Introduction

Afghanistan has entered a pivotal but highly uncertain time. As all parties involved in the conflict recognize that a military solution is not achievable, increased war fatigue has shifted Afghan and international attention toward an eventual political settlement of the ruthless conflict. Grassroots peace movements and a three-day cease-fire between the Afghan government and the Taliban in June 2018 echo a widespread desire for sustainable peace emanating from the Afghan population, wishing nothing but an end to the decades of war they have lived under. Despite a plurality of promising developments, many issues still are to be resolved before a process of sustainable peace becomes a plausible reality.

On an international scale, President Trump’s appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation in September 2018, and a series of negotiations between U.S. and Taliban representatives, have heightened anticipation that a breakthrough could be at hand, albeit vital negotiations among Afghans on ending the war and mapping the country’s political future have not yet begun. Concern is also spreading about what sacrifices peace might entail. The security situation has worsened in recent years, with rates of civilian casualties reaching record highs in 2018. A flawed and contested parliamentary election in October 2018 and uncertainty around the presidential election in September 2019 have worsened the already unstable political situation. The humanitarian situation is also a major concern, as the possibility of a prolonged drought and other resource scarcity issues threaten greater levels of displacement and human suffering in addition to those caused by the era of conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Sharia
Religious law derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Quran and the hadith. Nowadays, Sharia has been widely replaced by statutes inspired by European models. While the constitutions of most Muslim-majority states contain references to sharia, legislators who codified these laws sought to modernize them without abandoning their foundations in traditional jurisprudence. The Islamic revival of the late 20th century brought along calls by Islamist movements for full implementation of sharia, including hudud corporal punishments, such as stoning and amputation.

**IEDs**

An improvised explosive device (IED) is a bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. As they are makeshift bombs, they are often hard to detect: they do not necessarily contain any metal, making them invisible to detectors. Activated by wires, pressure plates etc, they can only be spotted by paying close attention and carefully scrutinizing every meter of terrain. They cause heavy casualties, both military and civilian, especially children. IEDs are also commonly used as roadside bombs, with some strong enough to destroy armoured vehicles.

**WHAM package**

The international community has poured billions of dollars into aid, services and protection for civilians in Afghanistan, hoping that winning their support would help the fight against insurgents. The “Winning Hearts And Minds” packages are designed to pursue in that optic, and albeit their contents may vary, they are always aiding those who receive them.

**Background Information**

**Events leading up to the situation in Afghanistan**

*The Soviet-Afghan war*

Late December 1979, Soviet troops marched into the Afghan territory. The purpose of this large-scale deployment was to support the Afghan communist government in its conflict with anti-communist Muslim guerrillas during the Afghan War (1978–92). The troops then proceeded to remain in Afghanistan until mid-February 1989. But to understand the motives and conditions that led to major military action, it is important to take a step back in history. In April 1978, Afghanistan’s centrist government, headed by Pres. Mohammad Daud Khan, was overthrown by left-wing military
officers led by Nur Mohammad Taraki. Power was thereafter shared by two 
Marxist-Leninist political groups, the People’s (Khalq) Party and the Banner 
(Parcham) Party—which had earlier emerged from a single organization, the 
People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan—and had reunited in an uneasy coalition 
shortly before the coup. The new government, which had little popular support, 
forged close ties with the Soviet Union, launched ruthless purges of all domestic 
opposition, and began extensive land and social reforms that were bitterly resented 
by the devoutly Muslim and largely anti-communist population. Insurgencies arose 
against the government among both tribal and urban groups, and all of 
these—known collectively as the mujahideen (Arabic mujāhīdūn, “those who engage 
in jihad”)—shared an Islamic orientation.

These uprisings, along with internal fighting and coups within the government, 
prompted the Soviets to invade the country on the night of December 24, 1979, 
sending in over 30,000 troops and overthrowing the short-lived presidency of 
People’s leader Hafizullah Amin. The aim of the Soviet operation was to prop up their 
new but faltering client state, now headed by Babrak Karmal. However, the new head 
of state was unable to attain significant popular support. Backed by the United 
States, the mujahideen rebellion grew, spreading to all parts of the country. The 
Soviets initially left the suppression of the rebellion to the Afghan army, but the latter 
was beset by mass desertions and remained largely ineffective throughout the war.

The Afghan War quickly settled down into a stalemate, with more than 100,000 
Soviet troops controlling the cities, larger towns, and major garrisons and the 
mujahideen moving with relative freedom throughout the countryside. Soviet troops 
tried to crush the insurgency by various tactics, but the guerrillas generally eluded 
their attacks. The Soviets then attempted to eliminate the mujahideen’s civilian 
support by bombing and depopulating the rural areas. These tactics sparked a 
massive flight from the countryside; by 1982 some 2.8 million Afghans had sought 
asylum in Pakistan, and another 1.5 million had fled to Iran. The mujahideen were 
eventually able to neutralize Soviet air power through the use of shoulder-fired 
anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the Soviet Union’s Cold War adversary, the United 
States.
The mujahideen were fragmented politically into a handful of independent groups, and their military efforts remained uncoordinated throughout the war. The quality of their arms and combat organization gradually improved, however, owing to experience and to the large quantity of arms and other war material shipped to the rebels, via Pakistan, by the United States and other countries and by sympathetic Muslims from throughout the world. In addition, an indeterminate number of Muslim volunteers—popularly termed “Afghan-Arabs,” regardless of their ethnicity—traveled from all parts of the world to join the opposition.

The war in Afghanistan became a quagmire for what by the late 1980s was a disintegrating Soviet Union. (The Soviets suffered some 15,000 dead and many more injured.) Despite having failed to implement a sympathetic regime in Afghanistan, in 1988 the Soviet Union signed an accord with the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and agreed to withdraw its troops. The Soviet withdrawal was completed on February 15, 1989, and Afghanistan returned to nonaligned status.

**The build-up to US intervention**

Despite the withdrawal of the foreign armed forces, Afghanistan did not achieve peace. A civil war is waged as the mujahideen push to overthrow Najibullah, which topples in 1992. The fight for power continued, as the civil war now opposed different parties all claiming rule over the nation. 1996 marked a turning point in the situation: the Taliban seized control of Kabul, and introduced a hard-line version of Islam, banning women from work, and introducing Islamic punishments, which include stoning to death and amputations. The following year, controlling about \( \frac{2}{3} \) of the country, they became recognized as legitimate rulers by neighboring Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Taliban allied with Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden. Funded by the United-States to fight the Soviet troops, the group took a stance against their former allies, with as central lament the presence of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, or “the occupation of the land of the two holiest sites.” Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, bin Laden offered to defend Saudi Arabia with his Arab legion, but the Saudi royals decided that the U.S. military would be a better bet. Six years later, American soldiers were still in Saudi Arabia in a bid to contain Saddam Hussein. Bin Laden saw the United States as the power behind the throne: the “far enemy” that propped up apostate regimes in the Middle East. Muslims, he wrote, should abandon their petty local fights and unite to drive the Americans out of Saudi
Arabia: “destroying, fighting and killing the enemy until, by the Grace of Allah, it is completely defeated.” This stance taken against the United States was at the origin of several US-targeted terrorist actions, including the August 1998 bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed 224 people in total, 12 of them American. The United States responded with a quasi-war against al-Qaeda and its state sponsors, which combined a legal indictment of bin Laden with limited military action, including cruise missile strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998 that killed at least six al-Qaeda personnel. With Oussama ben Laden being considered at the head of a terrorist organization and guilty of crimes, the UN involves itself in the situation by imposing an air embargo and financial sanctions to force Afghanistan to hand over Osama Bin Laden for trial. In 2000, al-Qaeda suicide bombers hit the USS Cole at a port in Yemen, killing 17. The following year, the terrorist group brought the war to the American homeland with the 9/11 attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people. Paroxysm of Al Qaeda’s attacks against the US, 9/11 shook the world and was met with an iron fist on the American side.

The US-waged Afghan war.
In response to the terrorist actions, the US declared war on Afghanistan, initiating hostilities with airstrikes, followed by a land invasion of the country after joining forces with allies including the UK and the Northern Alliance, removing the Taliban from power within weeks under mission “Enduring Freedom”. (For further information on this mission, see articles about the Iraq war.) After establishing a new government in Afghanistan, the US continued its military deployments, declaring war against an enemy of all nations: a war on terror.

The War on Terror mainly opposes the Taliban and the US through unconventional warfare. Where the US has resorted to regular troop deployments and formally fought warfare with official units, the Taliban proved to be experts at guerilla warfare, carrying out brisk offensives and operating as small “sting task forces”, in order to harass the US occupation army. Many attacks are carried out persistently in the form of suicide bombings, long-range suppressive fire, heavy shelling of the positions of the armed forces employing recoilless rifles, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), and other means of high caliber weaponry. Similarly to the Vietcong in Vietnam, the Taliban have vast cave and tunnel systems, covering all the areas they shortly gain control over with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), which are often undetectable
with metal detectors and thus require the soldiers to be fully aware at all times. As the Taliban further engages in guerilla warfare, their fighting force becomes more dispatched and camouflaged amongst civilians. They force inhabitants to grant them cover during their operations, and can flee the fighting scene through their vast cave network. One could consider them a ghost force, extremely hard to distinguish from regular civilians as they are no conventional fighting force and do not wear uniforms, and dangerous because of their access to all sorts of weaponry.

In 2003, the US officially ended their war in Afghanistan, as they commenced one in Iraq. However, the UN acknowledged the threat the Taliban pose, and following their objective of fighting radicalism and extremism, commenced a combat mission in Afghanistan through their NATO body. This decision saw a US-led deployment of coalition forces take over the formerly US-only war effort in Afghanistan.

*International involvement and support from the US*

The coalition forces, operating under NATO, have as main objective to combat the Taliban, and liberate territories from their rule. In a strive towards guaranteeing the safety of towns and villages against attacks, of which many suicide bombings, NATO took the lead of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan on 11 August 2003. Mandated by the United Nations, ISAF’s primary objective was to enable the Afghan government to provide effective security across the country and develop new Afghan security forces to ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists. From 2011, responsibility for security was gradually transitioned to Afghan forces, which took the lead for security operations across the country by summer 2013. The transition process was completed and Afghan forces assumed full security responsibility at the end of 2014, when the ISAF mission was completed. A new, smaller non-combat mission (“Resolute Support”) was launched on 1 January 2015 to provide further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.

The USIP (United States Institute for peace) has four different objectives in Afghanistan: firstly, supporting the successful and sustainable Afghan Peace Process (high-level consultations with a range of top Afghan and international stakeholders). Secondly, USIP has partnered with universities in Kabul, Herat, Nagarhar, Khost, Kapisa, and Kandahar provinces to teach peacebuilding and conflict resolution.
Thirdly, USIP publishes research—including field studies—to inform policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners on the key topics related to peace and conflict in Afghanistan, including the underlying drivers of conflict, peace negotiations, security, the economy, and politics. Finally, USIP has been working since 2002 to strengthen the rule of law in Afghanistan by identifying peaceful means of dispute resolution, developing partnerships between state and community actors, and improving access to justice.

A complex political situation

**Taliban rule**

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (totalitarian Islamic state), was established in 1996 when the Taliban began their rule of Afghanistan, after they consolidated their power on Kabul, the capital. The Afghan capital was then transferred to Kandahar. At its peak, formal diplomatic recognition of the Taliban's government was acknowledged by only three nations: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); the Taliban, by then, had established control over approximately 90% of the country. Remaining parts of the country (northeast) were held by the Northern Alliance, who maintained broad international recognition as a continuation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. In the early 2000s, the international opposition to the regime drastically increased, with diplomatic recognition from the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan being rescinded. The Islamic Emirate ceased to exist on December 17, 2001, after being overthrown by the Northern Alliance, which had been bolstered by a US-led invasion of the country.

**Foreign interests in Afghanistan**

A possible settlement of the situation in Afghanistan is strongly hampered by foreign interests. Many nations prioritize their personal interests over the interest of Afghanistan, despite the conflict being waged within the nation itself, meaning that it’s civilians are the ones affected by it. This creates a controversy: possible solutions are oftentimes disregarded because of external powers disagreeing with it. It thus becomes important to understand the major nations and their interests, which are partially at the origin of the current situation in the war-torn region. For example, America’s political objective in Afghanistan is a negotiated settlement, rather than the defeat of the Taliban. This sees American interests converge with Pakistan’s. All
sides now agree the Taliban have a role to play in future Afghan governance. As such, it makes little strategic sense to continue to sanction Pakistan over its support to the Taliban and risk impacting long-term geostrategic flexibility. The Taliban now present a shared interest to exploit for the strategic gain of both sides. By resetting relations with Pakistan, the United States can potentially reduce Pakistan’s reliance on an emerging Sino-Russian partnership. If Pakistan falls decisively into the Sino-Russian camp then by extension so will Afghanistan. Therefore, the best way for America to maintain influence in Afghanistan in the long-term is to continue its reinvigorated engagement with Pakistan. Pakistan is more important to America’s long-term interests in Central and South Asia than Afghanistan as its geography offers an opportunity to exploit the geopolitical seam running through the region. This potentially offers an opportunity to disrupt Chinese economic flows and security infrastructure as a counter to its Pacific military power, while also providing an ability to threaten Russia’s Southern flank in any future confrontation.

Current political situation, latest elections
The current political situation of Afghanistan is very unstable and heavily contested. The latest election took place on September 28, 2019. The turnout was a historical low, where only around 2 of the 9.7 million registered voters expressed their vote. Despite low turnout, voting during election day was described by Reuters as being held in a "relative calm" situation, with only 3 deaths and 37 injuries occurring due to "small-scale" Taliban attacks. Al Jazeera also noted that in spite of the low voter turnout, violence was only "sporadic". However, a tally held by The New York Times, which was based on conversations with local officials, found a death toll of "at least 30 security personnel and 10 civilians", and a number of "at least 40 security forces and 150 civilians" injured — which, according to the Times, was "much higher than the official reports, but in line with the average daily toll of the country’s long-running war."

Humanitarian crisis

Economic struggles
The war-torn nation struggles to build itself back up. The nation’s economic struggles, which originate from a prominent informality in the national economy, can be identified as one of the root causes for the impossibility to thwart the decline of the
nation. There is a vast weapon trafficking market, generating much profit for those participating in the trade, but as it is considered smuggling and therefore illegal, it is not declared. The state does not generate any profit from this, and it only enhances the terrorist threat as access to weaponry (including high caliber arms) is widespread. The illegal weapon sales hint towards a more general issue: smuggling. As prices of food and other products are rising, specifically in urban areas, many undeclared shops open, further enhancing the black market. Lastly, an opioid crisis plagues Afghanistan, (see map) as the nation's opium poppy harvest produces more than 90% of illicit heroin globally, and more than 95% of the European supply. More land is used for opium in Afghanistan than is used for coca cultivation in Latin America. In 2007, 93% of the non-pharmaceutical-grade opiates on the world market originated in Afghanistan. This amounts to an export value of about US$4 billion, with a quarter of profits allocated to opium farmers and the rest going to district officials, insurgents, warlords, and drug traffickers. As of 2017, opium production provides about 400,000 jobs in Afghanistan, more than the Afghan National Security Forces.
Civilian troubles

Because of the political and military complexity of the situation in Afghanistan, civilians are often overlooked, despite being the primary victims of the conflict and first affected by newly adopted rulings. Overall, there is a lack of consideration for them, and albeit efforts made by several NGOs, the situation remains grave. With 2019 almost over, humanitarian needs continue to grow in Afghanistan due to ongoing violence, natural disasters, internal displacement, growing food insecurity, and dropping temperatures. The overall security situation remains tense across the country. Armed clashes affecting civilians continue across many parts of the country against a backdrop of delayed preliminary Presidential electoral results and a possible resumption of talks between the United States of America and the Taliban. Between 2 and 4 November, three separate incidents of pressure-plate IED attacks occurred killing 20 people and injuring 10 in the Paktika, Takhar, and Baghlan provinces. The majority of casualties were women and children, including five children killed and four other children injured by a roadside pressure-plate IED in Takhar province on their way to school.

From August to October 2019, one-third of people in Afghanistan were facing severe acute food insecurity, according to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Alert (can be found in the appendix section). While there was some improvement (33 per cent in 2019 compared to 44 per cent in 2018) in the acute food insecurity situation compared to last year, the situation remains very severe with 12.6 million people in crisis (IPC Phase 3) or emergency (IPC Phase 4) situations. It should be noted that the 2019 analysis included urban populations while the 2018 analysis only took into account rural populations.

Furthermore, urban populations were found to be equally or in some areas even more food insecure than rural populations. The main causes of food insecurity were: high unemployment and food prices, natural disasters, and the ongoing conflict in many areas resulting in internal displacement and lack of access to agricultural lands. The number of people experiencing severe acute food insecurity is expected to rise in the coming months (November 2019 to March 2020) to 13.9 million people or 37 per cent of the population, out of which an estimated 3.4 million people are likely to be in an emergency situation and 10.5 million in a crisis situation based on WorldPop-Flowminder population data.
Despite these obstacles, humanitarian agencies continued to respond to people in need. Life-saving assistance was delivered in 372 of the 401 districts of Afghanistan (93 per cent of all districts). From January to September 2019, 5.4 million people have been reached with assistance at least once. This included 3.9 million people who received food and emergency livelihood assistance. To address malnutrition, 880,000 women and children received emergency nutrition services, a significant increase from the 469,000 reached as of June 2019. In addition, 1,060,000 people were provided with access to safe water; 500,000 people were assisted with shelter, emergency relief items, and winterisation support; 185,000 children in emergencies were provided with access to education. Some 820,000 people accessed health services and 199,262 people were reached with mine risk education. Over 850,000 people were reached with protection assistance.

Overall, civilian casualties in Afghanistan have hit a record high in 2018. At the roots of these deplorable figures are several factors. Airstrikes, often carried out with poor accuracy, result in a high civilian death toll. The Taliban also massacre the civilian population, either by the punishments they inflict which result in death, or by using civilians as human shields. In their attacks, they often target civilians, meaning that suicide bombings also are a cause of the casualties within the population. Lack of access to food, water and medical supplies is another important factor to consider when studying the origins of the rising civilian death tolls.

**Women’s rights**

Under Taliban rule, women’s rights suffered a great deal. By imposing Sharia law in the conquered territories women saw several of their rights and actions denied and prohibited. These bans included going to school or studying, working, leaving the house without a male chaperone and showing their skin in public. The prohibitions further included involvement in politics or speaking publicly, and accessing healthcare delivered by men (with women forbidden from working, healthcare was virtually inaccessible). If women or girls went against any of these bans they had to undergo severe punishments ranging from flogging, to public beatings or even death sentences. By applying all these bans on women’s daily lives they became invisible in their own society, and completely dependent on their male “protector”. This in turn
meant that the man of the family had every freedom to rape and assault the women under his care since they were not protected by any law.

**General lack of freedom**

**Entertainment**

It is well known that in order to control a population you must take away all forms of solidarity they may have, this comes down to banning several forms of entertainment that were thought to bring people together. Anything from traditional wedding festivities to playing musical instruments or singing simple songs was prohibited in the taliban rule. The bans went as far as banning a national holiday marking the first day of Spring because it was considered an insult to Islam. Television was limited to a few channels approved and controlled by the taliban, and cinema became almost extinct in the taliban zones. To further their grasp on the population the taliban decreed that excessive laughter was also an act going against the word of God. Any kind of insubordination to the bans on entertainment was met with brutal punishments, from lapidation to amputations and public beatings.

**Education**

Education under the Taliban rule shifted from a basic curriculum to a series of classes revolving around Islam. Every village that was conquered by the taliban had to change its educational program. Classes like social studies, sports, culture and history were replaced by the study of the Coran or other Islam related subjects. Books that depict living creatures were destroyed and any mention of afghan culture or the afghan flag was ripped out.

In all Taliban ruled territories, girls were banned from going to school and young boys would stop attending school because they wanted to escape the brainwashing perpetrated in the schools. According to the UNESCO Atlas of Out-Of-School children, in 2003 Afghanistan had the highest percentage of children not attending primary school in the world (73%)

**Mass displacement of refugees**

Afghan refugees are nationals of Afghanistan who left their country as a result of major wars or persecution. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marks the first
wave of internal displacement and refugee flow from Afghanistan to neighboring Pakistan and Iran that began providing shelter to Afghan refugees. When the Soviet war ended in 1989, these refugees started to return to their homeland. In April 1992, a major civil war began after the mujahideen took over control of Kabul and the other major cities. Afghans again fled to neighboring countries.

A total of 6.3 million Afghan refugees were hosted in Pakistan and Iran by 1990. As of 2013, Afghanistan was the largest refugee-producing country in the world, a title held for 32 years. Afghans are currently the second largest refugee group after Syrian refugees. The majority of Afghan refugees (95%) are located in Iran and Pakistan. Some countries that were part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) took in small number of Afghans that worked with their respective forces. Ethnic minorities, like Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, often fled to India.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**Afghanistan**
Afghanistan, a former kingdom, is war-torn, disputed between the Taliban and coalition forces which side with the non-taliban Afghan government. Further information can be found throughout the report.

**Northern Alliance**
The Afghan Northern Alliance, officially known as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, was a united military front that came to formation in late 1996, after the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) took over Kabul. The United Front was assembled by key leaders of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, particularly president Burhanuddin Rabbani and former Defense Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud. Initially including mostly Tajiks but by 2000, it was later joined by leaders of other ethnic groups. The Northern Alliance fought a defensive war against the Taliban government. They received support from Iran, Russia, Turkey, India, Tajikistan and others, while the Taliban were backed by Pakistan. By 2001, the Northern Alliance controlled less than 10% of the country, cornered in the north-east and based in Badakhshan province.

**People's republic of China (PRC)**
While Sino-Afghani relations can be dated back to the 7th Century, today, China is primarily concerned with security in the region. In the 20th century, China supplied Mujahideen with military aid and arms in fear of being encircled by the USSR. More recently, China stated it would not contribute militarily to Afghanistan and wants peace in the region.

**France and the United Kingdom**
Both France and the United Kingdom have helped to reduce fighting by removing their respective troops from the conflict. Previously, both nations had supported the Afghan National Army. France was involved with the conflict in part due to their investment with NATO and its mission in Afghanistan. The UK is not only militarily involved, but also has several humanitarian projects in the region to improve living conditions.

**Russian Federation**
Today, Russia employs diplomatic and political leverage to protect its interests in Afghanistan. However, it has little interest in exerting hard-power in the country, but rather aims to consolidate its increasing ties with stakeholders inside and outside of Afghanistan. Russia ties with ties with major factions of Afghanistan, including elements of the former Northern Alliance – Uzbek and Tajik groups – and perhaps most significantly, the Afghan Taliban. Furthermore, Russian engagement with the militants drew attention, and some flak, when the Kremlin invited Taliban representatives to Moscow for a meeting in September, days after Donald Trump declared US negotiations with Afghan group ‘dead’.

**United States of America**
Historically, the United States has armed the Mujahideen to fight against the USSR during the Cold War, resulting in a rise of extremism and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, their relationship starkly changed following the 9/11 attacks. The US acknowledged Afghanistan as a threat and began bombings. They lead NATO in fighting the Taliban as part of the War on Terror, supplying the majority of troops and equipment, as well as coordinating missions. Today, they are a dominant member of NATO’s “Resolute Support” mission.

**The Taliban**
The Taliban represent an Islamic fundamentalist political movement and military organization in Afghanistan currently waging jihad within that country. Since 2016, their leader is Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada. They were condemned internationally for the harsh enforcement of their interpretation of Islamic Sharia law, in the example of massacres against Afgh
civilians, especially women, denied food supplies to 160,000 starving civilians, and policy of "scorched earth" (burning vast areas of fertile land and destroying tens of thousands of homes).

**North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**

NATO is leading a non-combat mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions. The Resolute Support Mission (RSM) was created in January 2015, when responsibility for security in Afghanistan was transferred to the Afghan national defence and security forces (following the completion of the mission of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in December 2014). NATO Allies and partners are helping to sustain Afghan security forces and institutions financially, as part of a broader international commitment to Afghanistan, while NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership provides a framework for wider political dialogue and practical cooperation.

**United Nations Development Programme**

UNDP has implemented a specific programme for Afghanistan. It works to achieve transformational change that will lead to freedom both from poverty and food insecurity for every Afghan. The organisation mainly assists in the achievement of Afghanistan's own priorities, specifically outlined in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and National Priority Programmes. However, the organisation extends its assistance in international development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, and other global agreements in which Afghanistan participates.

The 6 main objectives to which UNDP Afghanistan contributes and for which they strive are “

1. Promoting inclusive and legitimate politics at all levels of the Afghan society, including assisting in the preparation of credible and fair elections.
2. Developing the capacity of national and sub-national institutions to deliver essential services and ensure that development gains are durable.
3. Strengthening the rule of law, fulfilment of human rights, and increased access to legal and judicial services.
4. Empowering women in the legal, economic, social and political spheres.
5. Building capacities to promote stabilization, strengthen democratic governance and promote sustainable economic and social development.
6. Managing natural resources in ways that contribute to poverty reduction and improved lives for the people of Afghanistan, while ensuring that economic development is environmentally sustainable.”
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
There are almost 2.5 million registered refugees from Afghanistan. They comprise the largest protracted refugee population in Asia and the second largest refugee population in the world. In light of the increasingly deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country, the violence continues to drive people from their homes in 2019. UNHCR's work in the country includes coordinating with the authorities to ensure returns to Afghanistan takes place in a voluntary, safe, gradual and dignified manner. We also lead on two inter-agency groups, one on protection and response to internally displaced people, and the other on emergency shelter and non-food items, providing core relief items and emergency shelter assistance to vulnerable displaced people.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
The UNAMA was established on 28 March 2002 by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401, at the request of the Government of Afghanistan. Its two pillars are Political Affairs and Development and Humanitarian Aid. The missions' headquarters is in Kabul and it maintains a permanent and extensive field presence across the country, in addition to liaison offices in Pakistan and Iran. UNAMA is a political UN mission that assists people living in Afghanistan and lays the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is renewed annually and its mandate has been altered over time to reflect the current needs of the country. Most recently, it was renewed for a year until 17 September 2020.

Mujahideen
The mujahideen fought against Soviet and DRA troops during the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989). Eventually, the seven main mujahideen parties allied as the political bloc called Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahideen. Many Muslims from other countries assisted the various mujahideen groups in Afghanistan. Some groups of these veterans became significant players in later conflicts in and around the Muslim world.

Timeline of Events
1919
Emir Amanullah Khan declares independence from British influence
December 1979
The Soviet Army invades Afghanistan and establishes a communist government.
The Mujahideen come together in Pakistan to form an alliance against Soviet forces. More than half of the Afghan population is estimated to be displaced by war.

1989
The last remaining Soviet troops leave the Afghan territory. Civil war is waged as the Mujahideen push to overthrow Najibullah, the Afghan president.

1996
The Taliban seize control of Kabul and introduce a radical vision of Islam, imposing an extremist conception of Sharia.

1999
The UN impose an air embargo as well as financial sanctions in an effort to force Afghanistan to hand over Osama bin Laden for trial.

October 2001
US-led bombings of Afghanistan commence, following 9/11. Other Anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces enter Kabul shortly afterwards.

January 2002
“International Security Assistant Force” (ISAF). It is the start of a protracted fight against the Taliban.

August 2003
Nato takes full control of security in Kabul, which consists of its first-ever operational commitment outside Europe.

September 2005
The first parliamentary elections in over 30 years are held, giving the Afghans an opportunity to vote, despite heavy repressive actions undertaken by the Taliban.

February 2009
Nato countries pledge to increase military and other commitments in Afghanistan after US announces dispatch of 17,000 extra troops.

December 2009
US President Obama decides to boost US troop numbers in Afghanistan by 30,000, bringing total to 100,000. He further announces that the US will begin withdrawing its forces by 2011.

August 2010
All Dutch troops quit.

February 2011
Civilian casualties since the 2001 invasion hit record levels in 2010, according to Afghanistan Rights Monitor reports.

October 2011
India sign a strategic partnership to expand co-operation in security and development.

July 2012
A Tokyo donor conference pledges $16bn in civilian aid to Afghanistan up to 2016, with US, Japan, Germany and UK supplying the bulk of funds.

June 2013
The Afghan army takes command of all military and security operations from Nato forces.
October 2014  The US and the United Kingdom officially end their combat operations in Afghanistan.

December 2014  NATO formally ends its 13-year combat mission in Afghanistan, passing the baton to the Afghan forces. Despite the official end to ISAF's combat role, violence persists across much of the country, with 2014 said to be the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since 2001.

January 2015  NATO-led follow-on mission "Resolute Support" gets underway, with some 12,000 personnel to provide further training and support for Afghan security forces. Islamic State (IS) group emerges in eastern Afghanistan and within a few months captures a large swathe of Taliban-controlled areas in Nangarhar province.

September 2015  Taliban briefly capture the major northern city of Kunduz in their most significant advance since being forced from power in 2001.

May 2016  New Taliban leader Mullah Mansour is killed in a US drone attack in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

July 2016  US President Barack Obama says 8,400 US troops will remain in Afghanistan into 2017 in light of the "precarious security situation". NATO also agrees to maintain troop numbers and reiterates a funding pledge for local security forces until 2020.

August-October 2016  Taliban advance to the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand, and to the northern city of Kunduz. The group has brought much of the two provinces under its control since the bulk of NATO forces withdrew by end of 2014.

August 2017  US President Donald Trump says he's sending more troops to fight a resurgent Taliban.

September 2019  Protracted peace talks between the Taliban and the United States break down.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Renewal of the Mandate of Unama, 17 December 2019 (S/RES/2489)
- Resolution on the functioning of the 1988 sanction regime in Afghanistan, 21 December 2019 (S/RES/2255)
- High Commissioner's report on Afghanistan, 21 February 2018 (A/HRC/37/45)
Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The 1988 sanction regime (2011)

The situation in Afghanistan has been central to the international scope of attention for over 40 years. Through the years, many attempts have been made towards solving the various issues plaguing the nation. The situation escalated to become an international concern when the terrorist threat was evaluated. Therefore, in order to fight the emerging Taliban forces, which were financed and supported by various countries, most notably by the US, the UNSC adopted RES 1988, also known as the 1988 Sanction Regime (2011). The Security Council reaffirmed that the situation in Afghanistan continued to constitute a threat to
international peace and security. The provisions of the resolution, adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, aimed to reduce the terrorist threat by enhancing transparency and encouraging a peace process.

**Gaining civilians’ trust**

In response to the terrorist menace, Afghanistan saw many foreign troop deployments on its soil. These combat missions, led by the US under NATO, attempted to solve the issues in other ways than by solely eliminating the Taliban fighters. One of their main objectives in order to ensure a successful mission was gaining people’s trust. This was achieved through various means. The use of WHAM packages became more and more widespread in an effort to rally civilians to the cause. NATO bases were also known to pay civilians for any damage inflicted to their property during operations. The coalition forces made sure to have translators on every team after repeated incidents to ensure proper contact with the population. When invited to local town and village meetings, the armed forces sent delegations in order to assist the locals in the process of re-establishing their own local political system as it functioned before the Taliban’s arrival, and tried to promote cooperation between the troops and the village.

**Fighting the Taliban**

Within their combat missions, NATO took a series of measures to counter insurgency. These included identifying all suspects by taking pictures of them and creating respective files which would become a form of ID accessible by the coalition forces. The combat units were tasked with hunting weapon caches in the mountain and destroying all tunnel systems they would encounter. All found weapons were photographed in order to increase the amount of available documentation on the Taliban. This information was used to discover more about how they function, where the equipment comes from, and how to dismantle their organization. Night compound raids were organized mainly by the US Marines, in response to gathered intel suggesting the presence of Taliban leaders. These were in general very effective at eliminating strong stiches of the insurgents. Airstrikes were often employed against enemy shooting positions and strongholds but could result in civilian casualties, especially as some were carried out with poor target acquisition. The coalition established outposts on hilltops at the entry of valleys, thus creating choke-points, which further acted as look-outs for the main base which was often located within the valleys. Placing these in the most heated territories ensured that the Taliban was constantly under pressure, but also implies that the soldiers stationed in these strategic locations were
constantly exposed to heavy fighting. Lastly, a prominent intel campaign was set up, with the use of radios to intercept Taliban communications, translated by the Afghan forces present within the coalition groups.

Support missions

Another attempt at solving the issue was NATO’s Resolute Support mission. This operation consisted of training the Afghan army and security forces to help the nation regain control over their territory, enabling the transition of roles.

Reconstruction

In an effort to repopulate and rehabilitate areas, the NATO forces dispatched teams of engineers to rebuild roads, schools, and sometimes even entire districts, clearing the area from all IEDs, and focussing on rehabilitating the squares to encourage commerce, thus allowing for a return to “normal” life.

Elections

Elections have repeatedly been held in Afghanistan in an effort to establish a democratic government. However, some of the populous did not want a democracy. Every election held was accompanied by a wave of menaces and attacks by the Taliban, announcing for example that they “will cut off the finger of anyone if they find it marked with the indelible ink used to prevent multiple voting”. Voter fraud was also a common practice, and lead to the failure of multiple elections. Eventually, in 2018, parliamentary elections were held to elect members of the House of the People. They had originally been scheduled for 15 October 2016, but were postponed. The new Parliament was later inaugurated on April 26, 2019.

Peace talks between the Taliban and their opposition.

Peace talks were repeatedly organized between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and various other NATO member nations. However, none managed to find a congruent solution to the issue. The United States has resumed talks with the Taliban in Qatar, three months after President Donald Trump abruptly halted diplomatic efforts that could end the US's longest war. US peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, held the first official talks since September with the Afghan group in Qatar's capital, Doha. The renewed talks were expected to pave the way for direct talks between the Taliban and the government in Kabul and, ultimately, a possible peace agreement after more than 18 years of war.
Addressing radicalisation and extremism

Extremist views are one of the root causes for the situation in Afghanistan and for the growing terrorist threat. Hence, it has become a focal concern of the United Nations. To address this issue, former Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon released a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Delegates may wish to use some ideas from the Plan, which can be found in the appendix section. Fighting online extremist propaganda is also essential in the address of the issue. Therefore, many nations continuously have cyber experts target all forms of radicalized propaganda published online, and try to identify individuals and networks at their sources.

Possible Solutions

Reconciliation

This process will require inducements to insurgents to put down their arms, in a manner that does not alienate those members of the population that have remained loyal to the Afghan government. While some reintegration will happen organically at the local level, some may require an intervention from the centralized government.

To create circumstances most conducive for negotiations, the Afghan government must maintain military and social pressure on the Taliban, while simultaneously providing viable, attractive, and feasible alternatives for those choosing to abandon the fight. Due to the fractured nature of the Taliban, the Afghan government should apply a methodical and targeted approach, by pressuring the Taliban in designated areas with greater susceptibility to government influence, while pursuing a simultaneous “bottom-up and top-down” approach to reconciliation efforts.

Countering Narcotics

Narcotics serve to finance terrorist actions and contribute to the illegal Afghan economy. They are exported worldwide, meaning that this issue also directly concerns the other nations. In order to solve this issue, delegates may want to look into the Colombian anti-narcotics strategy, elements of which they could adapt to the Afghan narcotics crisis.

Reintegration

The prospect of large numbers of former insurgents, coupled with Afghanistan’s burgeoning youth bulge foreshadows new waves of social instability and potential radicalization. Preventing future insurgency or expanded criminal activity requires concurrent
investments in economic and the development of human capital, in order to provide a tangible opportunity for the youth population and former insurgents.

A regionally oriented program—loosely based on a national model—might fit the bill, only if it supports local infrastructure development, provides immediate work opportunities to former Taliban, and teaches basic skills to foster future employment and counter potential extremism. Programs should be geared toward youth engagement to implant national identity and provide job opportunity, but also build life skills to really foster hope for the future.

The Transition of Roles in Afghanistan

Most importantly, the coalition needs to continue shifting ownership of the mission to its Afghan partners. Otherwise, the US will find itself attempting to solve the same Afghan problems seventeen years from now. Failing to encourage Afghan independence and legitimate governance will result in Afghanistan remaining a donor state reliant upon foreign presence and support, in order to function beyond the current Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, the Afghan government needs to set the conditions for greater regional cooperation external to Afghanistan. Such Initiatives leveraging the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) can firstly encourage regional partnerships, and also increase interoperability with partners, in order to promote regional security and cooperation on other issues.

Bibliography


Appendix or Appendices

I. Plan of action to prevent violent extremism:
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II. War in Afghanistan: 17 Years Later | NowThis World:
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