

# Kabul Says No to Guterres' Offer of Roadmap for UN 'Normalization'

by Marcia Merry Baker and Karel Vereycken

Dec. 1—“The United States’ firm position is that there will be no significant steps toward normalization unless and until the fundamental rights of all Afghans are upheld,” a State Department spokesperson told Voice of America Nov. 14, the week when a special assessment of Afghanistan commissioned by the United Nations was provided to UN Secretary General António Guterres, who then provided the UN Security Council what he called a “roadmap” for what the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (I.E.A.) should do for “normalization” in the coming years. All the while, U.S., European Union, and UN sanctions remain on the nation, and none of Afghanistan’s \$9 billion in central bank national assets seized by the U.S. and European cohorts, has been returned.

## A Positive UN Assessment, But Conditionalties for Help

The 21-page special UN [assessment](#) regards Afghanistan as a kind of permanent protectorate, not a sovereign nation. It calls for “cautious re-engagement,” and “recommends an expansion of international assistance, allowing for more regular development aid, infrastructure projects, and technical dialogue and cooperation,” which sounds good, and could be good. But then, it presents a list of conditionalities for distant “normalization.” The assessment was conducted pursuant to UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2679, adopted March 16, 2023 and received before the deadline of Nov. 17. Guterres commissioned senior Turkish diplomat Feridun Sinirlioğlu to provide the “independent” evaluation.

Guterres then presented in mid-November his own roadmap to the UNSC, which is to take up the matter in the coming weeks. Guterres spoke of how there



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*Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, inaugurates oil extraction from 8 new wells in the Amu oil field, Nov. 28, 2023.*

should be more international aid and dialogue with the I.E.A. But otherwise, he gave orders on what the Kabul government must do within Afghanistan. He called for “a predictable rule of law-based governance....” and specified actions the United Nations expects within the nation. Guterres calls for a UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan to be appointed. He wagged his finger at the I.E.A. over false expectations of diplomatic recognition, saying:

[Recognition of Afghanistan] comes with acceptance of their obligations and commitments in international conventions, and good faith measures to comply with these through policy, legislation and in practice.

## Afghanistan Responds with Sovereignty

In response, the Kabul government has provided a written statement to the United Nations. Neither it, nor the text of the Sinirlioğlu assessment has been publicized. But from various media reports, the I.E.A. has made clear its appreciation for some

useful aid and support towards respect for sovereignty, but as for the UN directives and conditionalities, Kabul is saying, ‘thanks, but no thanks.’ I.E.A. spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid, according to *TOLOnews* Nov. 17, said,

There are various countries with various types of government in the world. Afghanistan also has a government of its own and no one should put these illegitimate conditions on the Afghans. If they do so, we can still live without being recognized by them.

### New Afghan Ambassador to Beijing

It is notable that on Dec. 1 came media reports that the Chinese Foreign Ministry has accepted the credentials of Asadullah Bilal Karimi, from Afghanistan, to be the new Ambassador to China, which will be a first in the Taliban government’s foreign relations. This positive move follows the participation of a Kabul delegation in October at the third Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, and plans by Afghanistan to actively join the Belt and Road Initiative.

Despite this activity, and the Taliban government’s *de facto* control over other diplomatic missions with many world powers, such as Russia, and bilateral relations with several governments, Afghanistan has not been allowed to return to the UN. A holdover from the pre-August 2021 government, Naseer Ahmad Faiq, personally arrogates the right to speak at the UN as Chargé d’Affaires of the Permanent Mission for Afghanistan, despite the fact that he consistently opposes the I.E.A. government. Meantime, several Kabul government leaders, including Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, face travel restrictions due to sanctions from the U.S., EU, and the UN.

### The U.S. Reneges, Continues Sanctions

When negotiating a safe military withdrawal from Afghanistan (The Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan—the [Doha Agreement](#) of Feb. 29, 2020), the United States pledged to delist the Taliban by August 2020 from its sanctions and deploy a diplomatic effort to remove the Taliban from the UN



Courtesy Photo

*Assadullah Bilal Karimi presents his credentials as Ambassador to Beijing to Hong Lei, Director-General of the Protocol Department at China's Foreign Ministry, Beijing, Dec. 1, 2023.*

sanctions regime, thus opening the way for recognition of Afghanistan. It never happened, but now the time has come to do so.

In a disgusting [piece](#) titled “Afghanistan Seeks To Control Its Own Water Destiny,” published May 6 in *The Diplomat*, Patrick Yeager, an analyst at the U.S. Defense Department, rejoiced that, besides China, Türkiye and some others,

[Only] a very small number of international partners are willing to engage with the Taliban, including cooperation on water infrastructure projects.... Sanctions on Abdul Latif Mansoor (Afghan Minister of Energy and Water, a former military commander and former negotiator in Qatar) and other Taliban senior leaders complicate efforts to do business with the regime.

Yes, indeed, Mansoor remains under sanctions by the U.S., the EU and the UN. Even the VOA recognizes:

Apart from political sanctions, economic sanctions imposed on Taliban entities by the United States, the European Union and other nations have severely impacted the Afghan economy, exacerbating extreme poverty in the landlocked country.