



**Centre for  
Information  
Resilience**

**Afghan Witness**

**Afghanistan's mining sector under the Taliban**

**May 2024**

## Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Methodology.....	4
4. Overview of the Mining Sector in Afghanistan.....	5
5. Taliban Economic Linkages in the Mining Sector.....	8
6. Case studies in Afghanistan’s mining sector under the Taliban.....	10
7. Conclusion.....	15
8. Appendices.....	16

## 1. Executive Summary

An analysis of the mining sector in Afghanistan from August 2021-February 2024 found:

- The Taliban issued at least 205 mining contracts to 156 companies during this period.
- The actual number of contracts is likely higher than this figure. AW's analysis examined contracts publicly-disclosed by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MoMP).
- Of the companies who currently hold contracts with the Taliban, only 14 previously held publicly-disclosed contracts under the Republican government. This suggests that a new set of companies dominates the mining sector in Afghanistan.
- Almost one-third of the contracts were issued to mine nephrite, a form of jade used in carvings and jewellery.

An analysis of the beneficial owners of mining companies that hold contracts with the Taliban found:

- The Taliban hold foreign investment deals with Iranian, Turkish, British, Qatari, and Chinese companies.
- Foreign investments are concentrated in large-scale mining contracts.
- Of the 18 large-scale mining contracts disclosed by the Taliban, at least five involved partnerships between Afghan and foreign companies.

An analysis of the Taliban's role in the mining sector shows that the de facto authorities in Afghanistan are taking on an increasingly active role within the mining sector.

- In 2023 and 2024, the Taliban entered into partnerships with nine companies.
- Instead of collecting royalties from these mines, the Taliban (through the MoMP) became partial owners of these contracts.

## 2. Introduction

This report examines mining in Afghanistan since August 2021. It aims to provide an overview of the mining sector under the Taliban and create a foundation for future investigations into the sector.

This report builds on the following context. Afghanistan sits atop mineral deposits worth nearly \$1 trillion USD, according to the [US military and US Geological Survey](#). From 2004-2021, [the US spent approximately \\$962.6 million USD](#) on mineral surveys, exploration, regulatory reforms, and capacity development in Afghanistan. A 2023 report by [the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction](#) found that US programs failed to meet their goals, and Afghanistan did not see widespread economic benefit from its mineral resources.

Under [Afghanistan's Mineral Law 2010, Article 14](#), high-ranking state officials, including members of Parliament, were forbidden from holding mining contracts. Despite this, in 2015, more than 50 members of the Wolesi Jirga, Afghanistan's lower house of Parliament, owned mines or were major partners in mining projects<sup>1</sup>. A 2017 [USIP report](#) described the exploitation of the sector as "large-scale looting," and argued that mining-enabled corruption funded the Taliban and other Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs), and fueled local conflicts.

Since the beginning of the Taliban administration, the group has sought to exploit Afghanistan's mineral wealth. An article in [Foreign Policy](#) described minerals as the Taliban's "cash cow." In September 2023, [the Taliban](#) announced that they had signed more than \$6.5 billion USD in new mining deals. Despite these major investments, there has been little public systematic investigation of the mining sector under Taliban control.

## 3. Methodology

This investigation is based on an analysis of publicly available primary sources on mining in Afghanistan. AW created a database of 200+ publicly-disclosed mining contracts under the Taliban. To create the database, AW collected and analysed data from the following sources:

- Ministry of Mines and Petroleum [Transparency Portal](#)
- Ministry of Mines and Petroleum website [Transparency sections](#)
- Ministry of Mines and Petroleum [news](#)
- Ministry of Mines and Petroleum [account on X](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Integrity Watch, The Plunderers of Hope. On file with AW.

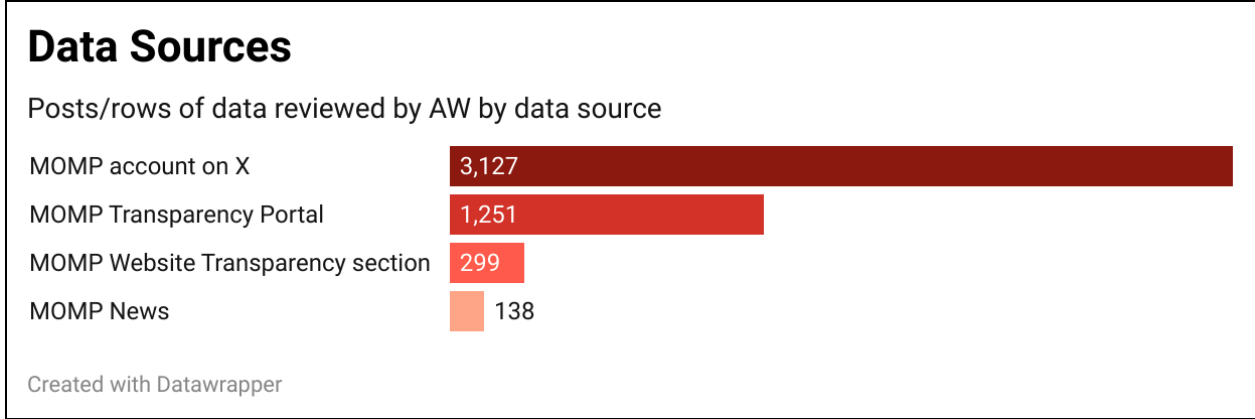


Figure 1: Sources of data used in investigation

After collection, AW standardised the data into a single ontology. Each row includes the date of issue, name of the company, mineral, province, and provenance of the data. Where available, it also includes the district, area, royalties, value of the contract, and the original contract document. The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MoMP) discloses differing levels of detail across its website, and thus some rows include more information than others. The database includes contracts issued between August 2021 and February 2024.

During the course of this investigation, AW also compiled a database of the beneficial ownership of 90+ mining companies that currently hold contracts with the Taliban. Each row includes the name of the company, their owners, titles, and shareholding percentages. AW derived beneficial ownership data from the MoMP’s contracts. AW notes, however, that the MoMP does not disclose beneficial ownership data for all companies or mining deals. AW also compiled the business licences for 30 companies that currently hold mining contracts with the Taliban. The MoMP website does not include business licences for all companies with mining contracts. Access to these databases can be made available on request to media at [afghanwitness dot org](http://afghanwitness.org).

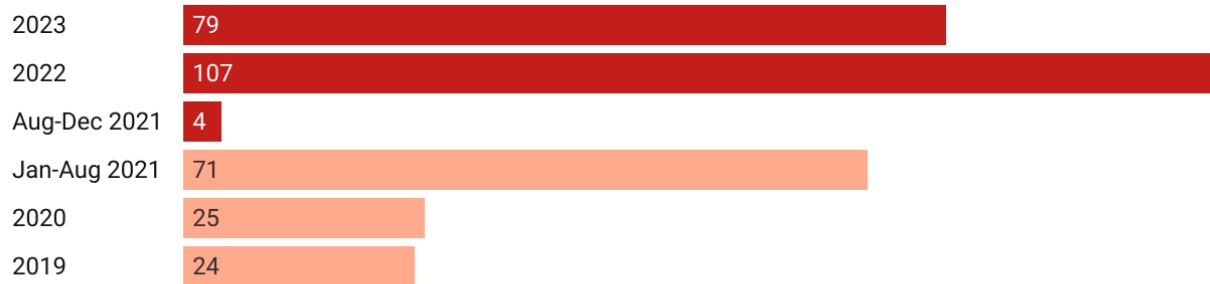
AW supplemented publicly-available official sources with social media research, and secondary sources about the mining sector in Afghanistan. Secondary sources included reports by the United States Institute of Peace, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and reporting by outlets such as Foreign Policy and the New York Times.

#### 4. Overview of the Mining Sector in Afghanistan

According to the MoMP Transparency Portal, which shows mining contracts dating back to 2005, there were 114 active contracts in August 2021. From August 2021 to February 2024, the Taliban issued at least 205 mining contracts to 156 companies – at a rate of more than one contract per week. The actual number of contracts is likely higher than the number that has been publicly disclosed, according to [publicly available reporting](#).

## Mining Licences Issued by Year

Number of publicly-disclosed mining licences issued by year, 2019-2023



Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Number of publicly-disclosed mining licences issued by year, 2019-2023

A set of companies that have previously not been involved in Afghanistan’s mining sector appear to dominate the mining sector in Afghanistan. Of the companies who currently hold publicly-disclosed contracts with the Taliban, only 14 (fewer than 10%) previously held publicly-disclosed mining contracts under the Republican government. However, several companies that hold mining licences under the Taliban were active in other sectors prior to August 2021, such as Sahil Middle East Mining and Logistics Company (Sahil Middle East Logistics was active in the logistics sector during the Republic but did not hold mining licences disclosed in the Transparency Portal until after August 2021). The vast majority of licences issued under the Taliban were for small-scale mining, with only 18 permits granted for large-scale mining (the MoMP designates mining contracts as large vs. small-scale).

In terms of geographical distribution, the province of Nangarhar has the greatest number of publicly-disclosed mining contracts issued (as shown on the map below). Prior to the start of the Taliban administration, Nangarhar had the second greatest number of publicly-disclosed active mining contracts (135 as of August 2021). Nangarhar is also known to have [deposits](#) of chromite, talc, and nephrite.

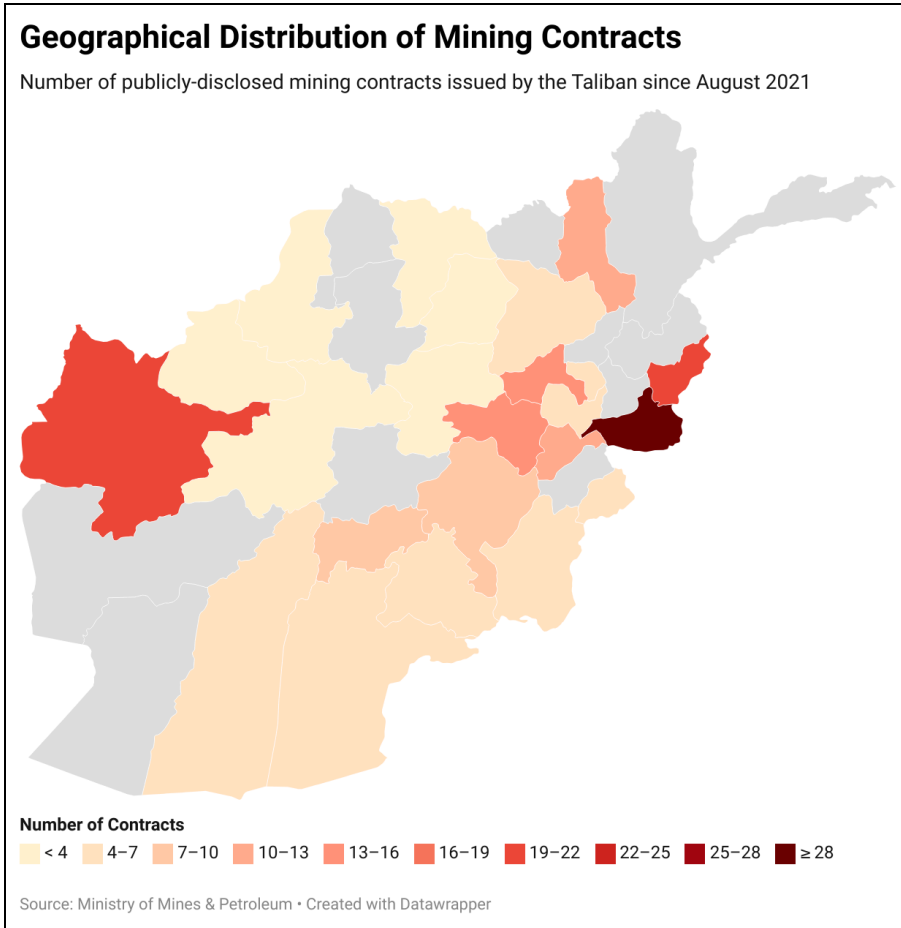


Figure 3: Geographical distribution of mining contracts issued by the Taliban since August 2021

In terms of minerals being mined, the Taliban have issued the greatest number of publicly-disclosed contracts to mine nephrite, a form of jade used in carvings and jewellery. This is followed by marble, chromite, and gypsum (as seen below).

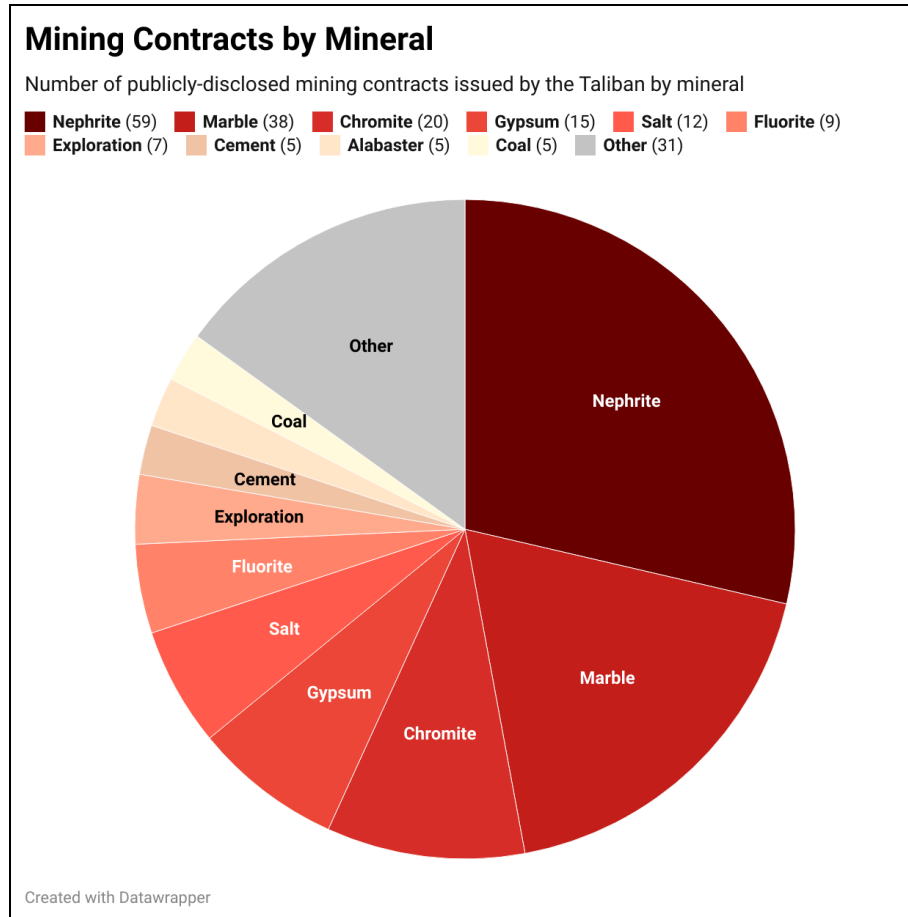


Figure 4: Mineral contracts issued by the Taliban, since August 2021, by mineral

## 5. Taliban Economic Linkages in the Mining Sector

Fifteen companies hold three or more mining contracts awarded by the Taliban. According to the MoMP Transparency Portal, none of these companies previously held mining licences during the Republican government (some of these companies, such as Sahil Middle East Mining and Logistics Company, were active in other industries prior to August 2021). In a 2014 [analysis of five mining contracts](#) issued under the Republican government, USIP found that the tendering process favoured bidders with no prior mining experience.” The data analysed by AW suggests that the Taliban may be repeating this pattern.

The Taliban have attracted foreign investment from Chinese, Iranian, Turkish, Qatari, and British companies. This foreign investment is concentrated in large-scale mining deals. Of the 18 publicly-disclosed large-scale mining deals, five had at least one foreign company listed as a shareholder.

In 2023, the Taliban [signed a deal](#) with Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co., a Chinese state-owned enterprise, to extract oil from the Amu-Darya oil fields. AW identified four other companies that may be registered in China with mining contracts in Afghanistan: Chong Fushengli



Company, Zhang Bao Tai Ha Mining and Processing Company, Chengdu Zhong Mining and Processing Company, and China-Afghanistan Dayunlong Zeren Mining and Processing Company.

In October 2023, the Taliban signed a large-scale mining contract for iron ore in Herat with Bakhtar Steel Company, Ehya Sepahan, and Parsian Iranian companies. The [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG) and [RAND](#) reported that a company called Ehya Sepahan was established with assistance from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). RAND and ICG report that Ehya Sepahan's director was Mostafa Safavi, the brother of Rahim Safavi (a former IRGC commander). It is highly likely that the Ehya Sepahan mentioned in these reports is the same Ehya Sepahan that holds a mining contract in Afghanistan.

The Taliban are also taking on an increasingly active role in the mining sector. AW found that the MoMP is a shareholder in at least 10 mining projects. Five of these were [first announced on the basis of royalties](#), before they were tendered as direct partnerships with the MoMP. Through a review of publicly-available contracts, AW identified an additional five projects in which the MoMP is a shareholder (as opposed to collecting royalties from the mining project). In one instance, the MoMP is a shareholder alongside a foreign company, Chengdu Zhong Mining and Processing Company.



**Centre for  
Information  
Resilience**