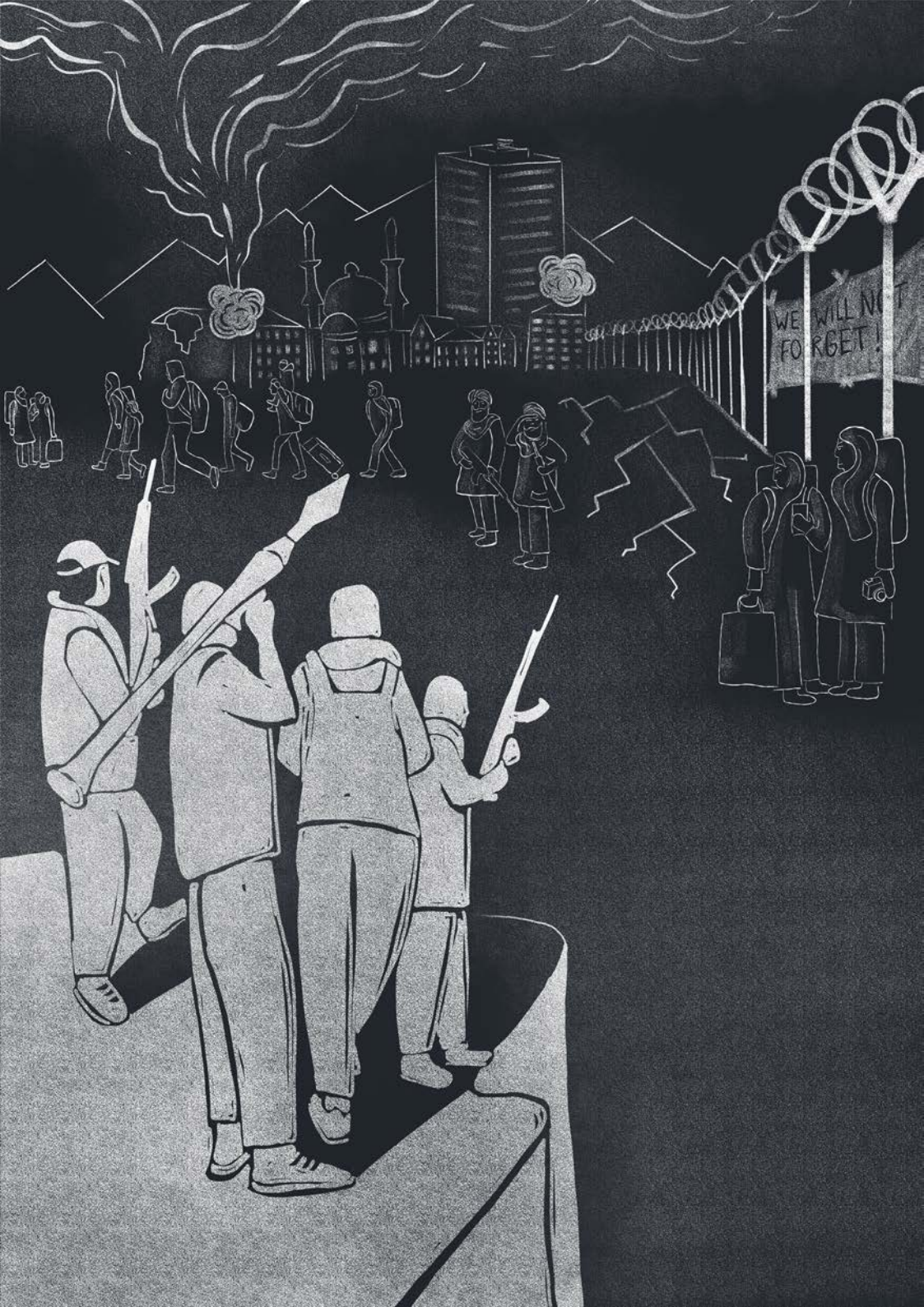
Desperation and frustration due to the economic crisis lead to civil protests and armed struggles in various parts of the country.

In early 2023, the de facto authority reopens schools for girls past 6th grade. The school curriculum at all levels, including universities, is revised to include a heavy emphasis on religious teachings aligned with the de facto authority's interpretations, and schools are closely monitored. As a result school attendance drops significantly for both boys and girls.

Most politically active Afghans in the diaspora advocate for their host countries to continue to pressure the de facto authority for further changes, including a broadening of the curriculum, rights for women to return to work, and increased freedom of speech. As a result of this advocacy, as well as competing demands for attention on the geo-political stage a few countries continue to engage in informal diplomatic discussions with the de facto authority, pushing for reforms, but these produce little result.

The de facto authority focuses its energy on ensuring compliance with its interpretation of religious law and on fighting terrorist forces and political opposition as well as the National Resistance Front and anti-Taliban groups engaged in uprisings. Across the country it hires monitors whose role it is to report any behavior that would challenge the de facto authority or that is misaligned with its religious interpretation. The Ministry of Virtue and Vice becomes more important and influential, ensuring that restricted rules are strongly enforced, including restricting women's travel without a male escort, restricting public gatherings, enforcing the dress code, ensuring that all businesses are closed and that people attend mosques during prayer times. They also prohibit performing songs, music and dancing, and limit cultural activities to religious activities. Cultural festivals such as the celebration of Nowruz (first day of solar year), and Yalda night (longest night of the year) are prohibited.

The de facto authority, which holds the view that most civil society actors and activities are cultural imports from the West restricts civic activities in the country and refuses to issue license to civil society organizations. This, in turn, prevents them from raising funds. A number of local councils and religious organizations, which do not depend on funding, remain active in improving people's lives. However, in general the role of civil society is



severely limited in its ability to provide services to people. Any activities that go beyond basic service provision are not licensed, and are unable to receive funding. When local shuras meet, monitors are always present, restricting the range of types of topics that are discussed. Criticism of religion, the de facto authority's religious interpretation, or of the de facto authority itself is met with formal or informal consequences.

Many government services are quite limited. For example, the capacity of the formal legal system is reduced. This causes more people to take their legal complaints to the informal justice system, led by local religious leaders, to take justice into their own hands, or to give up on having their challenges addressed. Policing for moral crimes continues, but other crimes, such as domestic violence or disputes between neighbors receive little to no attention. As a result tensions between people grow, and many live with feelings of resentment and frustration.

Problems with the health system also become more prevalent. Many people lack access to clean drinking water and to adequate nutrition. At the same time, people lack access to health care, with very few female doctors and specialist doctors remaining in the country and scarcities of medicines being common.

The de facto authority strongly censors what is said in conventional media and removes access to major global social media platforms. In conventional media any reporting that is critical of the de facto authority or its actions is not permitted. Protests are also banned and anyone engaging in public protests is detained.

The cultivation and trafficking of narcotics, despite being banned, is

growing rapidly, and arms trafficking and sales are increasing. There is also an increase in theft and other petty crimes, especially in urban areas. Feeling unsafe, many people buy weapons to ensure their personal safety.

Groups of anti-government armed civilians begin to form, including some made up of only women. These groups establish themselves in remote areas, outside of the surveillance of the governing authorities. Through connections to Afghans in the diaspora, they acquire weapons and training. In 2023 these groups are not active in physical attacks.

In 2024, frustrated by the lack of success in containing terrorist groups the de facto authority begins forced recruitment of men across the



country to join its security forces. To feed and care for these forces, the de-facto authority also forces the collection of tithes and zakat (charity) from the people of the villages and imposes high taxes on the people of the cities. There is an increase in armed conflict between these security forces and armed groups. At the same time terrorist groups begin taking their attacks beyond Afghanistan into neighboring countries. With the increasing spread of government-associated security forces across the country, the armed civilian groups also begin to engage in sabotage and attacks of these government security forces.

With increasing activity by anti-Taliban armed civilian groups, the de facto authority turns its attention to investigating and infiltrating these groups. Many of the armed civilian groups are organized around common ethnic identities. Following attacks by armed groups, the security forces often retaliate, attacking communities and inhabitants who are perceived to share an identity with the armed civilian groups forces. As the news of these incidents spreads, fears of potential ethnic cleansing are heightened among multiple groups. As a result, membership in the armed civilian groups grows.

Civil society actors in the diaspora remain engaged in raising awareness about the crisis in the country. They use their connections with people inside the country to amplify their voices in international media and social media. They put pressure on governments to ensure that people fleeing Afghanistan can access visas and find refuge and support new refugees from Afghanistan in establishing themselves in their host countries. They also advocate for continued emergency aid for those living in the country and try to document the atrocities committed by different groups aiming to someday support a transitional justice process.

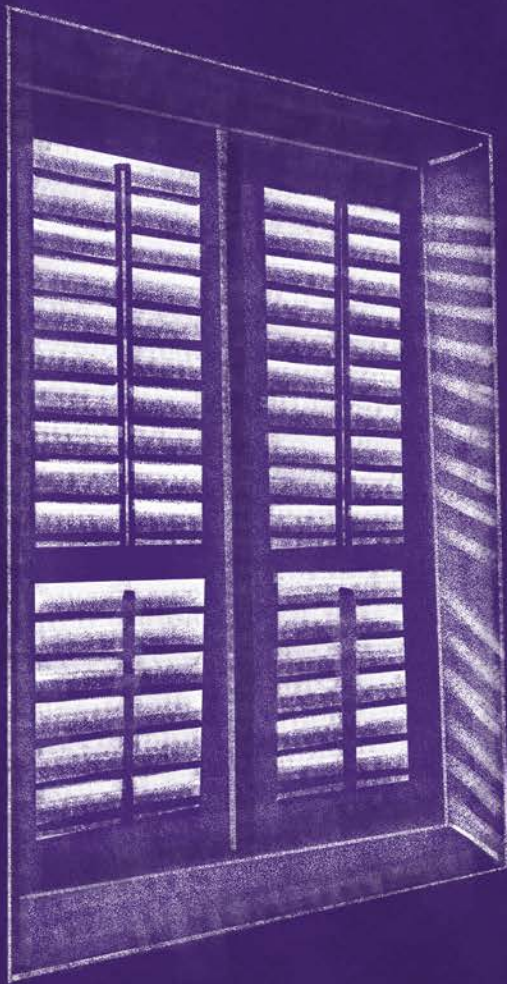
In 2026 internal divisions within the de facto authority increase. There are both more fundamentalist and more progressive factors which are increasingly dissatisfied with the deterioration of conditions in the country. There are pressures within the de facto authority for a peace process with the armed civilian groups, for increasing liberalization in order to reestablish relations with other countries and bring about an end to the crisis, as well as for alliances with terrorist groups. These tensions lead to inertia as well as attempts at taking power. This increasing instability within the de facto authority itself undermines its ability to effectively contain the many forces acting against it.

In 2028, a drought and increasing armed conflict lead to a poor harvest, while continuing currency devaluation means that people in the country have very poor access to food. Emergency aid is provided by international actors to stave off a famine. However, several aid convoys are attacked, leading to starvation in some regions. Though Afghans have steadily been leaving the country, in 2028 there is a new peak in migration, with thousands leaving every week. In host countries there is increasing pressure to intervene in the Afghan crisis. As a result, clandestine support is provided by many countries to the armed civilian groups opposed to the de facto authority.

In 2030, the de facto authority faces significant challenges within the country and in maintaining the borders of the country. There are many armed forces, including terrorist and ethnically aligned armed civilian groups in the country aiming to take over the rule of the country. At the same time, the armed civilian groups are increasingly working in alliances with neighboring countries. Major border cities are at risk of joining neighboring countries, and challenging the sovereignty of Afghanistan.

Will the de facto authority be able to maintain the territorial integrity of the country? What will happen to the people living in Afghanistan? Will other actors intervene militarily in the country?





Light through the cracks

Imagine a closed and stifling room. It is mostly dark. There is little change, little movement. However, through the darkness but there are also some cracks or small openings in the shutters, letting in rays of light.

In this scenario the de facto authority has managed to create fragile calm in the country. This condition is established and maintained by limiting the flow of ideas and criticism, restricting political opposition, and by attempting to maintain a basic level of wellbeing for people in Afghanistan. Civil society is permitted to be active in the country in ways that directly support the survival of the people. Other activities, for example advocacy, capacity building, or education are officially not permitted. However, there is some permissiveness by the de facto authority, and in different regions and communities, a larger role for civil society is tolerated, as long as it does not threaten the de facto authority. Most countries refrain from meddling in Afghanistan.

As a result of these conditions, many people in Afghanistan experience day-to-day life as difficult, but survivable. However, because there is no freedom of expression, and most activities are highly constrained, there is also a stifling feeling that pervades the country. Underneath a seeming peace on the surface are many tensions that could erupt.

Timeline

In 2022 the de facto authority is led predominantly by a group of people who share common perspectives and a common ethnicity. A handful of representatives from Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups are put in mid-level posts, which they hold for the long-term. The facto authority also places loyal servants in the positions of provincial governors. There are very few changes to laws, but in general, across the country laws are enforced inconsistently, with ethnic and regional differences influencing how laws are implemented.

There is very little communication between civil society actors and actors from the de facto authority. Protest movements have no access to dialogue with the de facto authority, and are largely repressed. Very few people who were part of protest movements remain in the country.

By the end of 2022, the de facto authority opens schools for all children and youth, including secondary schools for girls. With a view towards maintaining stability and supporting the interpretation of religious law held by the de facto authority, the curriculum is revised to focus on basic literacy and numeracy and religious teaching.



Women receive permission to work outside their homes only if there are working spaces where they can be separate from men. They are also required to cover their faces, according to the de facto authority's rule on Hijab. The types of professions that women are allowed to work is very limited.

Afghans living outside of the country continue to play an active role in the country. Many people who remain outside send remittances, helping families to survive, and make small investments to enable small businesses to function. Civil society actors and organizations outside the country remain very active in advocacy with international actors and donors. They advocate for actions to support the wellbeing of the Afghan people. Their advocacy priorities include ensuring the right to life, education, elections, freedom of expression, freedom of press, women's rights and human rights. To advance towards these goals, they also continue to push for donors to tie provision of funds to priority changes, such as increasing freedom of speech and allowing for capacity building programmes for women. They aim to ensure that the Afghan people are not forgotten, that women have rights, and that hope for a more inclusive future government, which is based on people's vote and through elections, remains alive.

From 2023 media channels that remain in the country adopt a consistent policy of self-censorship. Local and national media outlets continue to close due to economic problems and security pressures. However, remaining regional media in different languages are able to share more critical perspectives without consequence. Reports by these media sources are picked up and spread on global social media platforms by members of Afghan civil society living in the diaspora. Social media becomes a more relied upon source of information for many people living in Afghanistan.



However, dis- and misinformation is widespread. As a result the people of the country are very poorly informed about what is happening in their country and outside.

In late 2023 civil society actors who the de facto authority considers to be relatively trustworthy are provided with licenses to set up non-governmental organizations and act as service providers, providing support for livelihoods, medical services, and undertaking basic infrastructure projects. As they become established, these NGOs, along with religious leaders and local councils also help to deescalate tensions at the local level when they arise. There are a few actors within the de facto authority who are supportive of civil society and who provide permission to undertake slightly broader activities. In some provinces there are governors who are supportive of civil society while in others, the governors prohibit any activities.

Where civil society organizations serve communities, they function on lean budgets. They rely primarily on local staff and volunteers who are closely in touch with the needs of the people that they support and serve. They focus on meeting needs in ways that can be sustained by the communities themselves as much as possible, that are in line with the culture and values of the communities being served, and that align with the values articulated by the de facto authority.

During this period Afghan civil society in exile continue to document the cases of human rights violations for accountability purposes as well as advocacy at the international platforms.

By this time, it has become clear to civil society groups that many activities

will be permitted, provided that they are not against the authorities and that they do not blatantly oppose the de facto authority's interpretation of religious law. As a result, civil society becomes progressively more active in a wider range of domains, but in a hidden manner. For example, small underground schools that teach a broad curriculum, including technology and art emerge across the country. Civil society networks and media organizations emerge, using secret and encrypted channels to communicate.

Donors begin to provide increased funds for humanitarian assistance and expand to also funding basic development. Because of many bureaucratic hurdles, the flow of these funds is slow. Neighboring countries strengthen their borders with Afghanistan.

Protests are very rare, with civil society activists having adopted strategies that are less public. However, the increasing underground activities by civil society and growing local support lead to an increased sense of possibility for change among civil society activists.

The level of service provision varies greatly across regions. In regions where religious teachings are interpreted more liberally, there is access to more and different types of services provided by civil society, such as hosting dialogue, creating community plans and visions, and undertaking capacity building. This leads to increasing numbers of jobs available in agriculture, construction, and other basic work. In other regions, which are neither well served by civil society nor by the de facto authority, there is very poor access even to the most basic needs of life.

In addition to geographic variation in access to service and support, there are also significant disparities in support to different ethnic groups. The

communities who are underserved tend to be those who have been historically marginalized in Afghanistan. The result of these differences tends to be very different levels of support of the de facto authority, with some becoming increasingly supportive and others increasingly dissatisfied. The divisions between ethnic groups is further amplified by messaging through conventional media and social media, which tend to sow increasing discord between groups. There are occasional informal flare-ups of inter-ethnic group conflicts, however there is no direct official physical violence against marginalized communities.

The basic needs of life, such as food, shelter, and medical care, remain difficult to come by for most people in Afghanistan. While many Afghans



continue to experience significant poverty practices such as selling children or organs have almost completely disappeared, as most Afghans are able to survive due to the flow of humanitarian aid.

By 2024 the de facto authority is focusing significant energy on preventing the growth of terrorism, seeing that the emergence of other religiously driven and armed groups is the greatest threat that it faces. Arms are strictly controlled, and those suspected of belonging to Daesh, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups are summarily imprisoned.

A coordinated national protest is organized in several cities across the country, demanding free and fair elections. The turnout for these protests is smaller than expected, and they are brutally suppressed by the



authorities. Many of the civil society activists involved are arrested or flee the country. As a result, some of the underground networks and activities that existed in the previous years are suppressed or dissolved. However, most of the local activities that are recognized and supported by the authorities continue.

The de facto authority makes several significant reforms, which lead to a more decentralized state. Many functions and decisions are devolved to the provincial level. There is no legal change, but in practice, the de facto authority steps out of several domains and encourages provincial governors to step in. As a result, in 2025 some provinces are more open than others and civil society is enabled to have a larger role. Informal civil society networks across the country share their successes with each other, and province-level advocacy slowly grows. Primarily concerned with maintaining stability, the national authorities largely allow these changes to take place, without officially condoning or acknowledging them.

When underground activities become too well known for local authorities to ignore them, the leaders and organizers are most often penalised, with significant personal consequences. However, the authorities are also aware that threatening services that people depend on can lead to public unrest. As such, efforts are made to provide alternative services, or to allow needed services to continue, even while punishing insubordination.

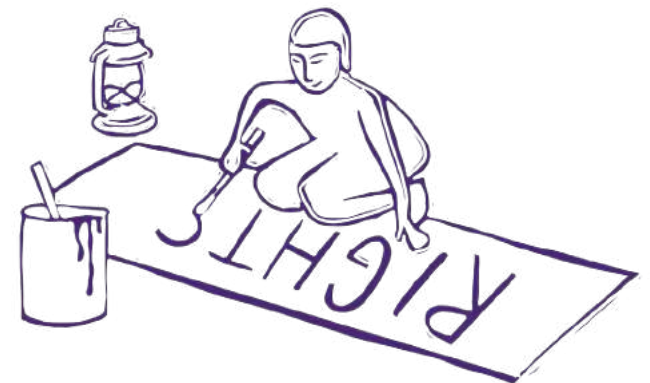
From 2025, as a result of their culturally aligned and effective service, civil society organizations are increasingly valued by local authorities, religious and cultural leaders and are given increasing flexibility in the communities that they operate in. Subsequently there are increasing civil society activities to advance rights for women and minorities, to expand education,

to create spaces for dialogue, and to act as mediators and supporters in informal justice systems. Civil society actors also increasingly fill their role in bridging between the people and the authorities at the provincial level.

By late 2025 many of the underground activities of civil society that had been in place in 2024 prior to the protests are back in place.

Conditions for the people and for civil society remain relatively stable over the period of 2025–2030. Natural disasters, drought, and occasional border skirmishes disrupt the calm and lead to increasing suffering for short periods. Throughout, conditions feel stifling and unmoving. Nevertheless, through the period, the de facto authority is continuing to maintain a fragile stability. While Afghanistan is not a prosperous country with thriving people, the people are also not suffering as they did in the past. The acts of violence that characterized the period of the American presence are rare, and most people are able to eke out at least a subsistence lifestyle. There is no freedom of speech or freedom of assembly. While women have some basic rights, they are far more limited than men. Similarly, while girls are being educated, many are only being educated in religion. Their futures are largely domestic futures, in which they will care for households and will not have professional positions. Civil society is functioning and making an increasingly effective difference, but remains highly constrained.

How long can this fragile stability last? Will an unexpected crisis, foreign influence, cracks within the government, or growing desire of the people for change lead to massive disruption?





Breeze of change

Imagine opening a window and letting in a breeze. The breeze clears out the stale air and brings in movement and change. The change can be inconsistent and unpredictable. Sometimes, perhaps, the curtains will flap or a paper will be blown off of a table. How and when the breeze blows cannot be predicted, but what can be sure is that it will bring change.

In this scenario a closed and ineffective governing authority fails to meet the needs of its people, while simultaneously limiting their rights. With time larger and larger numbers of people become discontented. Effective organizing by Afghan civil society leaders, many of whom are women, inside and outside the country helps to turn this discontent into a social movement for change. While there are opportunities for the de facto authority to choose reform, rather than revolution, these opportunities are not acted on. Further, terrorist violence spreading to neighbouring countries and potentially beyond the region engages the support of other countries to support a change in government. By 2030, a revolutionary change is looking very likely.

Timeline

In 2023 the living conditions of people in Afghanistan are very poor. After a drought season, famine is common and families are forced to make impossible choices in order to survive. A small trickle of remittances from Afghans in the diaspora helps some, but the situation remains desperate for many.

In an effort to satisfy donors and increase the flow of international aid to address the famine, the de facto authority reopens schools for girls. These schools teach a curriculum that is exclusively focused on religion. During the famine emergency food aid, distributed by international actors, reaches people and prevents many deaths.

During this same period, a group of civil society leaders, spearheaded by women in the country, begin to organize a social movement. Their aim is to ensure that human rights are respected and upheld. They want rights for women, freedom of speech, and freedom from discrimination. In addition, they work towards and advocate for a government that is inclusive and based on free and fair elections, in which all Afghans have the right to vote and get elected, arguing that this is the foundation for an inclusive and lawful government. In order to move towards this, they also advocate for the establishment of an interim government that can pave the path for elections where Afghans can elect their future government. They argue that if Afghanistan doesn't move towards a political system that is inclusive and is based on the vote of the people, the future of the country will likely be one of ever-increasing poverty and violence.

By 2024 the protest element of their movement has dwindled due to increasing repression and as activists flee the country for safety. Those remaining who want change work with a small group of progressive religious

scholars to articulate its aims within a framework of religious interpretation. They argue that a true Islamic country, which upholds Quranic teachings, would include respecting these rights. They also present a framework for women's rights which they argue is not a western interpretation, but rather an Islamic one.

Many of these civil society leaders choose a strategy of building a broad-based social movement to try to influence the de facto authority to increase access to basic human rights. There is tension among the movement leaders about how to balance maintaining their security and effectively



influencing the future. A significant faction of these leaders decide to take a targeted approach, crafting messaging and strategies to engage many sectors of society through personal outreach. In the beginning the group is made up of women, youth, a small group of progressive religious scholars, and some former political leaders. Between 2023-2025 they engage teachers groups, lecturers, farmers associations, and some private sector leaders in the movement. By 2026, the membership of this group has grown to include more religious scholars. Over time the leadership grows to include more men. Among those engaged in leadership are a few individuals loyal to the de facto authority, who clandestinely monitor the activities of the group.

Those who join the movement are united by their desire for a change of government. Disparities and mistrust between ethnic groups are not among the topics commonly discussed in the movement. While there is mistrust among ethnic groups, it is temporarily pushed aside within the movement in the interest of the goal of government change.

During this same time period there are many publicized human rights violations. While formal news media is highly censored, and permits no criticism of the de facto authority, social media is highly active. There are many incidents of ethnically driven violence, as well as gender-based violence that are widely and graphically reported on social media.

There are regular incidents of violence, including terrorist attacks in the country on institutions such as schools, banks, and government offices. It appears that the membership and influence of terrorist groups is growing in the country. The de facto authority has made no significant effort to control either weapons or illicit drugs, and both seem to be fueling



the conflict. Additionally, there are occasional air strikes by neighboring countries targeting terrorist groups located in Afghanistan, as well as ground patrols by Pakistani and Iranian troops to try to contain these terrorist groups.

People in Afghanistan are increasingly unhappy and criticize the de facto authorities, and increasingly adhere to the movement for change. Within the de facto authorities itself, divisions and disagreement grow. The deteriorating conditions within the country and increasing repression also lead to increased international criticism about the human rights situation on the ground.

In 2027, after four years of trying with no success to engage the de facto authority in dialogue, the leaders of the social movement decide to stop trying to influence the de facto authority, and instead to create a new government. The leaders of this movement agree to organize a council, in order to design and choose a new government. They also agree that if the de facto authority does not accept the decision of the council, then they will do what is required to overthrow the de facto authority. When this new direction is taken, several leaders of the group are arrested and held by the de facto authority, having been exposed by spies in the group.

As a result, trust among members of the movement is compromised, and it fractures into several smaller branches, which intentionally do not share activities or identities with each other. Nevertheless, the activities of the movement continue, and over the ensuing two years, the leaders of the movement work to maintain broad support in the country, and to additionally engage the support of private sector actors and other countries for a new government.



Throughout this period, a few external countries provide political support to the de facto authority. Some neighboring countries, however, are the targets of increasing attacks from terrorist groups, coming from Afghanistan, including one which kills 20 soldiers in Pakistan. These countries become increasingly vocal in the UN and in other multilateral fora about the threat posed by the growth of terrorist groups.

In 2028 neighboring countries call for external military intervention in Afghanistan. No military intervention is taken but there is an agreement to increase monitoring of terrorist activities in Afghanistan and to reconsider an intervention if conditions continue to deteriorate.

In early 2029 civil society members in the diaspora, along with leaders of the social movement organize meetings with the other governments of regional powers. In these meetings the movement receives no explicit promises of support from other countries or corporations, except from one neighboring country, but is generally warmly received. Confidence in

the likelihood of a successful overthrow of the *de facto* authority grows. In a second round of meetings with the governments of regional powers, held in late 2029, the movement succeeds in obtaining private promises of support from several regional powers. These countries are not only concerned with violence, drugs, and terrorism spilling over the Afghan border to other parts of the world, but also see significant business opportunities in a more stable country that is open for business and with which they have strong alliances.

On August 15 2030, a grand council, which is not supported by the *de facto* authority, is convened with the presence of more than 1500 people's representatives. The membership of the council is carefully selected by the leaders of the movement to represent the full diversity of Afghanistan,



including a few members of the Taliban who are more moderate. This council finalizes plans for an inclusive government, a roadmap for the future of Afghanistan and an agreement on the future leadership of the interim government. Holding free and fair elections as soon as possible is the cornerstone of the council's priorities. The council also agrees to reinstate the previous constitution, with a few key changes.

Among the additional actions in their roadmap are:

- taking a hard line on corruption;
- increasing law enforcement to ensure that corruption is revealed and punished;
- changing the accounting systems to improve transparency and auditing of public and donor funds;
- prohibiting activities associated with the production of illicit drugs, including the growing of poppies;
- establishing a national disarmament team co-managed by the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense;
- providing livelihoods support for former combatants as well as alternative agricultural production by farmers who were involved in the production and distribution of illicit drugs.

Following this grand council who and what will replace the government and how? Will they manage to implement their road map? How will the many tensions and factions within the movement play out in the context of a new government?

Open curtains

Imagine opening curtains to look outside. In the act of pulling them aside, you go from being separated from the world to being able to see, understand, and engage with what is on the other side. In this scenario, there is a growing ability to understand, connect, and change. A small group of moderate Afghan leaders from across beliefs and perspectives come together for dialogue, reconciliation, and to move forward together.

While these groups have very different ideas of what the future of Afghanistan should look like, as well as strong feelings of anger and resentment about the past, there is agreement that the best way forward would be together. A slow process of dialogue and reconciliation moves the country towards an inclusive way forward.

International actors are highly involved in creating the conditions for this dialogue and reconciliation but also focus on ensuring that Afghans own the process. The living conditions of people in Afghanistan are slowly improving through increased rights, increased access to the needs of life, and increasing social cohesion.



Timeline

From 2022 to late 2023, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. People rise up in organized groups, some of which are armed some of which are civil movements, all of which challenge the authority of the Taliban.

Civil society in Afghanistan re-organizes. Civil society actors in the country focus on creating informal links with civil society actors in the diaspora, moderate figures within the de facto authority, and other political parties.

During this time the policies of the de facto authority are considered by the international community to be repressive. As a result, the international community continues to provide humanitarian aid, while ceasing development and political assistance. The lack of engagement by the international community leads to further challenges in society. Continuing emergency aid from the international community and the humanitarian activities of local non-governmental organizations enable many Afghans to survive.

At the same time, activities by armed groups of the people's uprising as well as some terrorist groups have become more prevalent; with planned attacks on the Taliban and frequent bombings of hospitals, schools, busses, and factories. Some of the armed groups resist the Taliban authority due to their brutal suppression of people; some others have been inspired by their rise to power through means of violence and have decided to challenge the Taliban militarily. Recruitment to these armed groups is very high. The Taliban have lost the ability to control the rise of these groups. Arms and drug smuggling to the neighboring countries are increasing. Drug production has reached highest an all-time high in 2023.

Divisions among the moderate and hardliners within the de-facto authorities are becoming more and more visible, and inter-group conflict is on the rise. It appears as if the country is descending into war.

In early 2024, a group of leaders from within the Afghan civil society, weary of the war and chaos, decide to attempt to establish a dialogue platform with the de facto authority, other armed groups, and political parties. This platform, funded by international donors, but governed and organized by





members of Afghan civil society, creates a space for information sharing, networking, joint strategizing, dialogue, and capacity building. The platform links civil society actors inside the country with each other and with the civil society diaspora. It has activities both in person and in virtual spaces.

This group articulates its aims as working towards peace, reconciliation, and an inclusive government. Members of this group who are in the diaspora advocate for a diplomatic approach to urge the de facto authority and other armed groups and political parties to come to the table for this dialogue and support other local dialogues. They propose the United Nations as facilitators or observers of these dialogue platforms.

There are many members of civil society who doubt the wisdom of this dialogue approach. They fear that by engaging the de facto authority, the de facto authority will be empowered and, in the process, civil society will lose its ability to be influential.

In this period there is ongoing intensification of armed conflict and growing poverty and resentment among the public, along with calls from civil society to end the conflict. Further, the de facto authority remains unrecognized by other countries, and aid remains very limited. As a result some members of the the warring parties come to believe that the only way forward for the survival of Afghanistan is in finding a joint political solution, leading to an inclusive and embracing government. All conflicting parties agree to meet and try to resolve their difference through dialogue and reconciliation.

The idea of talks in Kabul are supported by the international community

and regional actors. The regional actors meet with each other and arrive at a consensus that the conflict in Afghanistan needs to end. They encourage all parties in Afghanistan to find an inclusive solution to their differences.

In mid-2024, the preparation for these expected dialogues in Kabul begins. Donors support capacity building and training in collaboration and dialogue for many Afghans. The first to accept the offer of this capacity building are members of Afghan civil society and other Afghans in the diaspora, but they are not the only ones. Independent religious leaders, members of the Taliban, members of other armed groups, as well as political parties attend the capacity-building programs. This capacity-building leads to more constructive relationships and greater collaboration among those who participate, in addition to preparing for dialogue in the country.

In this same time period, many civil society members and media actors promote conceptions of forgiveness, acceptance, tolerance, reparation, and rehabilitation, pre-empting and countering disinformation campaigns that attempt to undermine dialogue. Across social and conventional media, these messages have become more widespread, and there is a growing sense among Afghans that co-existence might be possible.

In late 2024, the first national dialogue as part of “The Kabul Process” takes place at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. It is hosted and moderated by the United Nations and brings together Afghans from inside and outside of the country who have wide-ranging perspectives on the future of the country. This group includes members of the de facto authority, armed groups, religious leaders, civil society, media, the private sector, academia, and past political leaders. The actors engaged in this process

include men and women from all regions and ethnicities of the country and include youth and elders. The main topics of dialogues early on are a request to the UN to act as an observer and deploy its peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan to prevent the eruption of armed conflict while the talks are happening. The possible structure of the governance systems will be decided at the end of these talks. The constitution, laws, freedoms, and liberties (freedom of expression, freedom of speech), rights, political participation, and the roles of women and youth constitutes the agenda of the upcoming talks.

Following the first dialogue, an agreement is reached among all parties that commit to protecting any Afghans who want to return to the country. Though many are wary of the trustworthiness of this commitment, it does



prompt a slow return of Afghans from the diaspora. Local civil society monitoring of initial returns supports further returns.

In early 2025, local dialogue processes are initiated across the country. The processes mirror many of the conversations happening at the national level and are linked to the national dialogues as well. Women, local councils, and local mullahs animate and participate in these platforms and bring them legitimacy and engagement. They provide perspectives from across the country to help inform the national process and provide space to develop shared understanding and action locally. Across the country, a culture of dialogue is cultivated along with the ability for issues to be brought into the open and discussed.

News media and social media channels play an important role in engaging the wider population. Insights and perspectives are widely shared through conventional and social media. There is an increasing degree of freedom of speech and expression seen across the media in Afghanistan. There is also an increase in freedom of cultural expression.

With an increasing return of Afghans from the diaspora, there is a growth in civil society activities to meet the needs of the Afghan people.

Throughout this entire period, there are divisions and tensions among actors within all sectors of society. Within religious groups and the de facto authority, there are many who believe that engaging in dialogue and adapting will lead the country to deteriorate into a secular state, where religious teachings are not respected and where western culture dominates. These more conservative actors are in tension with those who aim

to build an inclusive state in which a diversity of perspectives can co-exist. To ease these tensions, the parties engaged in dialogue continue to send clear messages that Afghanistan is and will remain an Islamic country that will respect Islam and will not allow foreign interference in the affairs of Afghanistan.

Similarly, due to the policies adopted by the Taliban in the past, some civil society actors believe that dialogue and working with the de facto authority will lead to a country in which human rights are not respected, and ethnic and gender-based discrimination will be prevalent. Some of these civil society actors abstain from the dialogue process while critiquing it publicly. Within the group of civil society actors involved in the dialogue process, there are also tensions, with different members of the platform jockeying for influence, recognition, and access to avenues of power. These tensions sometimes flare in accusations of personal and political ambition.

In mid-2025, a small group of international peacekeeping forces arrives in Afghanistan to help protect civilians, reduce violence, strengthen security, support national political dialogue, and empower national authorities to assume responsibilities.

By early 2026, the actors involved in “The Kabul Process” engage in further dialogues. In this period of the dialogues, more groups such as victims of the war, minority groups, religious groups, students, and members of the diaspora participate in the discussion to contribute to the way forward for Afghanistan. These groups have been engaging in sub-committees throughout the talks. They deliver their findings and demands to the negotiating team in order to inform and influence their decision-making.

By Mid 2026 the parties engaged in the dialogue agree on a new structure for the government, agree to amend the current constitution, declare their commitment to international treaties, and agree on a timeline for the organization and conduct of elections. All sides acknowledge that women's active participation in all of the processes is a key to the success of these processes. Additionally, they also agree on a process of disarmament managed by the United Nations, recognize that all sides committed atrocities, and appeal to people for forgiveness for all and compensation. Throughout these years, there have been no significant interventions regarding the empowerment of women. Many of the past challenges remain the same. But women are actively engaging in the dialogues at the Kabul Process as well as at the community levels. The parties engaged in

the talks agree that there will be no laws and regulations limiting women from actively taking part in all walks of life.

Throughout the entire period, there has been a steady increase in public and private investment in the country. Some of the investors who had left Afghanistan are making a slow return. Some of the largest companies are exploring ways to contribute to the economy of the country.

By the end of 2026, as a concrete outcome of the ongoing dialogue through the Kabul Process, an inclusive, transitional government is formed. This transitional government includes men and women from across all regions, ethnic groups, and the wide political spectrum of the country. The majority of actors in the international community recognize this new transitional government as a legitimate authority and engage in formal relations with it.

From 2027-2028 This transitional government continues working on developing the new constitution. In parallel, its key domestic activities include organizing and facilitating national and local elections running a disarmament program, and working towards reconciliation. By mid-2028, preliminary preparations begin for local and national elections to be held in 2029. Along with these plans for an election come plans to withdraw the peacekeeping forces following the election.

Internationally, the interim government focuses on attracting international aid and relief to ease the suffering of the people. The international community and regional actors support this transitional government's role and extend their assistance.



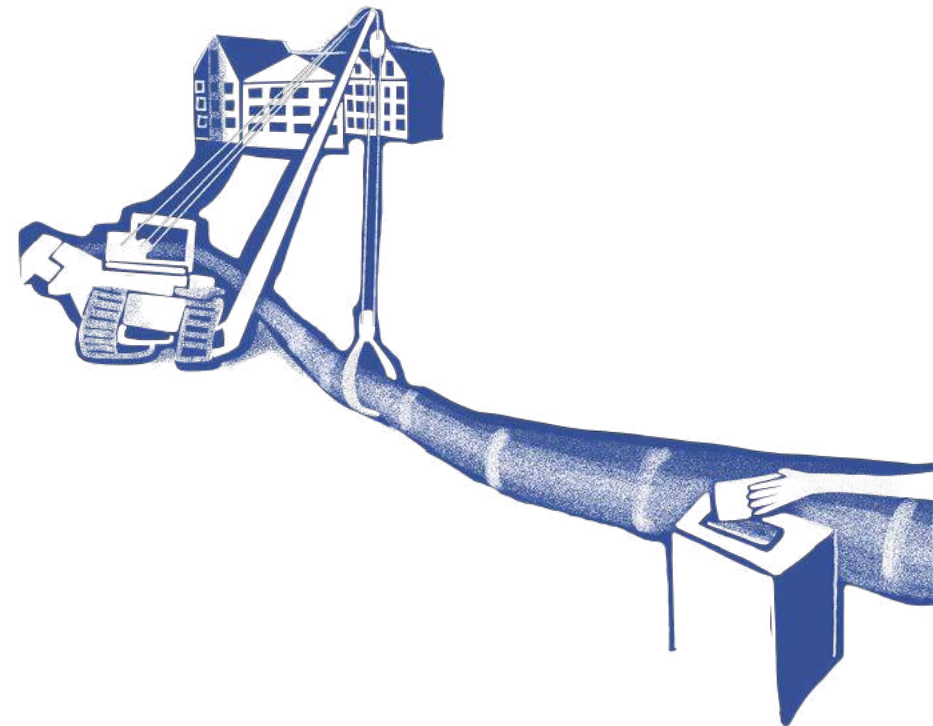
In early 2029, there is a massive campaign by civil society to mobilize people across the country to participate in the upcoming elections and to educate them about how to vote.

In late 2029, national and local elections are held. The elections are widely celebrated and welcomed by the people of Afghanistan.

In early 2030, the majority of Afghans still live below the national poverty line, and disparities between ethnic groups and women and men persist. Incidents of violence still occur, and there are some who are prepared to pick up weapons if the transition to the new government does not go well. Nevertheless, mutual understanding has grown as has the economy, and human development indicators are progressing.

Following the election, a newly elected government is announced. This elected government is recognized by the international community and regional actors. This newly elected government promises to adhere to the agreement that came out of the Kabul Process, to take steps to resolve any remaining grievances and help in healing the wounds of the nation, and to launch a series of economic, social, and political programs to improve the status of Afghanistan and its people.

What will the government look like following the elections? Will these developments in mutual understanding persist? Will foreign investments lead to a better life for people in Afghanistan?



Contributors

The Scenario Team for the future of Afghan Civil Society comprises a diverse group of 30 Afghan Civil Society activists, actors and experts. As a team, they have a range of backgrounds and perspectives (different professions, genders, generations, thematic expertise, ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional backgrounds) that enable them together to grasp the challenges facing Afghan Civil society as a whole.

These scenarios represent a collectively constructed set of four different imagined futures. Almost every Scenario Team member likely disagrees with the plausibility or relevance of particular elements in one or more of the scenarios. As a consequence, this list of contributors represents not a consensus on any implicit recommendation or on the probability of events to come, but simply the people themselves – a group of diverse, committed, and caring actors who worked together in the hope that these scenarios might encourage more strategic and expansive dialogues that can help Afghanistan to move forward.

This initiative was implemented by the Folke Bernadotte Academy in collaboration with Reos Partners and under the umbrella of the EU Afghanistan Peace Support Mechanism (EU APSM).

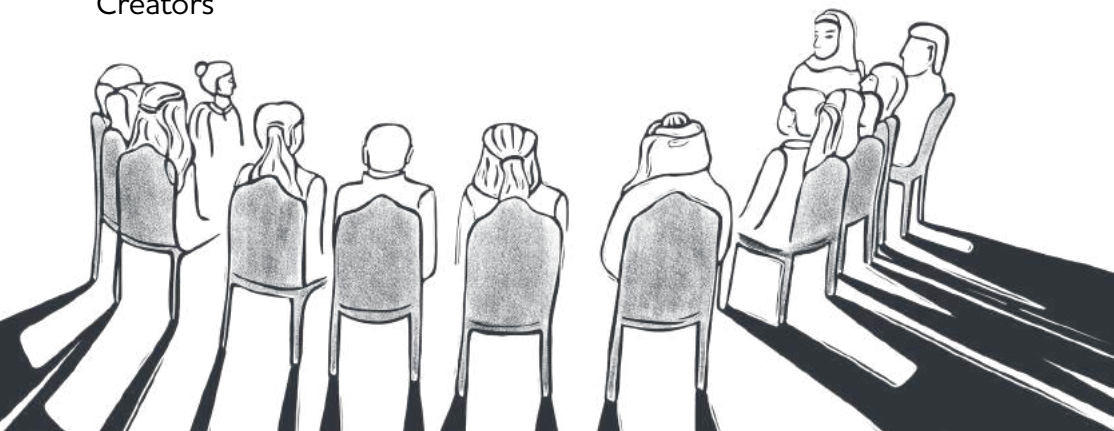
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How to use the scenarios

“Engaging with the future does not take place in the future; it takes place in the present. Having a future focus changes the way we see the present, so much so that we ‘re-perceive’ that present and its strategic requirements. Learning from the future is exciting and challenging because it changes forever the way we engage with the present.”

- Oliver Freeman

These scenarios are not predictions.

They are not proposals.

They are stories that describe possible pathways into the future to help us talk and think more deeply about our current reality.

The success of a scenario or set of scenarios is not evaluated by whether these situations occur in the future, but rather on whether they influence the strategies and choices of today. Sometimes the most significant scenario is, in hindsight, the one we manage to avoid.

In developing scenarios, we create a common language that allows us to talk about the challenges of the present and the future. Based on

this conversation, we can make choices and form strategic alliances that allow us to promote the future reality that we desire. Therefore, for the scenarios to be successful, it is essential for people to reflect on and talk about them. This reflection may be individual or collective, face-to-face or virtual.

The purpose of structured reflection on the scenarios is not to arrive at a consensus about what will happen. It is to engage a diverse group of participants in a discussion about what could happen, using the scenarios to inform and inspire individual and collective strategies, illuminate possible pathways, and clarify next steps.

We suggest you read the scenario narratives fully before engaging with the exercises that follow.

How do I personally reflect on the scenarios and discover my own role in influencing them?

The scenarios for the future of Afghan Civil Society are relevant for all Afghans and for many non-Afghans whose ideas and actions affect the future of the country and its people.

1. Individual Reflection on the Scenarios

We offer here a set of questions and tools for individual reflection on the scenarios. We encourage you to engage with these questions personally, whether for five minutes or for several hours, to deepen your thinking. Perhaps you would like to draw something or write about it in your journal as a way of reflecting. We invite you to share the results of your reflections, if you wish, with your peers, with partners and collaborators, and even with those you disagree with, through virtual or face-to-face interactions.

Questions for individual reflection

EACH SCENARIO

- What feelings does each scenario evoke in me?
- What most stands out for me about each scenario?
- If this scenario happened, what impact would it have on me, on the groups that I am a part of, and on the Afghan people?
- What opportunities can I make the most of and what threats do I face in this scenario?
- What can I do today to prepare for this possible future?

THE SET OF SCENARIOS

- What feelings does the set of scenarios as a whole evoke in me?
- What do I see now that I didn't see before?

THE FUTURE

- What worries me about the future?
- What excites me about the future?

MY ROLE

- What is my sphere of influence?
- What role do I want to play?
- What can I do to influence these futures?
- What actions can I take?

2. Disseminating the Scenarios and Stimulating Wider Conversation

How do I effectively present the scenarios to a group and stimulate conversation around them?

More than a product with a single message, the scenarios are a catalyst to spark reflection, discussion, and action. The Scenarios for the Future of Afghan Civil Society offer an opportunity to engage many diverse voices in drawing attention to the opportunities, risks, and choices we face regarding the future of the country, its people, and its institutions.

You can contribute to this effort by organizing presentations, debates, meetings, and workshops and by spreading the word about the scenarios through the media and social networks.

You can share the scenarios in the following ways:

1. Take advantage of existing conferences and seminars you are participating in to share the scenarios.
2. Engage with others who discuss related topics on social media and share the link to the scenarios.
3. Organize a briefing or discussion meeting for your colleagues, peers, or strategic partners.
4. Write articles or blog posts related to the scenarios and your insights from them.

3. Collective Reflection About the Scenarios

How do I facilitate a collective reflection about the scenarios?

Beyond disseminating the scenarios and generating awareness, you may be looking for an in-depth way for a group to consider the scenarios together. For instance, you may want to host a collective reflection in a community, sector, group of peers, or diverse group of people who do not work together in their day-to-day activities. The intention of your collective reflection may be to deepen the group's understanding of what is emerging and/or to brainstorm possible actions.

If you want to reach a deeper level of dialogue, we recommend scheduling sessions that are at least four hours long, so you have time to both grasp and internalize the content of the scenarios, and come to new insights about their meaning for the group.

You could use the following table to structure this conversation.

	What opportunities does this scenario present us with?	What challenges does this scenario present us with?	What would we do to adapt to this scenario?	What can we do to influence this scenario?
Light through the cracks				
Breeze of change				
Open curtains				
Shutters				

4. Using the Scenarios in Education Settings

How can I use the scenarios to educate students about Afghanistan or the broader issues addressed?

The scenarios can be a stimulating element in academic programs on peacebuilding, governance, human rights, sociology, or other disciplines.

If you are a teacher or professor, you may prepare a lecture on the scenarios, and/or assign the report, website, and social media posts as pre-reading before you hold a class discussion.

Another option is to organize an academic debate or seminar about the four scenarios, inviting participants to comment on the challenges and opportunities they see reflected in the scenarios and the policy or strategy implications.

5. Strategy and Policy Development with the Scenarios Scenarios

How can my organization or others use the scenarios to improve our strategy or policies?

Scenarios are a useful tool for developing or rethinking an organization's or collective's strategy and for guiding the development of new policies. When we work with scenarios, we are looking at the big picture and the long term. The scenarios do not directly provide the answer for what you should do tomorrow. But by reflecting on the implications of each scenario, you can consider what position you want your organization to be in, what forces you need to pay attention to, and where your effort is best spent in the unfolding future of Afghanistan. The scenarios also create a strategic clarity that will help you to plan initiatives and actions. Here are ideas, questions, and tools you can customize to meet your particular strategic planning needs.

Questions for strategy development:

- What opportunities, risks, and challenges do these scenarios present for our organization or collective?
- What forces, indicators, or warning signals in our context do we need to be paying attention to?
- Considering these four scenarios, how do our current strategies hold up?
- In each scenario, what position would we want to be in?
- What is our desired reality?
- What strategies/policies do we want to pursue?
- What do we need to stop doing, what do we need to start doing, and what do we need to continue doing?
- What do we need to think about and what do we need to do now?

This initiative was implemented by the Folke Bernadotte Academy in collaboration with Reos Partners and under the umbrella of the EU Afghanistan Peace Support Mechanism (EU APSM).

This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

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