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Research report

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing the humanitarian crisis in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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Introduction

In the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a grave humanitarian crisis has materialised. As a consequence of many factors, including severe political instability, economic challenges and natural phenomena worsened by climate change, as of 2023 an estimated 28.3 million people - two-thirds of the population - are in need of humanitarian assistance¹. This research report focuses on this crisis, how it came to be and explores possible solutions. Seeing as understanding how the situation in Afghanistan came to be is crucial to finding a solution, this resolution will start with the historical background and will then go over the present-day situation.

Definitions of key terms

Global war on terror

The Global War On Terror - or GWOT for short - was the term used by the US and its allies to define the military operations in multiple countries including Afghanistan and Iraq. The word “War” is not entirely correct, as GWOT also refers to diplomatic, financial, and other actions to stop terrorists.²

Interim government

An interim government, also called a temporary or provisional government is a form of government that is designed to transition from a previous political system. The government is in power until a new leader has been appointed.

Insurgency

Merriam-Webster defines insurgency as “A condition of revolt against a government that is less than an organised revolution and that is not recognised as belligerency”³. Insurgencies are often characterised by the utilised tactics such as bombings, kidnappings, and the like. Insurgencies are often formed in rural areas by slowly gaining the support of the populace. This explains the aforementioned fact, as an insurgency rarely has the means to face a national army head-on.

Humanitarian crisis

A humanitarian crisis is a generalised state of crisis for an entire group or region which prevents people from accessing their basic needs.

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General overview

On the fifteenth of October 1999, the United Nations Security Council released a statement to the press, following their unanimous adoption of resolution 1267 (further reading A). In this statement, the Security Council demanded al Qaeda and/or the Taliban turn over Usama bin Laden to bring him to justice. Unless/until this demand had been met, the committee decided that all States should freeze funds and further sanction the Taliban and al Qaeda, defined by this resolution as terrorist organisations. To explain this stance, we must first look back to actions in the past.

In 1988, after the retreat of the Soviet occupiers, bin Laden founded al Qaeda, “the base” to continue the cause of jihad⁴. Under his command, the organisation's power grew, as did his hostility towards the US. After five years of expanding its power and means, the organisation started a terrorist attack in America. A truck bomb was planted under the WTC, to topple both towers⁵. This did not work, and the towers remained upright. Unfortunately, however, nine people were killed⁶. This and more acts of terror, including the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania goaded the US into indicting bin Laden in 1998. After this, the US and the rest of the SC adopted the resolution, which concludes this explanation.

As the climax of a plan first started in 1993, on September 11, 2001, 4 planes were hijacked by al Qaeda operatives. Two of which crashed into the Twin Towers in New York, one of which crashed into the Pentagon and the last ended in a crash in a field in Pennsylvania⁷. This was the first terrorist attack on American soil and a wave of shock and terror surged through the country. While the remnants were still being removed, President Bush announced the start of a counter-attack. With the support of the majority of the public, the Global war on terror - or GWOT for short - had started.⁸ The GWOT had the core goal of stopping all terrorist activities - avenging the events of 9/11. It also included non-combat missions and was supported - also including personnel - by NATO. —a large-scale military operation with the goal of stopping all terrorist activities.

“Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”

--President George W. Bush, September 20, 2001

After some months of war, on 5 December 2001, several Afghan anti-Taliban and political groups came together in the German city of Bonn, where they signed the Bonn agreement (Further reading B). This document gave power to an interim government to attempt to bring back desperately needed stability to the region. The Bonn agreement was also later endorsed by UNSC resolution 1383 (Further reading C), which created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by NATO. This body had the primary objective of enabling the interim government to provide security in the country and help develop Afghan security forces. This body continued its work for many years until the transition to Afghan forces was completed in 2014 and the ISAF was dismantled.⁹

In June 2002, the Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan (ITGA) was approved whilst the fighting continued and in 2004, Afghanistan got a constitution. In October of that year, the ballot boxes opened for the Afghan people to vote for a new president. Hamid Karzai, who was

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also the interim leader and the leader appointed by the ITGA, became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan and the UN press headline read: “Afghanistan’s first presidential election not perfect, but sets stage”¹⁰

From the summer months of 2006 and onwards, resistance increased as insurgencies grew bolder. From 2005 to 2006, the amount of suicide attacks increased sevenfold and even more in 2007 - 103 as of the end of August 2007 against 123 for the whole of 2006.¹¹ In 2009, the new president of the US, Barack Obama, announced more troops to be sent to the front with the core goal of the operation being to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan”¹². That year also marks the re-election of President Hamid Karzai.

At a NATO summit in Portugal in 2010, countries signed to hand over full responsibility of security to the Afghan forces by the end of 2014¹³. At this time, many nations were concerned about the capability of the national troops to be able to take over the responsibility, which the Taliban later proved correct. One year later, bin Laden was found by US troops in a hideout in Pakistan and killed¹⁴. This sparked global debates about whether the war should be continued - as the primary target for the war was now dead. In December of that year, many countries once again went to Bonn to discuss a plan for cooperation beyond troop withdrawal. This conference did not achieve its primary goal - providing a roadmap for cooperation in the country, as Pakistan - with a crucial role in this conflict - refused to participate¹⁵.

Three years later, in 2013, Afghan forces took the lead in security nationwide, as NATO handed over control of the last districts. NATO’s focus shifted to training and special operations. On the same day, it was announced that talks between US diplomats and Taliban representatives would resume. Many hoped this would mean peace in the country. One year later, President Obama announced a timetable for withdrawing the majority of troops by 2016. This timetable had the goal of redistributing resources to be able to “respond more nimbly to the changing threat of terrorism, while addressing a broader set of priorities around the globe.”¹⁶ Some experts at that time pointed to the insurgencies' resiliency and questioned the capability of the Afghan forces.

As President Karzai’s term ended in 2014, new elections took place. These did not go smoothly, as during the counting, Abdullah Abdullah contested the results and accused his opponent of fraud. Ashraf Ghani denied these claims, saying that his team was a victim, not perpetrator, of fraud. As the results proved Ghani to be the new President, Abdullah prompted his followers to take to the streets in protest.¹⁷ After negotiations led by the US, Abdullah acquired the role of Chief Executive. This warded off civil unrest, but was adverse to a stable government, as conflicts between Ghani and Abdullah remained common.⁸

In 2017, newly elected President Trump decided to double down on the situation and sent 4,000 more troops in an attempt to break the stalemate.¹⁸ During this escalation, the Taliban launched more attacks. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 10,000 civilians were injured or killed during this period - January to December 2018. The insurgencies were responsible for the majority of these, but an increased number of US airstrikes also contributed to hundreds of casualties during the year¹⁹. Two months later, negotiations between the US and the Taliban reached their highest

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points thus far. The negotiations were ramped up by the announcement of Trump's plan to halve the number of troops deployed. Some months later, Trump abruptly called off a secret meeting with the Taliban leaders and President Ghani. He tweeted that this was due to an attack in Kabul that killed a US soldier and 11 other people: "I immediately cancelled the meeting and called off peace negotiations."²⁰

After peace talks resumed in the next year, a new agreement (further reading D) was formed paving the way for a drawback of troops. September 12th, intra-Afghanistan peace talks started in Doha, with all parties stating their eagerness for peace and solid plans for troop withdrawal²¹. Five days later, America announced the further halving of their troops to 2,500. The chief of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg warned of Afghanistan becoming a haven for terrorists, if the plan weren't executed properly.

14th of April 2021, President Biden announced the full troop withdrawal by September 11. In his statement, he declared that it "is time for American troops to come home." as the primary objective – the assassination of bin Laden – was fulfilled 10 years before.²² With this, he opted for a symbolic date – exactly 20 years after the 9/11 bombings – rather than a tactical date. Only one day after this announcement, the Taliban fighters took control of the capital. The Taliban had already started taking control over many provinces in the week prior²³. Once they reached the capital, they faced little resistance as the president had already left the country. The sudden change in power led to much chaos and confusion as many hurried to the airports to escape the country.



The Taliban then reformed the country as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. However, this country is not uniformly recognised by the global community. The only three countries that do are Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE²⁴. Since the Taliban has taken control of the country, the humanitarian situation has decreased dramatically.

The situation in the country has also been worsened by the climate. According to Reliefweb, two-thirds of Afghanistan's population – 28.3 million people – are in dire need of humanitarian help as the country enters its third consecutive year of drought²⁵. Amongst those people are also 875,000 children facing life-threatening acute malnutrition. The international community has been actively trying to deliver food, but this is not an easy task (see previous attempts). Earlier this year, the UN warned that Afghanistan requires 4.62 billion dollars in aid this year, to supply food and other items.

Amidst this crisis, the Taliban regime keeps on tightening their "temporary" restrictions on women's rights. Currently, girls have been banned from attending secondary school, and women from tertiary education. Women have also been banned from gyms, sports clubs, and amusement parks and from working at NGO offices²⁶.

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Many NGOs – including the UN – have been working on finding out a way to help the people of Afghanistan. This is sadly made very difficult by the Taliban rule, but this will be explored more in the previous attempts section. As explained before in the introduction, this issue mainly sprouts from the war, which is why this research report has focused on this. Still, this report will now discuss the previous attempts – including ongoing operations – and the possible solutions.

Major parties involved

The Taliban

The Taliban of course has a central role in this issue, as their repressive policies – such as banning women from working at NGOs– have made it considerably harder to deliver aid to the people. They were also one of the main parties in the Afghan war, during which they committed many terrorist acts and undermined the government causing even more instability in the country. As the Taliban took power in the country in 2021, they have not shown to possess the capability to steer the country out of this crisis, as well as the ability to provide peace and stability in the region.

America

As the USA started the GWOT, they have also played a central role in the country. Both in trying to bring peace to the country by providing means for a democratic election, and in their role in the downfall of said government. The date provided by Biden in 2021, caused too much of a rush and didn't guarantee a safe final transfer of power to the Afghani forces.

World food programme

The World Food Programme is an international organisation, and part of the UN. It provides food in regions where there is little to none. In Afghanistan, they have saved many lives by providing essential food, circumventing the many restrictions the Taliban has put in place.

United Nations

The UN as a whole also has an important part in this issue, as they are the base of many of the NGOs active in Afghanistan. They have an important part to play in the sense that the UN must come up with a plan regarding the restrictions. For example, whether the organisations should still allow women to work for them in Afghanistan, considering the risk this brings to their person.

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Timeline of Key Events

11 September 2001	A plane hijacked by al Qaeda operatives crashes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, thereby starting the GWOT
2002	An interim government is put into place with Karzai as interim president
2004	Afghanistan gets a constitution and the first democratic elections take place
2010 of 2014	NATO signs plan to have all troops out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014
2014 2016	Obama releases a timetable to have the majority of troops out by 2016
2017	Peace talks are cancelled by Trump over the death of an American soldier
April 14th 2021 September of that year	Biden announces the final troops to leave the country by 11 September of that year
April 15th	The Taliban, with little resistance, takes over the capital and declares the country the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
2022	The Taliban bans women from working for NGOs
Present day	After three years of drought, many people are in danger

Previous attempts to solve the issue

As stated before, there are many ongoing operations in Afghanistan. However, the major issue seems to be a contradiction of sorts. On one hand, there is the obvious goal of delivering aid to the 28 million people in need, on the other hand there is the importance of maintaining pressure. This is because the UN doesn't, nor should it want to help the Taliban in its grave violations of human rights.

For some time, the humanitarian operations ran on a certain flexibility. This flexibility included running a girls' school, finding work for the many women left jobless and hosting negotiations. The UN has not come up with one clear plan as of date, which has left many groups confused

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by the unclear messages, as they have not decided upon one singular course of action. An example of this is that, on the 18th of April 2023, the UN Development Programme Administrator warned the Taliban. He warned them of the fact that the UN was “Ready to take the heart-breaking decision to pull out of the country.” if they wouldn’t revoke their ban on women employed by the UN. The next day, the UN Deputy Secretary-General suggested for member states to explore “baby steps” to putting the Taliban “on the path to recognition”²⁷.

The currency situation is of course not caused by these incoherence’s. However, as the instances working in the field attempt to plan a course of action, the UN agencies need to figure out a plan. This confusion is further increased by the Taliban-imposed ban on women working for the UN. This is because some UN agencies have allowed women to keep working, whereas others haven’t.

In short, there are many previous and current attempts to solve the humanitarian crisis by supplying food and medical care. This is sadly not enough, as this is only treating the effects of a larger issue, the larger issue being the Taliban rule and its severe negligence of basic human rights.

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Possible solutions

Whilst the current situation regarding the humanitarian crisis could be postponed, to truly solve this issue, delegates must find ways to decrease the tension. Organisations like the World Food Programme are essential for the survival of the many people in Afghanistan who depend on this food. However, delegates must look at both the past and present to find a peaceful way of fixing this issue.

One important detail is also the current economic crisis in Afghanistan. This was caused by the sudden change of power and the consequent freezing of roughly 9 billion dollars in foreign reserves by the international community. Delegates must also deliberate whether they trust this money in the hands of the Taliban, and if they would then distribute the funds as required. As the Islamic Emirate of Taliban is not an officially recognised country, it is even harder to make agreements on how the money would be used, if given to the Taliban.

This issue is a very complex one, and delegates must constantly be aware of the two sides of every action. Will it help the people in need, but will it also help the Taliban? Or will it destabilise the Taliban but also hurt the people? These are questions the delegates must be prepared to ask if they want to solve this issue.

Further reading

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- C. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/454021?ln=en>
- D. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

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