**Forum: General Assembly 3**

**Issue: The question of measures to ensure the safety and security of Afghan citizens post-withdrawal of foreign troops**

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**Position: Deputy Chair**

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**Introduction**

On December 24th 1979, the Soviet Union began military incursions into Afghan territories in a means to support the local Socialist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The result was the ignition of a nearly 40 year period of instability in the country and the region, resulting in a world class civilian and humanitarian catastrophe with more than 240,000 people dead on Afghan soil since 2001 (“Afghan Civilians | Costs of War”).

The Soviet Incursion into Afghan territory was met with fierce paramilitary resistance from the US-backed Mujahadeen militia. This was a classic symptom of the wider cold war which since its start towards the end of the 1940s caused a plethora of proxy conflicts in which Capitalist VS Socialist/Communist ideologies were in constant competition in order to get power. Similarly in Afghanistan, the US actively armed and trained the loosely organized Mujahadeen militia in order to combat the organized Soviet forces that were present in Afghanistan until the end of the war on 15 May 1988.

The conflict resulted in a Mujahideen victory due to the numerous advantages they faced when compared to an organized and very european orientated Soviet military. The Mujahideen utilized the country's rough untameable terrain as the perfect playground for the guerilla warfare they employed against the invading forces. Military and financial aid provided by the US also aided them in protecting air superiority against the Soviet air force which had trouble with logistics coupled with the economic collapse of the Soviet Union due to the lack of infrastructure in the Soviet economy required to meet the demands of the modern day consumer.

Following the Soviet withdrawal, some of the Mujahideen, which were organised into 7 Sunni factions, created the Afghan Interim Government in February of 1989. Because this government failed to consider the Shia Mujahideen along with other political and religious groups, it failed to secure complete authority over the territories that made up the country. This unstable government resulted in another civil war, now amongst different Mujahideen factions and raged on due to the funding of several nations and private donors notably from the Middle East. Other sources of revenue included the illegal cultivation of Poppy plantations to smuggling illegally derived Opium and Opium based products.

Taking rise following the lack of control in the country, in 1994 a former Mujahideen militant by the name of Mohammed Omar formed the “Taliban” organization meaning the “students” or “seekers”. The members of this new group followed the organisations namesake with a majority of members being the children of Afghan refugees that grew up learning the Saudi funded Islamic Madrasas which specialized in the education of a fundamental and orthodox form of Islam called Wahhabism.

The loose Mujahideen during the Soviet invasion managed to keep organised using their common religious backgrounds along with what seemed to be a responsibility to keep their countries religion pure. In fact their name is derived from Jihad, meaning amongst others “the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary” (“BBC - Religions - Islam: Jihad”). This religious bond developed into a worse and more brutal form of aggression (perhaps unintendedly) with the Taliban. Over time the Taliban became a major faction and succeeded in overcoming the Mujahideen factions in controlling the country. In 1996 the capital of the country was transferred to Kandahar and the Emirate of Afghanistan was declared as the dominant government in the region. Only three countries recognised the nation at its height. Namely, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Taliban held large amounts of power in the country following a totalitarian ideology and enforcing strict sharia practices on its residents until the US invasion in 2001.

Justifying its actions by blaming the Taliban for harboring terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the United States Invaded Afghanistan. This operation on the Taliban government was following a wider “War on Terror” campaign of then President George W. Bush. By december of 2001, the Taliban were driven out of power by the US and its allies which built military bases across strategic locations within the country, with Kabul; a key Taliban stronghold falling to US forces by November. The US took Taliban strongholds one by one across November starting from the northern stronghold of Kunduz all the way into the heart of Taliban society in Kandahar. US presence although much more limited continues to this day while foreign presence continues under UN sponsored peacekeeping coalitions.

The decades of war within the country has left it penniless and heavily lacking compared to modern societal standards. The country's HDI released by the OECD was ranking at the bottom section of the globe coming in at 0.511. This value, although low, has seen an increase from before following some new developments. The following power vacuum is to be taken in by the UN coalition however the reduced but continuing presence of the Taliban is still a cause of concern for the country’s development (Blake).

On the 30th of August, the withdrawal of all US forces from Afghanistan was completed, resulting in instability throughout Afghanistan because of the return of the Taliban’s rule. Since their return to power, the Taliban have imposed regulations denying freedom of movement, imposing compulsory dress codes and even severely curtailing access to employment and education for all. In addition, this withdrawal has left all the Afghan people helpless, as their economy and governance, which have been artificially propped up for years by foreign funding, collapsed at a rate faster than most international speculations. In addition to this the inevitable wave of US and international sanctions imposed and enforced in response to Taliban actions which is expected to further pull down Afghanistan’s economy and by extension the living standards of all Afghanis.

**Definition of Key Terms**

## **Taliban**

The word literally means “Students” or “Seekers” founded by Muhammed Omar in the refugee camps of Northern Pakistan that played a big role in the governance of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Their ideology is one of totalitarianism followed by the rule of Islamic Sharia law.

## **Sharia law**

The code of Islamic regulations and justice system that uses the Quran and its Prophet Muhammads teachings (Hadeeth) as its jutification base.

## **Totalitarianism**

A system of government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state.

## **People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)**

The Socialist party was funded and backed by the Soviet Union during its presence in the region before their dismantlement following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the formation of the succeeding Afghan Interim Government.

## **Mujahadeen**

The plural form of Muhajid, meaning individual engaging in Jihad, typically denoting the Islamic Militias in Afghanistan that propped up following the Soviet Invasion in 1979.

## **Capitalism**

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.

## **Socialism**

A political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

## **Communism**

A theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

## **Guerrilla Warfare**

A type of warfare fought by irregular armed forces using hit and run style tactics.

## **Shia**

The second of the biggest two Muslim sects, they are seperated from Sunnis by their belief that Ali was meant to be the successor after Prophet Muhammad’s that would lead the Muslim world.

## **Sunni**

The largest muslim sect, they see Abu Bakr as the rightful first caliph after the death of Muhammed (the main point of disagreement between the two sects)

## **Islamic Madrasa**

Madrasa, meaning “school” in Arabic, relates to the Islamic theology schools that teach students traditional islamic values and scriptures.

## **Wahhabism**

A form of ultra-orthodox and traditional Islamic belief. The type of sect that the Taliban used to idolise and follow.

## **Kabul**

The capital city of Afghanistan, situated on the east side of the country.

## **Kunduz**

An old Taliban stronghold famous for its large war during the 2001 US invasion.

## **Kandahar**

A southern Afghan city that served as the Taliban’s historic capital.

## **Cold War**

A collection of proxy conflicts between the US and NATO alliance against the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc. The Afghan conflict is an example of these proxy conflicts. This collection came to be after the end of WW2 due to the ideological differences between western capitalism and eastern communism.

## **Jamiat-e Islami**

One of the two largest groups that made up the Mujahideen. Its also a political party and the oldest Muslim one in Afghan history. They believe in the use of Sharia law in the Judicial system of Afghanistan. The party is made up of mostly ethnic Tajiks.

## **Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin**

The other of the largest groups that made up the Mujahideen. They are ethnically Pashtun and they follow the Islamic ideology similar to that of the Jamiat-e Islami.

## **Pashtun**

The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan making up about 42% of the population. They are a sub race of Persian ethnicity and speak Pashto.

## **Tajik**

The second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. They speak a Persian derived language however have cultural influences from Turkic and Russian cultures as well.

## **Al Qaeda**

A widely recognised terrorist organisation formed by Osama Bin Laden along with others. They have claimed responsibility for many terrorist attack including the 1998 US embassy bombings, the 911 attacks and the Bali bombings. The Taliban harbouring important members of the Al Qaeda organisation was the main contributor to the US invasion in 2001.

## **Osama Bin Laden**

A Saudi born man, Osama is the founder of the Al Qaeda terrorist organisation and comes from the highly wealthy Bin Laden family.

## **Geneva Accords**

An agreement held in Geneva regarding the situation in Afghanistan outlining certain dos and don'ts for the region.

**Key Issues**

**Casualties and Deaths**

In accordance to a combined report, ‘Body Count’, submitted by international bodies such as the Physicians for Global Survival, Physicians for Social Responsibility and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, the casualty count of the conflict in Afghanistan falls within the bracket of 106,000 - 170,000 civilians. As reported by the United Nations in 2009, 70% of the 1,500 casualties were attributed to anti-government elements, or non-state actors, but not directly the Taliban, as many websites and news sources quote. Of the total death count in 2010, with over 2,700 civilians killed, the UN reports 75% to be caused by anti-government forces and 450 deaths to pro-government elements. From United Nations reports in the succeeding years, 2011, 2012 and even as far as 2016, the death toll attributed to anti-government forces drops from 74% to 61% in 2016, however the overall reported civilian deaths and injuries numbers rise tremendously. Contributing causes to the death toll alongside the activity of insurgents are the actions of troops from the United States and NATO, Afghan security forces, government militias and airstrikes from both the US and Nato, and the Afghan government. During the offensive of Kabul in 2021, it is said that more than 150 government soldiers were killed in 24 hours as the fighting raged.

**Damage to Social Infrastructure - Education**

Reports reflecting research conducted within Afghanistan indicate cooperation between the Afghan government and non-state actors in power in certain regions in the country, such as the Taliban in the Khogyani District, towards the cause of education. In this region, the Afghan government is awarded nominal control to implement educational reforms under the provision of providing the wages to Taliban-appointed teachers in these educational facilities. Indicatively, across Afghanistan, while fewer than 50,000 girls made up the school-attending population of 1.2 million children in 2001, they currently account for 3.2 of the 8.2 million Afghan children attending schools in 2013. Specific to the Khogyani District in 2017, the Taliban justifies renouncing its opposition to female education movements in an effort to garner support from the local civilians. Since the fall of Kabul in 2021, women have been banned from entering and taking education from Afghanistan’s top schools and universities.

**Refugee Crisis**

It is well known that the war in Afghanistan has been a contributing factor to the modern day refugee crisis. Aside from the sheer quantity of asylum seekers and refugees fleeing Afghanistan, there also arises the issue of maltreatment of these people. This mistreatment of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers has been documented in states of refuge such as the Netherlands, Australia, the United States, Pakistan, Europe and various NATO countries. Some of these actions have included restrictions on education and attendance to public school, lack of access to institutions and government services, property ownership and freedom of movement, suffrage and job availability, wage brackets and exploitation for military purposes, as well as harassment during visa applications processes. This, along with constant bullying, marginalization and ostracizing has led to studies indicating towards Afghan refugees harboring increasingly and abnormally severe mental health issues and suicide rates/tendencies. The UNHCR Refugee Agency identifies there to be approximately 2.5 million registered Afghan refugees as of 2018, “comprising the largest protracted refugee population in Asia,” (UNHCR, 2018). CNN further reports the conflict within Afghanistan and states of refuge such as Pakistan, noting that over 600,000 Afghan refugees were threatened by police crackdown and deportation, and coerced into facing destitution in Afghanistan in late 2016, drawing the concern of the Human Rights Watch. Following the fall of Kabul in August of 2021, the refugee crisis has severely spiked, with many Afghan civilians trying to flee from the country. Many countries such as the United States, United Kingdom and France have all pledged to take in a certain amount of Afghan refugees to combat this issue.

**War Crimes and International Law**

War crimes, along with 3 other outlined clauses, are illegal and addressed in the Geneva Convention as a consequential violation of international treaty and customary law. This is under trial jurisdiction of the international criminal court, but also war tribunals or domestic judiciary systems. In the context of the conflict in Afghanistan, war crimes including murder of prisoners of war, terrorism, torture, targeting (bombings and massacres) of civilians have all been conducted by parties endorsed by the state and those not. Other crimes, not necessarily war crimes but a violation of conduct, such as destruction of property and infrastructure, theft and arson, are also notable occurrences during the conflict. Amnesty International, as well as many other global governmental and non-governmental organizations, point towards the Taliban as having conducted extreme crimes of war including mass murder and gang rape in Kunduz. The UN has condemned the Taliban’s rigging of boss along transit routes in the country and the New York Times accuses these non-state actors of being inadvertently responsible for 3/4 of the Afghan War’s civilian casualties.

It is alleged through reports of the 2001 Dasht-i-Leili massacre that anywhere between 250-3,000 surrendered Taliban militants were killed through suffocation or direct shot during a transportation process by Northern Alliance forces. U.S. ground troops are accused of being present and involved at the scene of incidents yet assumedly blocked any further investigations. Further more, coalition or pro-government forces are notable of committing war crimes such as murder of prisoners. One example is he 2003 murder of prisoner Abdul Wali by a CIA contractor, and another case being the torture and murder of unarmed civilian Afghan prisoners at the Bagram Collection Point in 2002. These charges of acts akin to genocide fell towards 15 soldiers. Furthermore, ISAF charged 5 US army personnel with murder during the Maywand District murders in 2010, with more charged with drug use, attacking of civilians and impeding investigations. With many other cases similar to these including the Kandahar massacre, it serves as a notable point to make that war crimes that are in serious breach and/or violation of international law are committed by not only anti-government actors and groups but also pro-government forces such as members of the American and British armies, falling under the greater Coalition.

**Question of National and International Stability**

Unquestionably, the Taliban have been gaining immense strength and socio-economic and/or political power at various times and places during the war in Afghanistan as well as during the dates of the larger conflict. Alongside this internal instability of power between non-state actors and governmental forces, external observers from the international community advocate that the western world’s mission in Afghanistan is limited in many ways due to its lack of consensus on mission objectives, too broad a focus on the country instead of depth in the regions and focus on a central as opposed to provincial governments. Due to the current reign of the Taliban militants in 2021, the question of national and international stability has been questioned even further, especially since the words of the spokesperson(s) have been contradictory and inconsistent with the Taliban’s current actions

**Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

**The United States of America**

The US plays a big role in the organization of security and politics in the country which has mainly begun since the invasion in 2001. The last US forces left the country on the 30th of August 2021; and left behind tens of thousands of Afghani allies, a majority of whom have been forced to go into hiding due to the threat from the Taliban. The USA’s interests in Afghanistan was, and still remains to be the need to prevent it from being used as a base from which terrorists can attack Americans. The withdrawal of the US has led to a race against time to see who will succeed first: the non-state actors achieving a safe haven and then building their external attack capabilities, or the US constructing a consistently effective over-the-horizon counterterrorism program.

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**NATO**

The organization has taken on some sponsored security operations within the country including the International Security Assistance Force and the Resolute Support Mission. The support missions in the region were withdrawn in August of 2021 in line with US withdrawal and leaving its support in the hands of Afghan owned and operated peace efforts.

**The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**

The Taliban launched an offensive against the Afghan government shortly after NATO troops began to withdraw on the 14th of April 2021, quickly advancing in front of crumbling Afghan government forces. The Taliban re-captured Kabul on August 15, 2021, after regaining control of the great majority of Afghan land. Many civilians, government officials, and international diplomats were evacuated. As of August 16, 2021, an unofficial Coordination Council chaired by top statesmen was planning the transfer of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's state institutions to the Taliban. As its opponents were vanquished or fled the country, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was quickly reestablished. It is reportedly commanded by Hibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme leader, and Hasan Akhund, the interim Prime Minister, who took office on September 7, 2021. It is worth noting that Akhund is one of the Taliban's four founders.

**The United Nations**

Multiple councils and commissions have focused on developing a solution for the country's political and societal instability and ensuring a plan for its sustainable growth in the long term. The UN Assistance Mission is another UN special mission designed to understand the local parameters in the region and provide peace and stability in line with UN resolutions. The UN also played a major role in the creation of peace agreements like the Geneva Accords.

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**China**

With its increasing economic power and sphere of influence, China has become a leading force in asian politics. The country has opened multiple investment schemes and development programs like the belt and road initiative that passes through Afghanistan as it makes its way into europe. The country has pledged over 4.3 trillion USD to the program that spans multiple states which can be seen as a form of employment for Afghan contractors and unskilled laborers. It could also develop the country’s failing infrastructure to reduce the influence of extremist groups. It should also be noted that this extra support by China can be seen in a way that is contradictory to the US policies in the region.

**Russia (Formerly USSR)**

Funded, backed, then later fought alongside the socialist party forces within the country. The country however never managed to grip control despite a near decade of war. The cracks that developed during the Soviet Afghan war made the first dent into Soviet doctrine and brought the dissolving of the Union closer as public sentiment increasingly became unfavorable. Currently due to economic problems it has limited impacts on the lives of Afghan citizens post foreign withdrawal.

**Pakistan**

Since the early 1970s, Pakistan has supplied political and military assistance to various Afghan forces. Pakistan was a significant supporter of the Afghan mujahideen (holy warriors) against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, and it welcomed millions of Afghan refugees escaping the conflict. Pakistan was a key ally of the United States at the time. The US sent $2-3 billion (A$2.7-4.1 billion) in covert aid to the mujahideen through Pakistan, training over 80,000 militants. However, previously, the Taliban leadership had three consultative councils located in Pakistan, known as shuras. At least one of these shuras, situated in Quetta, appears to still be based and operating out of Pakistan. Even though the Pakistan government denies backing the Taliban and disputes the existence of the Quetta shura, the Taliban functioned in the nation during the American occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan is expected to continue to give political and logistical assistance to Afghanistan's new Taliban authorities. It has also by extension been acting almost partially supportive of the governmental change especially considering the remarks of the Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

**Development of Issue/Timeline**

| **Date** | **Event** | **Outcome** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1989 - 1996** | Proxy and civil wars in Afghanistan | Contributes to unstable and fragile political and social situation, creating necessary conditions for relevant non-state actors to take beginning measures for insurgency. |
| **11/09/2001** | Terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center Twin Towers New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. | Increases tensions between Afghanistan and America, leads to a series of disputes - diplomatic and combat - between American government and troops, and non-state actors in Afghanistan, notably leaders of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. |
| **18/09/2001** | President George W Bush legislates the use of force against personnel involved in the 9/11 attacks. | This declares a war on terrorism. |
| **2003** | NATO takes over the UN’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) | ISAF flourishes as a military force with a strong defense, powerful as a combat force but also engaged in rebuilding Afghanistan and supporting the Afghan National Security Forces. |
| **17/02/2009** | Obama recommits to Afghanistan, announcing his plans to send 17,000 troops to the war zone | This shows the commitment of the United States towards the hunt of the 9/11 perpetrators. |
| **2014** | ISAF disbanded, number of troops reduced and role of the ISAF changed | Power transitioned to ANDSF who arguably struggled under the new burden and lack of proper training and support from the United States. |
| **2018** | Taliban launches major attacks in Kabul killing 115, President Trump signals prolongation of Afghan war. | Indication that despite all efforts, international support, aid and past military coalitions, Afghanistan still remains volatile, highly engaged in conflict and at constant risk of attack from non-state actors. |
| **28/01/2019** | The Taliban and the United States reached a draft agreement | Includes the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, and the non-use of the country by terrorist organizations as a base. |
| **14/04/2021** | US President Joe Biden announced that the withdrawal of his forces from Afghanistan will begin on May 1, and end on September 11, ending the longest American war in history. | This represents an extension of an earlier deadline for withdrawal, May 1, agreed between Washington and the Taliban. |
| **May 2021** | The United States and NATO begin withdrawing 9,500 troops, including 2,500 Americans who were still in Afghanistan. | The Taliban took control of the Narkh district, just outside the capital, Kabul, Americans withdrew from Kandahar Air Force One and the Taliban took control of two districts in Wardak Province near Kabul, before capturing two districts in Ghazni Province. |
| **June 2021** | Senior government officials said more than 150 government soldiers were killed in 24 hours as the fighting raged. | They added that fighting is taking place in 26 of the 34 states. Faced with the rapid advance of Taliban fighters, President Ashraf Ghani appoints two new interior and defense ministers. |
| **July 2021** | American forces quietly withdrew from Bagram, their main military base in Afghanistan and handed it over to government forces | Understood to be effectively ending their intervention in the war. Biden announces that the withdrawal of his forces, "will be completed on August 31." The Taliban announces control of three borders with Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan in Herat. According to a senior US general, Taliban militants now control half of Afghanistan. |
| **August 2021** | The Taliban swiftly took control of major provincial capitals, including Kandahar, Lashkar Gah and Shebergan. | The United States issued the deployment of 3,000 (slowly became 5,000) combat troops to help evacuate diplomats, civilians and Afghans who aided the United States during the war. |
| **15/08/2021** | Ashraf Ghani flees, and the Taliban announce the Fall of Kabul. | Led to the massive destruction and chaos within the country. |

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

**Diplomatic and Political negotiations:**

Following US and NATO withdrawal, the Taliban government took over the democratically elected government and reinstated the Emirate of Afghanistan with the Taliban as official rulers. The immediate neighbors that are expected to see the main parts of the migrant waves of Afghan citizens fleeing Taliban’s expected rules. Their main reactions have been based on political negotiations and trusting the democratic process. Countries like Pakistan have been quite vocal about the leadership. The prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan has said "If the world community incentivizes them (The Taliban), encourages them to walk this talk, it will be a win-win situation for everyone," he said. It is therefore clear that this time neighbors are following a more diplomatic approach considering the difficult and costly aggressive options tried during the US war on terror. Conclusively however, the fruits of this approach can’t be determined as the issue is still volatile and constantly changing.

**Possible Solutions**

**Development of a new organization**

Afghanistan has developed into becoming one of the longest civil wars in the world and the inclusion of foreign troops has seemed to worsen the situation in the South Asian country. One of the main solutions has been to create a new organization under the UN that will lead all UN activities within Afghanistan as a way to streamline all efforts into one organized and clear manner. The main objective of such an organization would be to ensure the safety of the citizens within the country. Such an existence of an organization will allow for the UN to ensure a direct communication to the forces on the ground.

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**Appendix**

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