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REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR AFGHANISTAN (2023-2025)



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR AFGHANISTAN (2023-2025)

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Office in Afghanistan was established in 2002 at the request of the Afghan government under the title of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. It works in coordination with other countries and its organizations in this country in order to achieve goals such as helping the government and people of Afghanistan in establishing peace and political stability, economic development and sustainable development, developing good governance, promoting the rule of law and respecting human rights, especially in relation to women.

UNAMA's activity in Afghanistan after the return of the Islamic Emirate as a result of the fall of the republic like other international organizations in this country was disrupted and challenged. This extraordinary situation in Afghanistan has brought UNAMA's mission into a new phase and its activities, work priorities and goals have been redefined according to the new situation in Afghanistan. Accordingly, in 2022, the UN Security Council extended the mission of this office for another year (2023).

Currently, UNAMA, in the absence of the presence of representatives of most countries in the world in Afghanistan, while fulfilling its previous duties, acts as a communication bridge between the world and Afghanistan. In line with the various goals of the type defined by the current situation and in response to the current conditions in Afghanistan, in coordination with donors and implementing partners (the United Nations team), it unveiled a new document entitled "Strategic Framework for Afghanistan" in English, which is set on 77 pages, for the years 2023 to 2025.

In this note, it is intended to examine the mentioned published document in several axes, the UN's depiction of the situation in Afghanistan, why a new plan for Afghanistan was formulated, the priorities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, the feasibility of implementing the goals of this strategy, and examining the obstacles and challenges facing it.

UNITED NATIONS DEPICTION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Before anything else, the United Nations has tried to present a picture of the current situation in Afghanistan in order to define its goals in this strategy. The first issue addressed in this document is the obstruction of the existing situation in the way of the framework that the United Nations had compiled in coordination and interaction with the then government of Afghanistan to implement the 2030ⁱ agenda progress plan and the sustainable development goals of the SDGsⁱⁱ in 2021. According to the United Nations, decades of conflict and instability have negatively affected most aspects of social, economic and political life in Afghanistan. These negative effects have been more severe on the marginalized than any other sector. However, according to the United Nations, although Afghanistan was only able to achieve 15 of the 169 sustainable development goals, the fall of the previous regime destroyed even the implementation of those 15 goals. According to the United Nations, this transition had a negative



impact not only on the political and security situation, but also on the overall development of the country and had severe consequences on human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

In areas such as governance, human rights, and security, according to the United Nations, although the new government officials have focused their efforts on transitioning from a state of insurgency to administration. But so far there has been no progress on national policies, legal frameworks or inclusive leadership. While the de facto cabinet in Kabul was initially the main vehicle for decision-making, influence shifted to a more conservative leadership based in Kandahar. Actual officials lack gender, ethnic, religious, political and geographic diversity. In addition to these issues, during this period, key mechanisms such as the Human Rights Commission or the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the achievements that women had achieved in leadership and representation in public institutions have disappeared. Restrictions have been imposed on the activities of civil society, non-governmental organizations, human rights defenders, and the media. Civil space and freedom of expression and assembly are limited. Although there has been a significant improvement in the security situation, violent extremist groups are still active.

In the social and economic fields, according to the United Nations, the social and economic situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated compared to the past, especially for women and girls as the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. According to the United Nations, all the achievements of the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals achieved during the past two decades have been quickly lost, and the rights of women and girls have been systematically violated. While the situation of the country has affected all the people of Afghanistan, some groups such as women, refugees, internally displaced persons, ethnic and religious minorities have suffered more. The existing unfavorable situation has led to an increase in immigration, especially the escape of government employees.

According to United Nations estimates, the economy, which was previously affected by several years of conflict and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, has declined sharply after the Taliban took over under the influence of the suspension of inhumane international aid and the isolation of the international financial system. According to the United Nations, although the actual authorities have been able to stabilize the downward trend of the economy through tax collection, export improvement and regional trade growth with the help of reducing global fuel and food prices. As a result, inflation has decreased from 18.3 to 3.5, but due to reasons such as the freezing of the country's foreign exchange reserves and the high limitation of the financial system, the reduction of international aid, the exclusion of women from the environment and the workforce, and the occurrence of drought and other natural disasters, the outlook is still favorable. It does not seem.

WHY DEVELOP A NEW PROGRAM FOR AFGHANISTAN

From the point of view of the United Nations, the new developments and disruptions in the previously foreseen plans, prompted this organization to respond to the significant changes in the country and to urgently deal with the existing problems in 2022, a temporary program under the title "Transitional Engagement Framework" to guide Created collective work. So that



it can enable partners to continue providing the basic humanitarian needs of the Afghan people in addition to the current humanitarian response. While the immediate handling of vital and basic needs is a basic priority, as the United Nations itself admits, only addressing the immediate and basic needs cannot be sufficient in the long run to deal with the human suffering on a large and increasing scale of the Afghan people. On the other hand, the lack and absence of the national development plan, which the United Nations strongly expresses concern about, has caused this organization, in consultation with the coordination group of its country team, to plan a multi-year strategic framework in order to reorient the country towards the agenda. 2030 and sustainable development goals.

In addition to the fact that the United Nations considers helping the people of Afghanistan in the current difficult and dangerous situation to be one of its main missions. Through planning such a regular framework, it encourages the new Afghan government to move towards the implementation of the 2030 agenda and sustainable development goals. However, the United Nations evaluates the restrictive actions of the new actual rulers of Afghanistan in the context of achieving their goals, especially in terms of imposing restrictions on destructive women. However, she hopes that the new government of Afghanistan will direct its future actions in such a way that it will help and support the realization of development goals in Afghanistan. The United Nations has the main responsibility to provide the needs of all Afghan people without discrimination and their rights according to international standards, the authorities of the existing government. Without a significant change in their policies and practices, especially in relation to the rights of women and doctors, the people of Afghanistan will continue to face problems. In addition to these humanitarian interventions to provide basic human needs, it will only be effective when the actual authorities make sufficient investment in the equitable provision of essential services and economic empowerment environments, including the removal of restrictions on access to essential services for women and girls, and prevent disruptions in aid and development programs.

Another reason that can be given for the formulation of a multi-year program by the United Nations is that this organization seeks support and allocates the necessary funds to help Afghanistan in a situation where there is no direct presence for each country separately. It is necessary to design a written and considered program. That is why this program or framework has been developed in full coordination with donor countries. In fact, the United Nations has formulated such a framework to attract the aid and support of countries and international organizations according to the current conditions of Afghanistan.

Another reason for developing such a plan is that the United Nations for all its institutions operating in Afghanistan. Through this program, it helps to draw their respective country planning tools from this framework to ensure maximum coherence and coordination across the UN system to deliver collective results to the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, this framework will act as an integrated strategic framework and in this way the multiple missions of the United Nations in Afghanistan will be unified and coherent.



UNITED NATIONS PRIORITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

According to the estimates and analyzes of the United Nations in cooperationⁱⁱⁱ with the coordination group, the current situation in Afghanistan has created three major priorities: "sustainable basic services, livelihood economic opportunities and social cohesion, gender equality, human rights and the rule of law". The main criterion considered for these priorities is the immediate and future needs of the Afghan people. Although the resources will be mobilized in a balanced way in all three sectors, but the first priority is more important immediately. Under this priority, the basic needs of the people are addressed. According to the United Nations, these priorities have been divided by the members of the coordination group when other countries that are not members of the coordination group also emphasize these issues. For example, in the fourth meeting of the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, the Samarkand Declaration expressed the commitment to the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful, united, independent country free from the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking. In that meeting, the importance of creating an inclusive and extensive government system that reflects the interests of all sections of the Afghan society was emphasized.

Taken together, from the point of view of the United Nations, the three major priorities segmented in the strategic framework of that organization, which reflects the wishes of all parties, including the coordination group and other countries, can have three positive results. The realization of the first priority can ensure that by the end of 2025, the majority of Afghans, especially those who are most marginalized, can have equitable access to basic services or at least quality standards. By fulfilling the second priority, by the end of 2025, most Afghans will benefit from an inclusive economy with greater equality of economic opportunities, jobs and sustainable livelihoods, increased food production, and improved natural resource management. And the third priority helps that by the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan can participate in a socially cohesive, gender equal and inclusive society where the rule of law and human rights are gradually supported and more people can participate in governance and decision making.

FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTATION, OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FACING THIS FRAMEWORK

The United Nations has considered the feasibility and implementation of its strategic framework conditional on several basic conditions. The first issue that has been emphasized a lot and can almost be considered the most important condition for the implementation of the framework is the cooperation of the existing ruling body of Afghanistan. According to the United Nations, international humanitarian interventions and meeting basic needs will be effective only when the actual authorities make sufficient investments in the equitable provision of essential services and enabling economic environments, including the removal of restrictions on access to essential services for women and girls. In addition, the government should stop interfering in the working affairs of the United Nations and remove the existing restrictions against the physical movement and activity of women, especially in this organization. Another issue that can hinder the full implementation of this framework and slow down its implementation is the isolation and low level of international interactions of the existing Afghan government. It can be seen that apart from UNAMA and a few other donors, international



political interactions with de facto authorities have been limited. As of August 2021, no progress has been made on the policy changes necessary to resume regular development cooperation.

As a result, protecting the space for impartial and independent humanitarian actions and basic assistance to human needs has become very challenging, and this situation has significantly reduced the ability of the international donor community to provide basic assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Another issue is fluidity and the constantly evolving situation, lack of political stability and little public involvement in the government. According to the United Nations, the exclusive and non-representative government with continuous restrictions on civil society, increasing violence and insecurity due to internal tension, war between the Taliban and opposition groups, increasing activities of violent extremist groups, increasing the crime rate due to poverty, etc., has worsened the political situation and confronts the government with increasing political challenges and instability. Naturally, such a situation removes the necessary opportunity for correct and timely implementation of UN programs.

Another more important issue that has a negative effect on the implementation of the framework programs is the level of donor support in front of their previously announced commitments. This effect manifests itself in two ways. First, because the trends in Afghanistan and the performance of the existing government (especially in the face of increasing restrictions against women) discourage donors from providing further support. And second, global trends and developments (such as the war in Ukraine) may draw the attention of supporters to other issues and lead to a decrease in financial support from the UN donor community for Afghanistan. Also, some countries may ignore the role of the United Nations and consume their aid through their own independent channels according to their specific political goals.

Another important thing that slows down the process of providing aid and implementing programs is Afghanistan's isolation from the global financial system. This factor also has a negative effect on the aid delivery process in two ways. First, because the restrictions against Afghanistan's banking system make the circulation of funds and cash difficult. And secondly, such a restriction accelerates economic deterioration, increases unemployment, poverty, food insecurity and humanitarian needs and doubles the existing problems.

As secondary factors, things like geographic barriers, climate changes, increase and intensity of natural disasters and significant increase in humanitarian needs, including those caused by large displacements of people inside and outside the country, which lead to an increase in humanitarian needs, can cause disruptions in the planned implementation of the framework programs.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, several evaluations can be made from the strategic framework of the United Nations:

First: the new initiative of the United Nations to design and develop a multi-year framework to support Afghanistan, which currently needs more aid, is considered timely and appropriate. The fact that its general purpose is to provide economic support to the people of Afghanistan, while



according to statistics and reports, a large part of the people of Afghanistan are in dire need of help and support, is considered a suitable, timely and effective measure.

Second: This initiative shows that Afghanistan has not been forgotten by the international authorities and the international community under the leadership of the United Nations continues to pay special attention to Afghanistan despite other global issues.

Third: Highlighting the problems and needs of the Afghan people and prioritizing them further reveals the current situation and the future prospects of Afghanistan.

Fourth: In the light of this strategy, countries and donor organizations are encouraged to provide more aid to Afghanistan. And finally, the current government of Afghanistan has a clear understanding of the activities of the United Nations and other organizations in Afghanistan, and it is forced to cooperate and cooperate more with the United Nations in the direction of helping people in need.

Despite the mentioned optimistic cases, the strategic framework of the United Nations can be evaluated as a commanding framework and almost incompatible with the social and cultural environment of Afghanistan. The whole of this framework is covered by requirements that sometimes cannot be adapted in the religious and cultural society of Afghanistan. In this context, the most important debate is the framework's emphasis on women's empowerment. Although it cannot be denied that women are empowered, this empowerment must be within the framework of Islamic Sharia, which is not considered at all in the framework under discussion. Beyond this, one of the very serious emphasis of this framework is on "gender equality and equal rights of women and men", which is also contradictory to Islamic Sharia in some places.

Another theme that stands out throughout the framework is to show the very dire situation in Afghanistan. However, in this framework, the two positive cases of "providing relative security and curbing inflation and increasing exports" have been addressed marginally. But this brief mention ignoring the other positive things that have come about as a result of the return of the Islamic Emirate is a persecution that has taken place in this context.

SUGGESTION

According to the United Nations strategic framework, two things are suggested:

- 1- For the Islamic Emirate, it is suggested that in order to achieve the economic goals of the mentioned framework, which a good opportunity for Afghanistan is provide the necessary grounds and at the same time, by increasing more cooperation with the United Nations, facilitate the space for positive interaction with other organizations.
- 2- It is suggested for the United Nations to adjust and modify the religious and cultural sensitivities in this plan and always include Afghanistan's religious and cultural contexts in every plan and framework.

NOTES AND SOURCES

ⁱ. The United Nations announced the seventeen sustainable development goals that countries must achieve from 2015 to 2030 as the 2030 agenda .According to this program, all the member countries of the United Nations should try to achieve the following seventeen goals by 2030 with the cooperation and interaction of the sustainable development goals and indicators at the national, regional and international



levels, Ending poverty, ending hunger, healthy life and improving well-being, quality education, gender equality, availability of clean water and sewage, access to clean and affordable energy, sustainable and efficient economic growth,

The promotion of resilient and inclusive industrial infrastructures, the reduction of inequality in cities and sustainable and resilient communities, sustainable production and consumption patterns, measures to combat climate change, sustainable use of oceans and seas, ecosystem improvement and prevention of biodiversity loss, sustainable and peaceful society and Revival of global partnership for sustainable development.

ii. SDGs stands for Sustainable Development Goals. These goals include 169 sub-goals of the 2030 agenda that countries must achieve.

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The Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research organization established in July 2009 in Kabul. CSRS is committed to promoting policy-oriented research through conducting authentic and unbiased research concerning Afghanistan and the region.

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