



Discussing NATO's involvement in the issue of Afghanistan

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Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan - or simply, Afghanistan - is a country located in Central Asia, bordering nations such as China, Pakistan, and Iran (amongst others). It has a turbulent history, particularly that of the recent past - as do its neighbours - and hence, militarily superior powers have had a tendency to intervene - with both benefit and consequence.

For approximately the last two decades Afghanistan has been unstable after the United States (US) began its military operation in the country after the 2001 terrorist attacks. Despite the initial goal of this operation - the location and assassination of extremist militant and al Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden - was achieved, the continued presence of any conflict between the US and the Taliban led to a twenty-year war in the country of Afghanistan. Since the US fully withdrew troops in 2021, under the Biden administration, the Taliban swiftly overpowered and replaced the previous Afghan government. This has caused further destabilization - economic, social, etc - within the country, as well as the curtailing and deterioration of many previous progressive developments, particularly regarding the rights of women within Afghanistan.

The type, scope, and gravity of a crisis determine how it should be handled. Some crises can be avoided through diplomacy - or other means - while other circumstances may call for more drastic action - such as the deployment of armed forces. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) takes a comprehensive approach to crisis management in this regard, planning to be involved at all phases of a crisis and taking into account a wide variety of instruments to be efficient across the crisis management spectrum. These instruments are constantly modified to the altering security situation in order to assure efficacy and resilience. Throughout its history, NATO has been able to handle crisis management, and more precisely, collective defense and disaster relief operations. An attack on one NATO member can be seen as an attack on all members, according to the alliance (and as stated in Article 5). Notably, said article has only ever been invoked once in the history of the alliance...after the September 11th attacks.

Definition of Key Terms

Terrorism

Terrorism is defined as the use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political, ideological, or religious goals. It is often committed by non-state actors, such as



extremist groups, but can also be carried out by governments. Terrorism is intended to create fear and insecurity among a population and to force a government or other group to make concessions or change its policies. Terrorism is criminalized by most governments.

Terrorist Organization

A terrorist organization is an organization that uses violence and fear to achieve a political, religious, or ideological goal. Terrorist organizations typically use tactics such as bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and hijackings to spread fear and terror among a population to achieve their goals.

Security

Measures are taken to protect the population from internal and external threats. Security is often the responsibility of law enforcement and the military.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid is the assistance given to people in need, typically in response to a natural or man-made disaster. It may include food, shelter, medical care, and other necessary items or services, as well as efforts to promote social and economic development.

Socio-economics

Socio-economics is an interdisciplinary field that studies how economic activity is shaped by social processes. It combines elements of economics, sociology, and other social sciences to examine how societies develop, organize, and distribute resources. It is concerned with the relationship between individuals, institutions, and the economy. It focuses on the social aspects of economic behaviour, including the roles of government, households, business, and labour.

General Overview

On September 11th 2001 the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda carried out four coordinated attacks with four hijacked airliners against multiple targets in the United States. Al-Qaeda is a terrorist organization which was at that time protected by the Taliban, the ruling group in 2001. Two of the aeroplanes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, another plane hit the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia outside of Washington D.C. whilst a fourth plane crashed into a field in Arizona. These terrorist attacks in which 3000 people were killed are commonly referred to as the 9/11 attacks. These attacks triggered major initiatives to combat terrorism by the United States.

In response to the Taliban not giving up Osama bin Laden, the co-founder of al-Qaeda thought to be responsible for the terrorist attack, the United States launched a military operation titled “Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)” on the 7th of October 2001. The operation aimed to remove the Taliban from their governmental power, destroy al-Quaedas training camps and capture and kill al-Quaed



Figure 1: The 9/11 memorial in New York to honor the victims of the attack, USA Today, 2022



leaders. OEF was supported by the United Kingdom as well as Canada. In cooperation with the Northern Alliance, OEF managed to overthrow the Taliban at the end of 2001. The Northern Alliance was disbanded though many members took positions in the new government. In 2014 the United States and the United Kingdom announced the withdrawal of most forces from Afghanistan and thus OEF was disbanded.

The interim government was set in place and a UN security council mandate requested assistance in the region at the end of 2001, due to further instability and conflict after the Taliban was overthrown. This led to the United Nations establishment of the “International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)”. ISAF was first deployed to assist the Afghan government to maintain security in and around Kabul and enable UN personnel to work under secure conditions. At the time command was taken on a rotational basis by ISAF nations. In August of 2003, NATO took command of ISAF at the request of the UN and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, this mandated the ISAF gradually expand its mission outside of Kabul. With its expansion under NATO’s order, ISAF further aimed to create conditions in which the Afghan government could provide effective security across the country and develop new Afghan security forces to ensure that Afghanistan would not become a safe haven for terrorists again. NATO taking over ISAF solved the issue of who leads the operation.

In 2011 NATO gradually transferred the responsibility for security to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). ANSF then began to take the lead for security operations across the country in 2013. The ISAF mission was completed when Afghan forces assumed full responsibility for security at the end of 2014. A smaller non-combat mission called “Resolute Support Mission (RSM)” was launched in 2015 to further support Afghan forces and institutions.

ISAF was one of the largest and most challenging missions in NATO’s history. ISAF had at its height 130,000 troops from 51 countries deployed. ISAF had multiple responsibilities such as fighting growing insurgencies while simultaneously further building Afghanistan’s forces and maintaining security. Furthermore, ISAF supported reconstruction and development with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) along with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The PRTs were also disbanded and handed over to the Afghan Government in 2014.

Even though the OEF was officially disbanded in 2014 US and UK military presence continued on Afghan grounds. Furthermore, the Taliban continued to expand their control over Afghanistan in 2015, they continued to do so in the following years but due to US military forces and NATO RSM still being present, the ANSF remained fairly in control even though the conflict was very present. In 2020 the Doha peace agreement between the US and Taliban has signed in which the US committed to starting withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan while the Taliban committed to cutting ties with

terrorist groups. Then in 2021, the US decided to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by September. The withdrawal of all American troops significantly lowered the morale of Afghan forces since they heavily relied on the US military and its contractors.

After the withdrawal of US troops, the security situation deteriorated and the Taliban could make significant advances. In August of 2021, the Taliban formally overtook Afghanistan. This created a humanitarian crisis since the government can not properly form and thus is unable to provide health services as well as economic opportunities. Furthermore, the Taliban's ideals are not in accordance with the UN's perception of Human Rights.

With the Taliban in the government, NATO has currently suspended support to Afghanistan, even missions such as "Resolute Support". Any government in place needs to adhere to international obligations such as safeguarding the human rights of all Afghans, upholding the rule of law, allowing humanitarian access and not being a safe haven for terrorists, to gain support from NATO for the security of their country. In December 2021 NATO Foreign Ministers discussed the various lessons learned from its involvement in Afghanistan which included the dangers of mission expansion and the immense capabilities of NATO, these are the outlined key conclusions and recommendations.

These are findings that are supposed to inform and help NATO's political and military leaders in the future of crisis management operations.

Even though NATO missions have been disbanded the UN mission UMAMA continues operating to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
11 th of September 2001	Al-Qaeda carried out terrorist attacks across the US
7 th of October 2001	US launches Operation Enduring Freedom
9 th of December 2001	Taliban collapses through OEF and Northern Alliance
20 th of December 2001	UN launches the International Security Assistance Force
1 st of August 2001	NATO assumes command of ISAF and begins to expand
1 st of January 2011	ISAF begins to transfer responsibility to Afghan forces
1 st of January 2014	Security responsibility fully transferred, ISAF ends
31 st of December 2014	OEF was disbanded, US troops ordered to withdraw
29 th of February 2020	Doha peace agreement signed
30 th of September 2021	All US troops and contractors removed from Afghanistan



15th of August 2021

Taliban takes over Kabul gaining full control over Afghanistan

Major Parties Involved

Afghanistan

As the focus of the entire issue, Afghanistan is fundamental in both the cause, continuance, and resolution of the issue. Afghanistan used to be a so-called “safe haven” for terrorist groups (such as al Qaeda), in order to evade and plot against (commonly) Western powers - like the United States. Moreover, considering the change in leadership as of late 2021, the international status and general stability of the nation has only deteriorated, and the new Taliban-led government has needed to prioritize multilateral cooperation in order to avoid total economic collapse. This dominantly comes through UN agencies and NGOs. The US has continued to provide support to the people of Afghanistan, however through means such as humanitarian aid and diplomatic collaboration, rather than infrastructural reconstruction.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is a militant Islamic organization mostly founded by Osama bin Laden. The organization began in 1980 as a logistical network supporting Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union during the Afghan War. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan the organization transformed into opposing other regimes they considered corrupt. Later the organization turned to terrorist methods, declaring *jihad* (holy war) on the United States.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The Afghanistan War has been a major focus of NATO since it began in 2001. NATO has provided military and logistical support to the Afghan government and international forces in the country in order to help stabilize the region and combat terrorism. This has included providing training for Afghan security forces, air strikes, and other forms of support. Discussing NATO’s involvement in the issue of Afghanistan is important as it gives insight into the strategic and operational decisions made by NATO in the country, and it can also provide a better understanding of the current situation in Afghanistan.

The Taliban

The Taliban is a (predominantly Pashtun), Islamic fundamentalist militant group that currently acts as Afghanistan’s - yet to be officially recognized - government, having taken power in 2021. The Taliban is known for its strict interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia law), and its opposition to democracy and secular government. They have been involved in armed conflicts with various governments and have been responsible for numerous human rights violations.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been a key player in NATO's involvement in Afghanistan since the beginning of the war. The UK has provided troops, financial support, and diplomatic efforts to help stabilize the country. The UK has also been a major contributor to NATO's counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan and has been instrumental in helping to broker peace negotiations with the Taliban. The UK has also played a significant role in the development of Afghan security forces, and in the reconstruction of the country. As one of the founding members of NATO, the UK has been a major supporter of the mission in Afghanistan and has been a key voice in determining the way ahead.

United States

The United States is the most relevant and significant nation in the issue, aside from Afghanistan itself. The primary basis of modern day conflict in Afghanistan stemmed from an attack on the US and their subsequent retaliation. Furthermore, the United States is the most powerful member of NATO, and as such has played a major role in the organization's activities in Afghanistan. The US has provided the vast majority of the troops and resources for the mission, and its leadership has been instrumental in determining the strategy and objectives of the mission. Additionally, the US has led the effort to increase funding for Afghan security forces and to support the Afghan government in establishing a more stable and secure environment.

Possible Solutions

Address financial instability and humanitarian crises

Afghanistan is suffering heavily financially (including a 20.7% retraction in 2021) and socially, with the country at risk of total economic collapse (without international intervention), as well as facing significant poverty, gender inequality and poor (physical and social) infrastructure. In order to combat these crucial weaknesses, delegates may consider methods of support through the implementation of task forces or the development of cooperation agreements between their delegation and that of Afghanistan. This diplomatic interaction with the Taliban is vital to progressing towards an adequate resolution to the issue, and steps toward this have already been made, such as:

- *Security Council Resolution 2615 (2021)*
- *Security Council Resolution 2626 (2022)*

Establish comprehensive long-term goals and action plan

In addition to aiding Afghanistan, a different potential solution to the crisis would be for NATO, alongside other member states, to create a concise, clear, and comprehensive plan of action that



would ensure the mitigation of any negative effects that may result from NATO's expansion or international missions. This could include both a narrow and holistic oversight of several operations that would ultimately look to support the restabilization of Afghanistan. As a part of this, delegates may also consider implementing various long-term goals, in tandem with the action plan - similar to that of the Sustainable Development Goals - in order to counter the ongoing socio-economic crisis.

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