

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The Situation in Afghanistan

Student Officer: Siya Sawhney

Position: President Chair

Introduction

Over the course of the past five decades, Afghanistan has grappled with the influence of the Soviet Union, the United States of America, and what we have today, the resurgence of the Taliban forces. Struggling with human rights violations, humanitarian crises, exacerbating poverty rates, and economic challenges and uncertainty, the conditions of Afghanistan have been more than just volatile.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in the midst of Central Asia and South Asia. Afghanistan shares borders with Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and is located near several other Central Asian countries. They have a population of over 40.1 million people, and occupy 652,864 square kilometers of land. The Pakistan and Afghanistan border is particularly notable as it runs directly through the Pashtun area, dividing the 60 million Pashtuns between both countries.

Currently, Afghanistan faces one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has ever seen. With over 97% of its population living below the poverty line, the Taliban takeover has led the country to be one of the poorest countries in the world. Human rights violations are also widespread in Afghanistan, and in 2022, 7,012 allegations against the Taliban for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary detention, were reported to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Moreover, the restrictions imposed on women's rights are another prevalent aspect of the human

rights violations that the country faces. Women and girls in Afghanistan lack the right to education, employment, and freedom of movement, ultimately preventing them from participating in public life and therefore forcing them to resort to staying at home.

A critical aspect that shaped the situation in Afghanistan today is a result of the Soviet Invasion in 1979, marking the beginning of a prolonged and brutal conflict. This invasion was an attempt to transform Afghanistan into a communist state. This war had a devastating impact on Afghanistan, with an estimated 1 million civilians killed and millions more displaced. This invasion paved the way for the rise of the Taliban, known as the radical Islamic movement that took control of Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban was established in 1994 and proceeded to capture Kabul and establish itself as the ruling power in Afghanistan in 1996. They remained in Kabul till 2001 and enforced various legislation supporting human rights violations by banning women from working or attending school and imposing severe and inhumane punishments for those violating such rules. However, as a response to the 2001 September 11 attacks in the United States, the US invaded Afghanistan. This led to the Taliban losing their control and being ousted by power.

The United States and its allies made significant investments in Afghanistan during their two decades in the country and helped to provide billions of dollars for humanitarian aid, development, and reconstruction. However, despite the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan's situation remained unstable, and the lack of a sustainable and effective government resulted in the resurgence of the Taliban forces.

The United States withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 left the country in shambles as the Taliban quickly captured Kabul and took control over the country. As a result, the Afghan government collapsed and millions of Afghans were displaced from their homes.

The Taliban's return to power has had a devastating impact on Afghanistan, with the country facing a humanitarian crisis, millions of people facing hunger and malnutrition, and the collapse of the economy.

Definition of Key Terms

Taliban

The Taliban is a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist and pro-Pashtun political movement and military organization founded in the early 1990s. They ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 before being overthrown by the US-led invasion. They returned to power after the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Counterterrorism

The practice of preventing, disrupting, and mitigating the effects of terrorism. Counterterrorism strategies and tactics to counter terrorist attacks vary from country to country with some of the most common including intelligence gathering, law enforcement, border security, and military intervention

Afghan National Security Forces

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are the armed forces of Afghanistan. They are responsible for defending Afghanistan from external aggression and maintaining internal security. The ANSF was created in 2001 after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, however, the security forces collapsed in 2021 shortly after US's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Insurgency

An armed rebellion against a government, occupying power, or established authority. An insurgency is typically characterized by its use of violence and intimidation to achieve its goals, and are often waged by groups opposing the government's policies or ideology.

Political Instability

Political instability is a state of a government or state that has undergone frequent changes in government, violence, or other forms of political unrest. The unstable political structure makes it prone to collapse in a short period of time.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The process of rebuilding a country after war or civil conflict involves restoring basic services such as security, water, and electricity, and rebuilding infrastructure. Despite ongoing post-conflict reconstruction for the past two decades, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world.

Key Issues

Humanitarian Crisis

Afghanistan's susceptibility to constant violence, destruction, and forces of the Taliban has exacerbated its humanitarian crisis. In 2023, it is recorded that a staggering 28.3 million people, which is two-thirds of the population, require urgent humanitarian assistance to survive. A deprivation of food, water, shelter, and healthcare lead to millions of Afghans facing food insecurity and malnutrition, and struggling to survive. Along with that, Afghanistan has been facing severe droughts, being the world's sixth most affected country by climate change threats. These droughts have a significant impact on the water supply in Afghanistan, drying up the land and decreasing the drinking water that is available. The droughts have also affected the current food crisis that is faced, worsening the food insecurity situation.

Due to ongoing conflict, there has also been widespread displacement where millions of Afghans have been forced to flee their homes. Nearly 6.6 million people have Moreover, after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the country was left in a poor economic state. This has further led to increased unemployment and poverty rates

across the country. Fewer people have now been able to afford basic necessities as a result of the growing poverty rates, severely affecting the living conditions within the nation. The length of this prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, ongoing for over four decades, has been a prime factor contributing to the humanitarian crisis. The consistent destruction and instability in the country have led to a loss of hope and decreased morale of the Afghans, further deteriorating their quality of life.

The exacerbated health conditions for Afghans have also placed more pressure on the healthcare system of the country. However, the collapse of various hospitals and healthcare facilities as a result of the conflict and destruction, coupled with the shortage of medical staff, decreases the direct humanitarian assistance that can be provided to the Afghans.

Rights of Women

Under the Taliban rule, the rights of women and girls have been severely restricted. The Taliban claims that the provision of rights in educational and professional workspaces is a breach of the Sharia law that they aim to enforce in Afghanistan.

As a result, the Taliban has imposed a number of restrictions and bans that they initially imposed during their rule in 1996. This included the banning of girls from secondary school and receiving higher education, leaving women and girls to be less educated than men. The Taliban decreed that all women should be banned from employment in 1996, the year that they first gained authority over the country, as they believed the workplace should only consist of men. Their continued restrictions on women's rights was seen through the requirement of women to be accompanied by a male relative when they traveled outside of their homes. This increased the overall dependence that women had to have on men in the country. Furthermore, there were strict impositions of dress codes for women to abide by, limiting the overall freedom that they had.

By banning women from participating in many public activities, they aimed to reduce the role of women in society even further and purposely exclude them from communities. Their exclusion, however, has had significant impacts on the education and healthcare systems, and the economy as a whole as women play a vital role in Afghan society.

The Taliban's restrictions on women's rights have had a devastating impact on the lives of Afghan women by being denied access to education, employment, and opportunities, forcing them to live in fear and isolation.

Economic Collapse

The economic collapse of Afghanistan is one of the key issues that the country grapples with today. This has been a result of both internal actions and consequences occurring in the country such as the conflict, destruction of infrastructure, and reduction in employment rates, as well as actions of the international community. The international community had frozen billions of Afghan assets in order to further pressure the government which in turn decreased the ability for the government to pay Afghan employees. They have also placed sanctions and suspended foreign aid in an attempt to further pressure the government, but have also led to a decrease in economic growth and prosperity of Afghanistan.

Over the past two years since the Taliban has regained control of the country, the economy has shrunk by 25%, decreasing the output levels of goods and services by one-quarter. Moreover, several businesses have also closed down after the Taliban takeover, ultimately causing a significant impact on the employment levels in the country as a whole. Since the Taliban re-insurgence in 2021, over 700,000 Afghans have lost their jobs, leading to a loss in their livelihoods as well. The unemployment rate in Afghanistan is estimated to be over 40% now, an immense increase from the pre-Taliban takeover

unemployment rate of 23%. The shrinking economy has also led to a soar in the inflation rates, reaching over 50%. This makes basic necessities such as food and fuel even more expensive to purchase than it already was. The inflation rates coupled with the loss of jobs have led to millions of Afghans falling into the vulnerable traps of poverty.

Furthermore, as the economy continues to decline, the Afghan currency has lost over 90% of its value since the Taliban takeover. This creates challenges for Afghans to import goods and services from other countries or for individuals to send and receive money from abroad, limiting the value of support that they can receive as well.

Security

Security in Afghanistan is a key issue that needs to be addressed to effectively decrease the immense instability that the nation grapples with.

Terrorist Groups and Organizations

Afghanistan has a reputation for being a safe haven to terrorist organizations and groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K, posing a severe issue of security in the country.

These terrorist groups have carried out a number of attacks both within the country and in other nations. The Taliban takeover in 2021 has further complicated the security situation, making it even more dangerous for civilians there. Taliban has had a long history of supporting extremist groups, which is shown through their close ties established with Al-Qaeda. As a result, they have permitted various terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda to operate freely in Afghanistan.

Border Crossing

The border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a major point of entry for people and goods, but also a major route for smuggling drugs and weapons.

The border situation between these two countries has been subject to violence and tension, making this border, and the crossing of it, dangerous.

Both the Taliban and Pakistani military control their respective sides of the border. However, Taliban's brutal control over the Afghan side of the border coupled with their history of supporting terrorism, raises concerns that the border crossing can be used to launch attacks on Pakistan. The Pakistani military has also been accused of human right abuses and its control over the Pakistani side of the border raises concerns that refugees and other vulnerable groups can be mistreated. Another key concern of border crossing includes the smuggling of militants, drugs, and other supplies into Afghanistan. This smuggling can undermine the security and stability of both the countries, and also make the routes more dangerous.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Taliban

The Taliban, a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political and religious movement originated in southern Afghanistan in early 1990s. The Taliban's main goals involved the implementation of the Sharia law in all aspects of life in Afghanistan and the establishment of an Islamic Emirate. They aimed to establish a pure Islamic state in Afghanistan and are known for their strict interpretation of Islamic law. This includes the imposition of harsh punishments for crimes such as theft. Moreover, during the Taliban's control, they have also been known for their continuous repression of women and minorities.

The Taliban initially controlled most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 after the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan that ended in the early 1990s. During this time, along with imposing the strict interpretation of Islamic law on Afghans, the Taliban also committed numerous human rights abuses including the execution of political opponents

and the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities. The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 ousted the Taliban from power. However, after the withdrawal of the US in 2021, the Taliban once again had waged an insurgency against the Afghan government and seized power over the territory.

United States of America

The United States of America has been a major player in Afghanistan for decades. The US had invaded Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in their country. These terrorist attacks were carried out by Al-Qaeda, a terrorist group based in Afghanistan at the time. Hence, the US overthrew the Taliban government which had previously been providing a safe haven to Al-Qaeda along with other terrorist groups and organizations.

Since 2001, the US had remained in Afghanistan and had invested heavily in the country, both in terms of financial resources and military personnel. Their provision of military and financial assistance to the Afghan government and security forces have helped to combat terrorism in the country. The US had also played a role in the peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban. However, the US war in Afghanistan had been long and costly, and failed to achieve many of its objectives. After the US withdrawal in 2021, they ended their military involvement in the country but also led to the Taliban quickly taking control over the country and collapsing the government. The US have been criticized for their inability to rebuild or strengthen the Afghan government to prevent such collapse, and have been criticized on other aspects such as the use of their airstrikes that resulted in civilian casualties.

Russia

Russia has played a role in the Afghan peace process by hosting peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, urging both sides to reach a negotiated settlement. Although Russia is concerned about Taliban's links to terrorism, they also

recognize that Taliban is a powerful force in Afghanistan and have been in contact with them indicating their willingness to work with the Taliban if it forms part of a future Afghan government. Post the Russia Ukraine invasion, Russia has also considered the Taliban an ally. In February 2022, Russia hosted a delegation of Taliban leaders in Moscow. Furthermore, in March 2022, Russia announced that it would provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. This was the first time that Russia had provided humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan since 2001.

Pakistan

Pakistan shares a long border with Afghanistan, resulting in their involvement in the situation in Afghanistan for decades. Over the past years, Pakistan has suffered a number of terrorist attacks over the years, and it believes that these attacks are often carried out by groups that are based in Afghanistan. Pakistan is also concerned about the potential for instability in Afghanistan to spill over into Pakistan.

However, Pakistan's support for the Taliban has also been noted through their provision of military assistance, training, funding and diplomatic support. Pakistan has also provided a safe haven for the Taliban and has facilitated the cross-border movement of men and materiel. Although they have denied accusations of supporting the Taliban, there has been notable evidence of Pakistan's provision of support to the Taliban in the past

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1919	The British Empire's rule in Afghanistan ends.	Although Afghanistan was never a part of the British Empire, the end of the British

		<p>Empire’s rule meant that they no longer controlled Afghanistan’s foreign policy, and sovereignty from them was achieved.</p>
1979	<p>Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan</p>	<p>The Soviet Union’s invasion led to a decade-long war of resistance with Afghanistan. This resulted in millions of casualties, injuries, and severe destruction across the nation.</p>
1989	<p>Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan</p>	<p>Withdrawal of all Soviet troops post the prolonged conflict. The withdrawal led to the country being left in a state of chaos, with various factions vying for power and control including the Mujahideens. This resulted in continued civil war, and instability leading to the rise of the Taliban in 1996.</p>
1996	<p>The Taliban captures Kabul and establishes itself as the ruling power in Afghanistan.</p>	<p>The Taliban’s establishment of power in Afghanistan led to them starting to implement strict rules, particularly affecting the rights of women.</p>

1997	The Taliban imposed severe restrictions banning women from working and attending school	The freedom of women was restricted, impacting their ability to thrive in the nation. Increased inequality and deprivation of rights for them.
7th October 2001	September 11 attacks in the United States	The United States invaded Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 attacks that took place in the US. The Taliban was ousted from power.
2001 - 2021	War on Terror unfolds, involving NATO and Afghan forces	The War on Terror aimed to seek out and stop terrorist groups from around the world, initiated and carried out by some of the NATO countries. This led to ongoing conflict battling the Taliban insurgency and other militant groups.
2004	Afghan presidential elections	Symbolized the start of a new democratic government in the nation. However, instability and conflict continued to persist regardless.
2011	Osama bin Laden killed in US raid in Pakistan	Affected morale and was a symbolic blow to Al Qaeda. However, despite this, the

		organization continued to pose a threat to various regions.
2018	US-Taliban peace talks begin	Initiation of diplomatic efforts in an attempt to find a solution to the situation in Afghanistan
2020	US-Taliban agreement for troop withdrawal	This agreement enabled intra-Afghan discussions to come up with a political solution and lasting ceasefire. The Afghan government affirmed its willingness to engage in talks and reach a ceasefire with the Taliban after the US troop withdrawal.
June 2021	Completion of border fence across the entire length of the Afghan-Pakistan border.	The formation of the border aimed to restrict cross-border smuggling and the movement of militants and goods between the two nations.
August 2021	US and NATO complete withdrawal from Afghanistan	The end of the two-decade involvement in Afghanistan. Concerns were brought up regarding the Afghan government's ability to maintain political instability and deter any future threats.

September 2021	Taliban captures key cities and takes control of Kabul	A rapid collapse of the Afghan government as the Taliban regains control of the nation once again. Raising fears of the increased repression and instability of the country.
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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Bonn Agreement

The Bonn Agreement was an international agreement signed in Bonn, Germany on December 5, 2001. The agreement established a new interim government in Afghanistan, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA), and paved the way for the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of national elections.

The Bonn Agreement was negotiated by representatives of the four main Afghan factions: the Northern Alliance, the Pashtun leaders of the former Taliban regime, the exiled Afghan king, Zahir Shah, and moderate Afghan exiles. The agreement was also signed by representatives of the United Nations, the United States, and other countries involved in the international effort to rebuild Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement established a power-sharing arrangement between the four main Afghan factions and also included a provision for the possible participation of the Taliban in the future government of Afghanistan.

The Bonn Agreement was a significant step in the process of rebuilding Afghanistan as it established a new government that was supported by all of the major Afghan factions. Moreover, the agreement also served as a basis for negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Doha Talks

The Doha Talks were a series of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban that took place in Doha, Qatar, from 2009 to 2021. The talks were aimed at ending the long-running war in Afghanistan and establishing a political settlement that was acceptable to all sides. The Doha Talks were launched in 2009, but they made little progress in the early years. The Taliban refused to negotiate directly with the Afghan government, which it considered to be a puppet of the United States. The Taliban also insisted that all foreign troops be withdrawn from Afghanistan before it would engage in serious negotiations.

However, there had been development of Intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government in September 2020. Regardless, the parties were unable to come to a consensus on various issues including the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. The Doha Talks were then suspended in January 2021, after the Taliban launched a major offensive against the Afghan government. The Doha Talks failed to achieve their goal of ending the war in Afghanistan and establishing a political settlement that was acceptable to all sides. However, the talks did make some progress, and they laid the foundation for a possible future peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Possible Solutions

Provision of Humanitarian Assistance

The immense deprivation of basic necessities in Afghanistan results in a severe humanitarian crisis. With 28.3 million Afghans in dire need of humanitarian assistance, the provision of such should be a global priority that the international community must emphasize. They require essential items such as food and water, the development and rebuilding of infrastructure to provide adequate shelter, and medical supplies and care at the very least. Along with the direct provision of these items, nations can increase their

financial support for local NGOs within Afghanistan to channel the assistance through the country.

In addition to that, the international community can also support the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan by pressuring the Taliban to allow humanitarian access. Pressuring the Taliban can also force them to respect international law, a critical aspect of mitigating the humanitarian crisis currently faced.

Counterterrorism Measures

Afghanistan, under the rule of the Taliban, has been known to be a safe haven for various terrorist organizations and groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K. In order to reduce the risk of instability in the nation, the implementation of counterterrorism measures is crucial. This includes measures such as cutting off terrorist financing and money laundering. Terrorist organizations need consistent funding to conduct their activities, attract new members, and promote their beliefs. By disrupting their financial networks and support systems, governments and international organizations can hinder their operations and reduce their ability to cause harm.

Furthermore, measures such as strengthening borders to prevent the movement of weaponry across borders and investing in more law enforcement support and agencies and diminish the effect and power of terrorist organizations.

Infrastructural Rehabilitation

Along with immediate humanitarian assistance, the development and rehabilitation of the infrastructure in Afghanistan will provide the nation with long-term stability. The fallen and destructive conditions of basic infrastructure including water supply, sanitation facilities, and healthcare have humanitarian repercussions. Moreover, the destruction of

roads, communication systems, and work areas affect the country's productive capacity and has led to hindered economic growth.

Thus, increased investment into reconstruction efforts is required to improve the roads, buildings, residential areas, workplaces, irrigation systems, water infrastructure, and other infrastructure that has been harmed as a result of the ongoing conflict.

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