

# ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE Security Council

ISSUE The Situation in Afghanistan

SUBMITTED BY Rita Bozlék, President of the Security Council

APPROVED BY Szófia Tóth, President of the General Assembly

## Introduction

The conflict in Afghanistan has spanned over four decades and has had a profound impact on both the nation and the global community at large. From the Soviet invasion in the 1980s to the post-9/11 era, Afghanistan has been at the center of complex geopolitical tensions, insurgencies, and shifting alliances involving a wide range of actors such as the Afghan government, the Taliban, regional players, and international forces. Given the ongoing struggle for lasting stability in the country, it is essential to examine the conflict's roots, influential entities, and potential solutions.

This exploration aims to unravel the historical context of the conflict and provide insights into the challenges and possibilities of finding a sustainable resolution.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Al-Qaeda** - Al-Qaeda is a broad-based militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s and became one of the world's most notorious terrorist organizations after carrying out the attacks of September 11, 2001.

**Terrorism** - Terrorism is the use of violence or threats to instill fear for political, ideological, or religious purposes. Perpetrators aim to coerce governments or societies into conforming to their demands. Acts often target civilians to maximize psychological impact and can include bombings, hijackings, and assassinations.

**Counter-terrorism** - Counter-terrorism refers to the efforts and strategies employed by governments and organizations to prevent, respond to, and mitigate acts of terrorism.

**Guerrilla warfare** - Guerrilla warfare is a form of unconventional warfare characterized by small, mobile groups using tactics such as ambushes, hit-and-run attacks, and sabotage to combat larger, more conventional forces. Guerrilla fighters often operate in terrain that

provides them with strategic advantages, relying on their knowledge of the local environment. This type of warfare is typically associated with irregular military forces or insurgent groups that aim to challenge or overthrow established governments or occupying forces. Guerrilla warfare can be protracted, as the objective is often to wear down the stronger opponent over time.

**Pashtun** - The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and a significant minority in Pakistan. They are known for their unique culture, language (Pashto), and tribal affiliations. Pashtuns are predominantly Sunni Muslims, though there are some Shia Pashtuns as well.

**Sunni Islam** - Sunni Islam is one of the two major branches of Islam, the other being Shia Islam. Sunni Muslims believe in following the Sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad and adhere to the teachings of the four major Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

## General Overview

From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun and Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movement, held control over much of Afghanistan. However, in October 2001, the Taliban regime was removed by U.S. and allied forces after they refused to hand over terrorist leader Osama bin Laden in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks carried out by al-Qaeda. After the U.S.-led invasion, the Taliban leadership relocated to the southern region of Afghanistan and into Pakistan. From there, they waged an insurgency against the government in Kabul, Afghan national security forces, and international coalition troops.

When the U.S.-led alliance formally ended its mission in 2014, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) was put in charge of Afghanistan's protection; however, the forces faced substantial challenges in controlling territory and protecting civilians. The Taliban continued to strike rural districts and carry out suicide attacks in major cities, with the ANDSF suffering serious losses. The war stayed in a deadlock for nearly six years, despite a small U.S. troop increase in 2017, continuing warfare, and a shift in U.S. military strategy to target Taliban revenue sources, which consisted of air strikes against drug labs and opium production sites. The Taliban briefly seized the capital of Farah Province in May 2018, and, in August 2018, it seized the capital of Ghazni Province, controlling the city for nearly a week before U.S. and Afghan troops regained control.

In February 2020, an agreement was signed between the U.S. government and the Taliban after more than a year of negotiations, known as the Doha Agreement. The agreement set a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, with the United States pledging to draw down troops to approximately 8,500 within 135 days and complete a full withdrawal within fourteen months. In exchange, the Taliban promised to prevent terrorist groups from using territory under their control and engage in negotiations with the Afghan government. Unfortunately, no official ceasefire was implemented, and despite a brief reduction in violence, the Taliban resumed attacks on Afghan security forces and civilians. Even though direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban began months after the agreed-upon start of March 2020, the negotiations faced several delays and made little progress. Throughout 2020 and 2021, violence across Afghanistan persisted, with the United States increasing air strikes and raids targeting the Taliban and the Taliban attacking the Afghan government and ANDSF targets while making significant territorial gains.

Civilian casualties across Afghanistan have stayed high over the past years. The United Nations recorded a then-record high of 10,993 civilian casualties in 2018. Although 2019 saw a slight decrease, civilian deaths and injuries overreached ten thousand for the sixth year in a row, bringing the total UN-documented civilian casualties from 2009 to 2020 to more than one hundred thousand. Despite another slight descent that year, the first half of 2021 saw a record-high number of civilian casualties as the Taliban ramped up their military offensive amid the leaving of the international corps. In addition to the Taliban's offensive, Afghanistan encounters a danger from the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISIS-K), which has also extended its presence to several eastern provinces, expanded its activity in Kabul, and targeted civilians with suicide attacks.

Back in April 2021, President Joe Biden stated that American military forces would depart from Afghanistan by September of the same year. Despite ongoing peace negotiations with the Afghan government, the Taliban persisted in capturing and fighting over territory throughout the country. This resulted in increased attacks on ANDSF bases and outposts and a swift takeover of additional land. As a result, the U.S. military expedited the withdrawal of its troops in May 2021. By the conclusion of July 2021, the majority of the withdrawal had been completed, with merely 650 military personnel remaining to safeguard the U.S. embassy based in Kabul.

During the summer of 2021, the Taliban launched a series of attacks on government-controlled urban areas and took over several border crossings. In early August, the Taliban started attacking multiple urban areas, including Kandahar in the south and Herat in the west. On 6 August 2021, the Taliban captured the capital of southern Nimruz Province, which was the first

provincial capital to fall. This led to the fall of other provincial capitals in rapid succession, including Mazar-i-Sharif in the north and Jalalabad in the east. As a result, Kabul was the only major urban area under government control. On 15 August 2021, over two weeks before the official U.S. withdrawal deadline, Taliban fighters entered the capital. Following this, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country and the Afghan government collapsed. Later that same day, the Taliban announced their takeover of Kabul, including the presidential palace, and proceeded to establish checkpoints to maintain security.

The pace of the Taliban's territorial advancements and the collapse of both the ANDSF and Afghan government shocked U.S. officials and allies—as well as, reportedly, the Taliban itself—despite earlier intelligence estimations of the concern on the ground. In light of the Taliban's recent takeover on 15 August 2021, the United States government has authorized the deployment of an additional five thousand troops to aid in the safe evacuation of U.S. and allied personnel, as well as numerous Afghans who supported and collaborated with the United States and are now seeking refuge.

On 26 August 2021, two suicide bombers killed at least 169 Afghans and thirteen U.S. troops outside the Kabul airport. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attacks. That was the deadliest day for U.S. armies in Afghanistan since 2011.

On 31 August 2021, the Pentagon reported the completion of the U.S. troop retreat.

## Major Parties Involved

**United States:** The US involvement in Afghanistan had distinct phases. Initially, the goal was to prevent Afghanistan from being a breeding ground for terrorism by dismantling the Taliban and eliminating their haven for terrorist groups after the 9/11 attacks. The US aimed to establish a stable, democratic government in Afghanistan by training the Afghan National Security Forces. In 2020, the Doha Agreement signaled a shift toward diplomatic solutions. However, the subsequent rapid deterioration and the Taliban's resurgence revealed the complexities of translating intentions into reality. The tragic events, such as the suicide bombings outside Kabul airport, emphasized the challenges faced by the US government in achieving its objectives.

**The Taliban Governance:** The Taliban perceives themselves as guardians of Afghan sovereignty and upholders of rigid Islamic principles. They reject the Afghan government, perceiving it as a marionette regime manipulated by external forces.

Nevertheless, they have participated in peace negotiations, indicating a recognition of the necessity for a diplomatic resolution. Their ultimate aspiration is to institute an Islamic Emirate founded on their understanding of Islamic doctrine. It is important to note that the Taliban, in recent times, have called on the international community to recognize the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Despite their appeals, no nation has officially recognized the said entity to date.

**Al Qaeda:** The inception of Al-Qaeda coincided with the Afghan-Soviet War, and its course became inextricably linked with Afghanistan's narrative. The ascent of the Taliban regime presented a vital haven for Al-Qaeda, culminating in the tragic events of 9/11. Although the U.S.-led intervention disrupted Al-Qaeda's main control in Afghanistan, the group exhibited tenacity and flexibility by leveraging local tensions and unregulated zones to recover. Currently, Al-Qaeda's decentralized network persists, representing a worldwide peril.

**NATO:** Following the 9/11 attacks, NATO invoked its collective defense clause for the first time and pledged to provide support to the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan. NATO's contributions were substantial, including extensive training and equipment provisions for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and counterinsurgency operations to combat the Taliban insurgency. Over time, troop levels were gradually reduced, and NATO transitioned to a more supportive role with the introduction of the Resolute Support Mission in 2015.

**Iran:** Iran's involvement in the Afghan conflict is complex and stems from its historical ties, sectarian dynamics, and geopolitical considerations. Iran shares a lengthy border with Afghanistan, and the two nations have a history of cultural, economic, and religious ties. Iran seeks to establish influence in Afghanistan partly to counter American presence and influence in the region. Sectarian dynamics have also played a significant role in Iran's engagement in Afghanistan. Iran has navigated the Afghan conflict by engaging with various actors, including the Taliban, and has contributed to stability by supporting reconstruction and development projects and participating in regional initiatives aimed at fostering economic cooperation and addressing common security concerns.

## Timeline of Events

**15 October 1999** - Resolution 1267 is passed by the UN Security Council, establishing the al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee, which identifies both organizations as terrorist entities and enforces sanctions on their financing, travel, and weapon transfers. This decision by the UN arises during a time when al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, were gaining power, as he led the group from Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan in the late 1980s, to Sudan in 1991, and then back to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. The Taliban, which emerged after Afghanistan's post-Soviet civil war, provided a safe haven for al-Qaeda's operations.

**9 September 2001** - Ahmad Shah Massoud, chief of the Northern Alliance, an anti-Taliban alliance, is assassinated by al-Qaeda operatives. The death of Massoud, a master of guerilla warfare known as the Lion of the Panjshir, has had a significant impact on the efforts to counter Taliban insurgency. Terrorism experts believe his killing assured bin Laden protection by the Taliban after the 9/11 attacks.

**11 September 2001** - Al-Qaeda operatives commandeer four commercial airliners, crashing them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. A fourth plane hits in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Close to three thousand people die in the attacks. Although Afghanistan is the base for al-Qaeda, none of the nineteen hijackers are Afghan nationals. Mohammed Atta, an Egyptian, led the group, and fifteen of the hijackers originated from Saudi Arabia. U.S. President George W. Bush pledges to “win the war against terrorism,” and later zeros in on al-Qaeda and bin Laden in Afghanistan. Bush ultimately called on the Taliban regime to “deliver to the United States authorities all the leaders of al-Qaeda who hide in your land,” or share in their fate.

**18 September 2001** - President Bush signs into law a joint resolution approving the use of force against those accountable for attacking the United States on September 11. This joint resolution will later be quoted by the Bush administration as legal grounds for its decision to take comprehensive measures to fight terrorism, including invading Afghanistan, eavesdropping on U.S. citizens without a court order, and standing up the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

**7 October 2001** - The U.S. military, with British support, initiates a bombing campaign against Taliban forces, officially launching Operation Enduring Freedom. Australia, Canada, France, and Germany vow future support.

**1 November 2001** - The Taliban surrendered Kandahar and their leader fled the city, which led to the establishment of tribal law under Pashtun leaders. Though the Taliban fell, al-Qaeda leaders still remain in hiding in the mountains.

**1 December 2001** - After tracking al-Qaeda leader bin Laden to the well-equipped Tora Bora cave complex southeast of Kabul, Afghan militias confront in a fierce two-week battle (December 3 to 17) with al-Qaeda militants.

**9 December 2001** - The Taliban Collapse

**1 March 2002** - Operation Anaconda was a ground assault against al-Qaeda and Taliban in Shah-i-Kot Valley. 2000 US and 1000 Afghan troops were deployed. The operation did not broaden the war effort as military and intelligence resources were shifted to Iraq.

**17 April 2002** - President Bush calls for the reconstruction of Afghanistan in a speech at the Virginia Military Institute.

**1 May 2003** - Major Combat Over

**8 August 2003** - NATO takes control of international security forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, expanding its role across the country. It marks NATO's first operational commitment outside of Europe.

**1 January 2004** - An assembly comprising of 502 Afghan delegates came together to reach a consensus on a constitution for Afghanistan. The outcome of this assembly was the establishment of a strong presidential system that aimed to unify the country's diverse ethnic groups. This pivotal moment in the country's political history was widely perceived as a positive step towards the development of a democratic system.

**9 October 2004** - Osama bin Laden releases a videotaped statement three weeks after the presidential elections in Afghanistan and just days before the U.S. election, taunting the Bush administration and taking responsibility for the attacks on September 11, 2001.

**18 September 2005** - Over six million Afghans voted in the most democratic elections ever in Afghanistan. Half of those who voted were women, which is considered a sign of political progress in a patriarchal society.



**1 May 2007** - An infamous Taliban military chief, Mullah Dadullah, is killed in a combined operation by Afghan, U.S., and NATO forces in the south of Afghanistan.

**22 August 2008** - Afghan and UN examinations find that erring fire from a U.S. gunship slaughtered dozens of Afghan civilians in the Shindand District of western Herat Province, drawing denunciation from Afghan President Karzai and supporting Taliban claims that coalition forces are incapable of protecting the population.

**17 February 2009** - Obama Recommits to Afghanistan

**1 November 2009** - Karzai won the disputed Afghan presidential election on August 20, but with only 49.67% of the vote, below the threshold. A runoff was scheduled, but Abdullah pulled out, and Karzai was declared the winner. US and international partners raised concerns over Karzai's legitimacy, calling for improved governance.

**1 December 2009** - Nine months after continuing the U.S. dedication to the Afghan war effort, President Obama declares a major escalation of the U.S. mission.

**1 May 2011** - Al-Qaeda leader bin Laden, accountable for the 9/11 attacks, is assassinated by U.S. forces in Pakistan. The death of the United States' primary target for a war that was initiated ten years ago fuels the long-simmering discussion about the Afghanistan war.

**22 June 2011** - President Obama summarises a timetable to withdraw 33,000 troops by the summer of 2012.

**7 October 2011** - Ten Years of War

**1 March 2012** - In January, the Taliban agreed to open an office in Qatar for peace talks. However, they suspended talks two months later, accusing the US of not fulfilling their promises for a prisoner swap.

**1 June 2013** - President Obama announces a plan to retreat most U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2016.

**21 September 2014** - Afghanistan's newly elected President Ghani signs a power-sharing agreement with his opponent Abdullah, brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

- 13 April 2017** - The United States drops its strongest non-nuclear bomb on supposed self-proclaimed Islamic State militants at a cave complex in eastern Nangarhar Province.
- 1 January 2018** - Taliban Launch Major Attacks Amid U.S. Escalation
- 1 February 2019** - Negotiations between the United States and the Taliban in Doha enter their highest level yet, building on the momentum that began in late 2018. The talks between the U.S. and the Taliban centre on the United States withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan conducive to the Taliban pledging to stop international terrorist groups from working on Afghan soil.
- 7 September 2019** - President Trump abruptly breaks off peace talks after a U.S. soldier was killed in a Taliban attack. The Taliban say they are “committed to continuing negotiations,” but warn that the revocation will induce an increase in the number of deaths.
- 29 February 2020** - US envoy Khalilzad and Taliban's Baradar sign deal for US troop drawdown in Afghanistan and Taliban's pledge not to harbor terrorists.
- 12 September 2020** - Representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan administration and civil society encounter for the first time in Doha, Qatar, after nearly twenty years of war.
- 17 November 2020** - Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Christopher C. Miller reports agendas to halve the number of armies in Afghanistan to 2,500 by mid-January, days before President-Elect Joe Biden will be inaugurated.
- 14 April 2021** - Biden Decides on Complete U.S. Withdrawal by 9/11
- 15 August 2021** - Taliban takeover in Kabul due to little opposition. The president of Afghanistan fled the country.
- 16 August 2021** - President Biden defends the decision to end U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan but admits the troop withdrawal has been messy. The U.S. deployed 6,000 troops to evacuate U.S. and allied personnel and secure Kabul's airport amid chaos.
- 30 August 2021** - Twenty-Year War Ends as U.S. Completes Withdrawal.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### THE DOHA AGREEMENT

In Doha, negotiations between the Taliban and the United States reached their highest level, building on the momentum that began in late 2018. The talks, led by U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and top Taliban official Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, were focused on the United States withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan in exchange for the Taliban's commitment to prevent international terrorist groups from operating on Afghan soil.

This increased diplomatic effort follows President Trump's recent indication that he planned to withdraw seven thousand troops, which represented about half of the total U.S. deployment. Khalilzad stated that the United States would insist on the Taliban's participation in an intra-Afghan dialogue about the country's political structure, as well as a cease-fire.

## Possible Solutions and Approaches

### ENSURING THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVILIANS WITH THE HELP OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

It is crucial to champion the protection of human rights, with special attention paid to women and minority groups. Creating a society that is fair and stable involves promoting inclusivity and tackling social inequalities head-on.

Immediate needs of the Afghan people must be met through prioritizing and coordinating humanitarian aid efforts. Long-term stability can be achieved through initiatives that promote education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and development projects.

Implementation of programs designed to reconcile and reintegrate former combatants is necessary. This can be achieved through providing employment opportunities, vocational training, and psychological support to ease the transition into civilian life.

### ENSURING POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

Promote inclusivity in peace talks by involving all major stakeholders, including the Afghan government, the Taliban, and various ethnic and political groups. International mediation can help establish trust and a framework for negotiations.

Engage neighbouring countries and regional powers in diplomatic efforts. Regional stability is crucial to Afghanistan's security, and collaboration among neighbouring nations can lead to a more comprehensive and sustainable solution.

Provide ongoing support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to enhance their capacity to maintain security. This includes training, equipment, and financial assistance to ensure that the Afghan government can effectively address internal security challenges.

Strengthen international cooperation in counterterrorism efforts to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist organizations. Collaborative intelligence-sharing and coordinated military actions can effectively address common security threats.

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