

Briefing Paper - Political Committee - QMUN2 2021

The Situation in Afghanistan: short-, medium- and long-term strategies

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Key terms

- ISIL: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, a term often used by UN and US officials
- ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, a term often used by media
- IS: Islamic State, another term for ISIL, a terrorist group with global ambitions
- ISIS-K: The Afghanistan section of ISIS, the “K” being a reference for an old name for Afghanistan, Khorasan
- Daesh: an Arabic acronym formed from the initial letters of the IS’ previous name in Arabic, a term often used in the Middle East
- NATO: The alliance of countries from Europe and North America
- USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or Soviet Union, a socialist state that expanded from Russia across Europe and Asia, known for its involvement in the Cold War
- Coup: Also known as coup d’état, an overthrow or removal of the government and its powers by the military, a political faction, or a dictator
- Militia: A military force that is formed with civilians and non-professional soldiers
- Sanction: A threatened penalty for disobeying a law, rule or request
- Jihad: Holy war
- Loya Jirga: Grand council
- Guerrilla: A small independent group such as armed civilians using military tactics to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military.

Important Treaties and Resolutions

All UN documents for Afghanistan (Resolutions, Presidential Statements, Reports and Letters)

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/afghanistan/>

United States and Afghanistan Peace Treaty (2020)

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02.29.20-US-Afghanistan-Joint-Declaration.pdf>

Mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

Background: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14639.doc.htm>

Background: <https://betterworldcampaign.org/u-n-peacekeeping/afghanistan-unama/>

Document: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/256/08/PDF/N2125608.pdf?OpenElement>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

<https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/udhr.pdf>

Background

Afghanistan’s rigorous campaign of socioeconomic reform began in 1921, after the British-Afghan wars, however since then, Afghanistan has experienced numerous conflicts due to changes of power which has undone all of the past 20 years of NATO efforts to continue this reform. However, it seems it wasn’t until Soviet occupation that the UN began involving itself in Afghanistan’s affairs.

The pro-Soviet generation began in 1953 with the 6th Afghan prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan coming into power. He looked to the communist nation for economic and military assistance, however also introduced a number of social reforms including allowing women a more public presence, to attend university and enter the workforce.

After a military coup in 1973 where Khan abolished the monarchy and named himself the president of the Republic of Afghanistan, he proposed a new constitution that granted women the rights and work to modernise the largely communist state. Although he also forced many of his opponents out of government which led to the Afghan Communist Party taking over in 1978 after a communist coup.

A friendship treaty was signed with the Soviet Union however after an intergovernmental conflict, new president Nur Mohammad Taraki was killed in a confrontations with deputy prime minister Hafizullah Amin, Hereford the USSR invaded Afghanistan on December 24th 1979 to bolster the faltering communist regime, and on December 27th, Amin and many of his followers were executed. Around 4.3 million Afghans fled to neighbouring countries after the guerrilla movement Mujahadeen that formed in the countryside fought against Soviet invaders and the USSR-backed Afghan Army. Saudi Islamist Osama bin Laden made his first documented trip to Afghanistan to aid the anti-Soviet fighters. This conflict led to the United Nations investigation reports of human rights violations within the country, whilst the US, Britain and China gave arms to the Mujahadeen rebels via Pakistan.

In September 1988, Osama bin Laden and 15 other Islamists formed the group al-Qaida to continue their jihad against the Soviets and other who they say oppose their goal of a pure nation governed by Islam. After victory in their first battle, they began to shift their focus to America, saying the remaining superpower is the main obstacle to the establishment of a state based in Islam.

In 1989, the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union signed peace accords in Geneva guaranteeing Afghan independence and the withdrawal of 100,000 Soviet troops. Following the Soviet withdrawal, the Mujahadeen continue their resistance against the Soviet-backed regime of communist president Dr. Mohammad Najibullah, who had been elected president of the puppet Soviet state in 1986. Although it wasn't until 1992 that the Mujahadeen and other rebel groups stormed the capital and oust Najibullah from power, who was offered protection by United Nations. Afghanistan became a largely Islamic state with Professor Burhannudin Rabbani as president.

Most Afghans, exhausted by years of drought, famine and war, turned to the newly formed Islamic militia, the Taliban, who promised to uphold traditional Islamic values, running the country on the basis of an extremely harsh interpretation of Shari'a law. The Taliban outlawed cultivation of poppies for the opium trade, cracked down on crime, and curtailed the education and employment of women. Women were now required to be fully veiled and were not allowed outside alone. Islamic law was enforced via public executions and amputations, and in 1997 the Taliban publicly executed Najibullah.

The United States refused to recognise the authority of the Taliban and in 1998, following al-Qaida's bombings of two American embassies in Africa, President Clinton ordered cruise missile attacks against bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan, yet the attacks missed the leaders of the group.

It wasn't until 2000 that bin Laden was considered an international terrorist and the United States demanded for him to be extradited to stand trial for the embassy bombing site. The Taliban decline as bin Laden was hiding in Afghanistan and cultivating thousands of followers in terrorist training camps. The United Nations punished Afghanistan with sanctions restricting trade and economic development as a result of this.

On September 11th 2001, hijackers commandeered four commercial airplanes and crashed them into the World Trade Center Towers in New York, the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and a Pennsylvania field, killing thousands. Days later, U.S. officials said bin Laden, the Saudi exile believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, was the prime suspect in the attack. As a result, on October 7th 2001, following unanswered demands that the Taliban turn over bin Laden, U.S. and British forces launched airstrikes against targets in

Afghanistan. American warplanes started to bomb Taliban targets and bases reportedly belonging to the al-Qaida network, therefore the Taliban proclaimed they were ready for jihad.

NATO coalition led by USA and UK entered Afghanistan to put Taliban out of power in order to stop terrorism spreading around the world, and on December 7th 2001, the rule of the Taliban was declared to have ‘totally ended’.

The UN held a sponsored conference to determine an interior government on the 22nd December 2001, nevertheless NATO took over security in Kabul amid increased violence in August 2003. The Loya Jirga adopted a new constitution in January 2004 that called for a president, 2 vice presidents and equality for women. Presidential elections were held in October 2004 and parliamentary elections were held in 2005. Despite this, in 2006 NATO expanded its peacekeeping operation to the southern portion of the country amid continuous fights between Taliban and al-Qaida fighters and the Afghan government forces. After the forces took over from American led troops, Taliban fighters launched a number of suicide attacks and raids against international troops.

The international community pledged more than \$15 billion in aid to Afghanistan at a donors conference in Paris 2008, and in 2009 President Barack Obama announced a new strategy that would dispatch more military and civilian trainers to the country, in addition to the 17,000 combat troops he previously ordered. Obama’s strategies led to Osama bin Laden’s death on 2nd May 2011.

Despite this progress, a US soldier killed 16 Afghan civilians inside their homes, causing President Hamid Karzai to call for American forces to leave Afghan villages and in 2013 the Afghan army took over all military and security operations from NATO forces. In December 2014 NATO officially ended its combat mission in Afghanistan however US led NATO troops remained to train and advise Afghan forces. During President Trump’s term in office, the US and Taliban signed agreement in a peace deal that would serve as the preliminary terms for the US withdrawal from the country by May 2021, and gradually by July 5th 2021 the US had completely left Afghanistan.

It was only 1 month and 5 days until the Afghanistan government collapsed as the Taliban took over Kabul, and on August 26th, two suicide bombings occurred outside Kabul airport as thousands of Afghans tried to flee the country following the Taliban’s takeover. The bombing killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 US troops. The extremist group ISIS-K, the affiliate of the terror group ISIS that fought in Iraq and Syria, claimed responsibility for the explosions.

Since then, the Taliban have been fighting ISIS-K in the southern regions of Afghanistan. In Nangarhar province, home to Jalalabad, the head of the Taliban’s intelligence services is Dr Bashir who previously helped to drive ISIS-K out of a small stronghold it had established in neighbouring Kunar, denies any link with the corpses of ISIS-K members but claims that his men have arrested dozens of ISIS-K members, preferring to refer to them as “a groups of traitors who have rebelled against our Islamic government”. Although the IS doesn’t control any Afghan territory, there are fears IS could end up recruiting some of the other Central Asian and Pakistani foreign fighters believed to be based in the country, as well as disillusioned Taliban members, yet the Taliban believe they are able to take on the insurgents alone.

Find more information on Afghanistan’s history:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan>

<https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.html>

Find more information on the sanctions applied to the Taliban as a result of the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Africa:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/300/44/PDF/N9930044.pdf?OpenElement>

Find more information on the sanctions reimposed on the Taliban in 2011:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/379/01/PDF/N1137901.pdf?OpenElement>

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/380/14/PDF/N1138014.pdf?OpenElement>

For information on what these resolutions mean, see this article:

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/they-arent-listed-but-make-no-mistake-the-un-has-sanctions-on-the-taliban/>

Find more information on Trump's peace deal with the Taliban:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/president-ghani-assures-afghans-after-report-of-u-s-taliban-peace-deal>

Find more information on ISIS-K:

<https://theconversation.com/what-is-isis-k-two-terrorism-experts-on-the-group-behind-the-deadly-kabul-airport-attack-and-its-rivalry-with-the-taliban-166873>

Find more information on the recent Taliban conflicts with ISIS-K:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-59080871>

Points to consider

The whole point and success of 20 years of NATO effort is called into question:

Does the international community have responsibilities towards Afghanistan?

What does the population think?

Given that 20 years of effort have achieved very little, is there any point in further global involvement?

What will be the consequences of the Taliban's success?

Will the Taliban spread, provide support, money and safety for other terrorist groups?

Will other nations feel emboldened by Taliban's victory over NATO?

Helpful articles:

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-the-taliban-has-taken-kabul-now-what/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-58279900>

Short-term solutions:

Last summer's evacuations of Afghans who wanted to leave, how could this have gone better?

Is there any more support/aid that should be given to the population now?

How should the Taliban's severe rules be combatted, should they be combatted?

How far can/should NATO assist Afghan people choosing to continue living in Afghanistan?

Is there any way to help with Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis?

Helpful video:

https://youtu.be/N2RocJDb_jE

Helpful articles:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-59009470>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-58950282>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58624998>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58830736>

Medium-term solutions:

What foundations should be laid for future progress?

Should other countries work with the Taliban eg talks, meetings, diplomatic recognition?

What kind of approach should be taken in negotiations with the Taliban/ISIS-K?

Should other countries work with the Taliban to combat any expansions into Afghanistan from ISIS?

Should countries refuse to work with the Taliban?

Long-term solutions:

How will Taliban position themselves in international politics - relations to other countries?

What are the prospects for the Afghan population - will they live under Taliban rule forever?

How can we prevent islamophobia and a bad public perception of Islam in the west due to Taliban's extremist interpretations?

As with any committee, remember to research your country's views, allies and any official documents regarding the topic.