



Security Council Topic Background Guide
Topic 1: The Situation in Afghanistan¹

25 September, 2017

Afghanistan poses a major challenge to the Security Council for two reasons. First, the situation in Afghanistan is very insecure – politically, militarily, and economically. Second, the Security Council has already passed a number of resolutions concerning Afghanistan’s security. According to the United Nations Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Yet, despite years of assistance and direct involvement from international actors, Afghanistan remains an unstable state that is regularly threatened by insurgent groups seeking to topple the current government. What can the Security Council do to address the seemingly insurmountable conflict in Afghanistan, so Afghans can return to their normal lives and the international community can attain greater peace and security?

History and Current Events

To understand and address the security situation in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand the history of Afghanistan and the current situation in the country.

A Brief History of Afghanistan

Since becoming independent from the British in 1919 and joining the UN in 1946, Afghanistan has experienced a number of tumultuous events, including King Zahir Shah’s “experiment with democracy” from 1964-1973; a military coup in 1973 that resulted in the creation of a parliamentary democracy; and Marxist coups in 1978 and 1979 followed by an insurgency and Soviet intervention. At first, the Soviet Union provided support to the new government. Later, when the government refused to take Soviet advice, the USSR toppled the government, installed a different leader, and invaded the country.² In 1980, the Security Council met to discuss (but due to the Soviet veto never passed) a draft resolution condemning Soviet actions.³

Although the USSR had as many as 120,000 troops in Afghanistan, it was able to subdue only 20% of the country between 1980-1984. According to the US Department of State:

An overwhelming majority of Afghans opposed the communist regime, either actively or passively. Afghan freedom fighters (mujahidin) made it almost impossible for the regime to maintain a system of local government outside major urban centers. Poorly armed at first, in 1984 the mujahidin began receiving substantial assistance in the form of weapons and training from the U.S. and other outside powers... By the mid-1980s, the tenacious Afghan resistance movement – aided by the United States,

¹ This document was written by Nicholas Potratz and Karen Ruth Adams with contributions from Jeffrey Frediani , David Knobel, and Jessica McCutcheon. Copyright 2017 by Nicholas Potratz.

² US Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, “Background Note: Afghanistan,” October 2008, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

³ UN News Centre, “Afghanistan & the United Nations,” available at <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/un-afghan-history.shtml>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others – was exacting a high price from the Soviets, both militarily within Afghanistan and by souring the U.S.S.R.'s relations with much of the Western and Islamic world.⁴

In 1984, the UN again tried to intervene, sponsoring talks among the US, Soviet, Afghan and Pakistani governments. But an end to the war was not negotiated until 1988, when “the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the United States and Soviet Union serving as guarantors, signed an agreement settling the major differences between them.” This agreement, known as the Geneva Accords, “called for U.S. and Soviet noninterference in the internal affairs of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the right of refugees to return to Afghanistan without fear of persecution or harassment, and ... full Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 15, 1989.”⁵

The ten-year war devastated Afghanistan. According to the US Department of State, from 1979-1989, “an estimated one million Afghan lives were lost.”⁶ In addition, approximately 4.5 million refugees fled the country. Of those, about three million went to Pakistan, and 1.5 million went to Iran. Afghanistan’s economy was at a standstill. The war destroyed schools, businesses, and industrial areas, as well as irrigation projects that moved water to arid regions throughout the country.

After 1989, the war continued despite Soviet withdrawal. According to the State Department, “the mujahidin were party neither to the negotiations nor to the 1988 agreement and, consequently, refused to accept the terms of the accords.” Thus there was “a new round of internecine fighting ... between the various militias, which had coexisted only uneasily during the Soviet occupation. With the demise of their common enemy, the militias’ ethnic, clan, religious, and personality differences surfaced, and the civil war continued.”⁷

From 1989-1994, “the country sank even further into anarchy.” Different parts of the territory were held by different mujahidin groups and warlords. On March 19, 1992, then Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, called for an end to the “human tragedy” that had been occurring in Afghanistan for more than a decade, while at the same time noting that the country had been “subjected to total devastation.”⁸

The civil war continued until 1999, when the Taliban – which had captured southern city of Kandahar from a local warlord in 1994 and slowly expanded its influence over the country – controlled about 90% of Afghanistan. Members of the Taliban are largely from the southern Pashtun ethnic group, which ruled Afghanistan for hundreds of years and today accounts for about 40% of Afghanistan’s population. According to Ahmed Rashid, a noted Pakistani journalist,

a handful of Taliban had fought the Soviet Red Army in the 1980s, more had fought the regime of President Najibullah who had hung on to power for four years after Soviet troops withdrew from Pakistan in 1989, but the vast majority had never fought the communists and were young Koranic students, drawn from hundreds of *madrassas* (Islamic theology schools) that had been set up in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.⁹

⁴ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.”

⁵ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.” Geriant Hughes “The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview” *Defence Studies*, Vol 8, No 3, (September 2008), pp. 326-350.

⁶ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.”

⁷ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.”

⁸ United Nations “Call for an end to Afghanistan’s ‘human tragedy’” *United Nations Chronicle*, Vol 29, No 2, (June 1992), p. 36.

⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 1-2.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

The Taliban rose to power in reaction to the devastation and anarchy of the civil war. In addition to establishing order, however, the Taliban “implemented an extreme interpretation of Islam – based upon the rural Pashtun tribal code – on the entire country and committed massive human rights violations,” especially against women, girls, and Afghan minority populations.¹⁰ As Rashid notes,

the Taliban had also implemented an extreme interpretation of the Sharia or Islamic law that appalled many Afghans and the Muslim world. The Taliban had closed down all girls’ schools and women were rarely permitted to venture out of their homes, even for shopping. The Taliban had banned every conceivable kind of entertainment including music, TV, videos, cards, kite-flying, and most sports and games. The Taliban’s brand of Islamic fundamentalism was so extreme that it appeared to denigrate Islam’s message of peace and tolerance and its capacity to live with other religious and ethnic groups. They were to inspire an new extremist form of fundamentalism across Pakistan and Central Asia, which refused to compromise with traditional Islamic values, social structures, or existing state systems.¹¹

Criminals and opponents of the regime were presumed guilty, expected to defend themselves without legal assistance, and were frequently executed in public. Women were stoned to death, and thieves had their limbs amputated.¹²

Al Qaeda, 9/11 and the 2001 War in Afghanistan

Despite international condemnation of the Taliban’s many human rights violations, international military forces did not enter Afghanistan until after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, which killed 2,974 people, mostly American civilians. The September 11 attacks were carried out by the Al Qaeda organization of Osama bin Laden, a citizen of Saudi Arabia who participated in the mujahidin fight against the Soviets in the 1980s and who operated terrorist training camps in southern Afghanistan beginning in the 1990s. After Al Qaeda carried out bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the Security Council imposed sanctions on the Taliban to encourage it to expel bin Laden and his group, but the Taliban refused. After the September 11 attacks, the Taliban again refused to expel Al Qaeda, so the US and its “coalition of the willing,” which included a number of Afghan warlords wishing to retake their territory, attacked the capital city of Kabul, forcing the Taliban to flee.¹³ This military operation was not explicitly authorized by the Security Council, but is generally considered to have been in accordance with the UN Charter, which authorizes the use of force in self-defense.¹⁴

Following the Taliban’s expulsion from Afghanistan, the Human Rights Watch assessed the situation as follows: “The demise of the Taliban brought with it the immediate prospect of greater personal freedoms and opportunities for women. It also portended a return to the political fragmentation that marked the country before the Taliban’s rise, and the reemergence of many of the same warlords whose fighting and disregard for international humanitarian law devastated Kabul between 1992 and 1996.”¹⁵

¹⁰ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.”

¹¹ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 2.

¹² Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 2-5.

¹³ US Department of State, “Background Note: Afghanistan.” See also Michael R. Gordon, “A Month in a Difficult Battlefield: Assessing U.S. War Strategy,” *New York Times*, November 8, 2001. David Rohde with Terence Neilan, “Northern Alliance Moves into Kabul,” *New York Times*, November 13, 2001. Seymour M. Hersh, “The Getaway: Questions surround a secret Pakistani airlift,” *New Yorker*, January 28, 2002, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/01/28/the-getaway-2>.

¹⁴ “Charter of the United Nations,” Article 51, available at <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2002: Afghanistan,” available at <http://hrw.org/wr2k2/asia1.html>

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The Karzai Government, ISAF, and UNAMA

In 2001, after the US-led coalition ousted the Taliban government from control in Kabul, the UN sponsored a conference in Bonn, Germany, where Afghan factions opposed to the Taliban created an interim government, the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) with Hamid Karzai as chairman. The Bonn Conference also established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to protect Karzai and the ATA in Kabul.

In 2002, Security Council Resolution 1401 established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the Bonn Agreement and coordinate the UN's peace and stability operations in the country. The mandate of UNAMA is renewed annually.¹⁶

In June 2002, a nationwide "Loya Jirga" (Grand Council) named Karzai president of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA), which drafted a constitution that was ratified by a Constitutional Loya Jirga on January 4, 2004. Democratic presidential elections were held in October 2004. According to the US State Department, "more than 8 million Afghans voted, 41% of whom were women." Karzai was the winner.¹⁷

In November 2009, Karzai was announced the winner of another presidential election. According to the UN, however, that election was marked by widespread fraud, as was a parliamentary election in 2010.¹⁸ In a tumultuous election in 2014, which included attacks from the Taliban in an effort to violently disrupt the political process, Ashraf Ghani was elected president of Afghanistan. After five months of negotiation with his primary competitor, Abdullah Abdullah, Ghani agreed to grant some political powers to Abdullah. The agreement was necessary following Abdullah's claims that Ghani had committed fraud during the election, and a later agreement by both candidates to audit the presidential elections and to form a unity government between the two. The US, in response, demanded that Ghani and Abdullah come to an agreement as a precondition for continued assistance.¹⁹

International Forces in Afghanistan

Initially ISAF was just a small peacekeeping force whose job was to provide security to the Karzai government in the capital city of Kabul. Over time, ISAF's job expanded. In 2003, at the US's request, NATO took over ISAF command from the UN and began to operate in the provinces. By October 2006, ISAF commanded international military forces that were fighting local warlords and Taliban insurgents throughout Afghanistan.²⁰

Beginning in 2011, ISAF gradually transferred responsibility for Afghanistan's security to Afghan forces. ISAF completed its mission officially in 2014, when it was replaced by a NATO-led non-combat mission called Resolute Support (RSM), which "provide[s] further training, advice, and assistance to the Afghan security forces

¹⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), "Mandate," available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/mandate>. Richard J. Ponzio, "Transforming political authority: UN democratic peacebuilding in Afghanistan," *Global Governance* 13, no. 2 (April-June 2007), 255-276.

¹⁷ US Department of State, "Background Note: Afghanistan."

¹⁸ "Afghanistan," *New York Times*. See also "Peter W. Galbraith," *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/g/peter_galbraith/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=peter%20galbraith&st=cse

¹⁹ Rod Nordland, "Afghan Presidential Rivals Finally Agree on Power-Sharing Deal," *New York Times*, 20 September 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/world/asia/afghan-presidential-election.html?mcubz=1>

²⁰ ISAF, "History," *International Security Assistance Force*, available at <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html>

Montana Model UN High School Conference

and institutions." At that time, the Afghan military also assumed full control over Afghanistan's security. At its peak in 2009, ISAF consisted of more than 130,000 troops from 51 contributing NATO members.²¹

While most NATO members have assumed an advisory role in Afghanistan (in addition to financial support, which, in addition to its RSM, it hopes to maintain until 2020²²), the US has continued to provide more direct aid in the form of "protection, logistical support, and counterterrorism activities."²³ To be sure, most US troops in Afghanistan are part of RSM, but, unlike the other 39 NATO members involved in the country, the US presence in Afghanistan includes troops outside of the NATO mandate.²⁴

In 2017, US President Donald Trump announced a shift in US foreign policy from that of the Obama Administration. Under the new policy, the US would reject "arbitrary timetables" for withdrawal from Afghanistan and instead continually assess the situation in Afghanistan to determine US policy towards the country.²⁵ In fact, in August 2017, the US Department of Defense announced that it actually had about 11,000 US troops in Afghanistan, almost 2,500 more than it had formally reported in previous years. This information came weeks after the Trump administration announced that it planned to send 4,000 troops in addition to the existing 11,000 currently stationed there.²⁶ Trump's new strategy towards Afghanistan also rejects diplomatic approaches, which Obama and other NATO members had begun in 2014, and instead promulgated a military approach to the situation.²⁷

The Main Security Threats: Afghan Government Weakness and Taliban Strength

Initially, NATO leaders such as former US president Barack Obama, had planned to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in 2011. After ISAF ended operations in 2014, Obama further announced plans to remove all US troops in Afghanistan by 2016.²⁸ These plans were delayed, however, for two reasons. First, the US and NATO members

²¹ NATO, "ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014) (Archived)," NATO website, September 1 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm; Pamela Constable, "NATO Flag Lowered in Afghanistan as Combat Mission Ends," *Washington Post*, 28 December 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-flag-lowered-in-afghanistan-as-combat-mission-ends/2014/12/28/5a3ad640-8e44-11e4-ace9-47de1af4c3eb_story.html?utm_term=.308bfa8e7e6f.

²² NATO, "NATO and Afghanistan," 13 October 2017, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm.

²³ Constable, "NATO flag lowered in Afghanistan as combat mission ends."

²⁴ *BBC News*, "Afghanistan War: Trump's Allies and Troop Numbers," 22 August 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-41014263>.

²⁵ Max Boot, "Back to Nation-Building in Afghanistan. Good." *New York Times*, 22 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/opinion/president-trump-nation-building-afghanistan.html>.

²⁶ Helene Cooper, "U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed," *New York Times*, 30 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/30/world/asia/afghanistan-troop-totals.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FAfghanistan>; *BBC News*, "Afghanistan War: Trump's Allies."

²⁷ Bret Stephens, "On Afghanistan, There's No Way Out," *New York Times*, 24 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/opinion/on-afghanistan-theres-no-way-out.html>.

²⁸ "The Afghanistan Withdrawal: A Potential Disaster in the Making," *The Atlantic*, October 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/the-afghanistan-withdrawal-a-potential-disaster-in-the-making/381474/>; Mark Landler, "U.S. Troops to Leave Afghanistan by End of 2016," *New York Times*, 27 May 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/us-to-complete-afghan-pullout-by-end-of-2016-obama-to-say.html>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

did not want to remove their forces from the country until the Afghan army was strong enough to keep the Taliban from retaking control of the government and territory. Thus, for almost a decade, ISAF and NATO worked with the Afghan government to build and train domestic security forces. At the end of 2011, ANSF forces stood at about 323,000 members. Since NATO began withdrawing troops, ANSF force numbers have remained at approximately this level.²⁹ Troop withdrawals were also delayed because, despite the ISAF buildup, the Taliban continued to carry out attacks on Afghan citizens, government officials, the Afghan military and police, and ISAF forces.

Because NATO ended ISAF operations have almost completely ceased, it would ostensibly seem that these concerns were resolved. Yet, since the 2014 withdrawal, the Afghan state has struggled to maintain territory vis-à-vis insurgent groups, particularly the Taliban. In fact, when NATO decided to remove troops initially in December 2014, ANSF already began to experience difficulty maintaining territory. This was evinced by the fact that there were a higher number of ANSF casualties in 2014 than in any previous year since 2001. Similarly, the number of attacks from insurgent groups in Afghanistan between 2011-2013 were comparable to the number of attacks in 2009-2010, suggesting that insurgent activity in Afghanistan did not decline before or after NATO withdrawal. This prompted Afghan military leaders to suggest that the withdrawal of international forces was "premature."³⁰

This has also been the basis for the US's recent decision to send more troops to Afghanistan. From the perspective of the Trump administration, the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan has failed to resolve the conflict in the country, and has left the state institutionally and militarily weak. Not only has the Taliban made gains in the country, but a number of insurgent groups, including members of the Islamic State, Haqqani network, and Al Qaeda, have begun operating in the country. These groups have not only attacked government forces, but have also committed terror attacks on civilians. In some cases, fights even occur between insurgent groups, such as conflicts that have arisen between the Taliban and the Islamic State in Afghanistan.³¹ Hence, Trump has promoted an increase in US troops as a means of not only preventing insurgent groups from toppling the Afghan government, but also as a means of preventing terrorist safe havens. From this perspective, the US (and possibly other states or international actors) will need to continue to build Afghan institutions and military capacities for Afghanistan to function as a stable state in the future.³²

Others have pointed out, however, that states have already employed multiple strategies in Afghanistan, including troop surges, bombings, reduced troops, and nation-building, and that none have been successful thus far. According to proponents of this view, the war in Afghanistan is insurmountable, since states will never be able to eliminate the religious and political ideologies of insurgents. Instead, they argue that the US, and possibly other

²⁹ "Afghanistan," *New York Times*. See also Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index," Brookings Institution, 25 May 2017, p. 6, available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/21csi_20170525_afghanistan_index.pdf.

³⁰ Sudarsan Raghavan, "In a strategic valley, a glimpse of Afghan troops' future after most U.S. forces leave," *Washington Post*, 21 December 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-a-strategic-valley-a-glimpse-of-afghan-troops-future-after-most-us-forces-leave/2014/12/20/f6623219-e74f-46c9-9d29-4043f7a55a8e_story.html?utm_term=.a3593098808d; Livingston and O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index," p. 8.

³¹ *BBC News*, "Afghanistan Profile – Timeline," 4 September 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253>; Boot, "Back to Nation-Building in Afghanistan. Good;" "UN condemns jump in Afghan civilian deaths," *Aljazeera*, 17 July 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/condemns-jump-afghan-civilian-deaths-170717085257088.html>.

³² *BBC News*, "Viewpoint: Why the US should withdraw from Afghanistan," 22 August 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41016347>; Boot, "Back to Nation-Building in Afghanistan. Good."

Montana Model UN High School Conference

actors, such as the UN, should continue to provide support to the Afghan government not with the intent of winning a war, but in hopes of sustaining the Afghan government against insurgents indefinitely.³³

In contrast to both of these perspectives, some argue that the US (and others) should withdraw from Afghanistan. Political Scientist Barry Posen has argued, for instance, that a US withdrawal would cause more powerful states in the region, such as Iran, to take the issue seriously. This could ensure that these states seek a peace deal, and might reduce the complexity of relations in the region by "forc[ing] Iran, Russia, and others to step up," since states such as Iran would have to focus on their direct interests in the region instead of being both concerned with and protected by the US.³⁴ This would additionally allow the US and others in the international community to focus on other security concerns such as climate change and East Asia, which, according to Posen, may be more pertinent than Afghanistan.³⁵

Finally, other observers have argued that the US and NATO members should withdraw because their presence actually incites anger and increased violence both towards foreign states and the Afghan government. As Micah Zenko, an expert from the Council on Foreign Relations has noted "[c]ivilian casualties engender hatred for America, aid terrorist recruitment, and can radicalize potential lone-wolf terrorists residing in the United States." Thus, from this perspective, withdrawal from the country would be beneficial, both in terms of actually reducing global terrorism, and in fostering legitimacy for Afghanistan as a state.³⁶

According to many military experts, the Taliban's ability to continue operating in Afghanistan was predictable because, in general, when foreign forces are in a country, there will be opposition to those forces unless they are very careful to protect the lives and the livelihoods of the local population. When foreign forces are not careful or cause unintended harm – and when they are not expected to stay long – it is easier for insurgents to obtain assistance from the local population.³⁷ As ISAF forces cleared Taliban forces from Afghan cities, for example, they caused civilian casualties that angered the Afghan government and population, which contributed to the challenges of eliminating insurgencies in the country.³⁸

Even today, civilian casualties from Afghan and US forces, as well as from the Taliban, remain a major problem in Afghanistan. The first half of 2017 witnessed a record number of civilian deaths in the country. Although 40% of these were due to attacks from anti-government forces, and though deaths caused by US-backed Afghan police and soldiers declined by 21 percent since 2016, deaths and injuries from Afghan and US air strikes increased

³³ Stephens, "On Afghanistan, There's No Way Out."

³⁴ Barry Posen, "It's time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else's Problem," *The Atlantic*, 18 August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/solution-afghanistan-withdrawal-iran-russia-pakistan-trump/537252/>.

³⁵ *BBC News*, "Viewpoint: Why the US should withdraw from Afghanistan."

³⁶ Micah Zenko, "Bush and Obama Fought a Failed 'War on Terror.' It's Trump's Turn," *New York Times*, Opinion, 24 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/trump-afghanistan-war-on-terror.html?mcubz=1>; *BBC News*, "Viewpoint: Why the US should withdraw from Afghanistan."

³⁷ Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, "Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition," *Foreign Policy*, 5 January 2009. See also Seymour M. Hersh, "The Other War: Why Bush's Afghanistan problem won't go away," *New Yorker*, April 12, 2004, available at http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/12/040412fa_fact

³⁸ Erica Gaston, "The War over Afghan civilian casualties," *Foreign Policy*, AfPak channel, 8 March 2011, available at http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/08/the_war_over_afghan_civilian_casualties

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by 43 percent.³⁹ Not only do these casualties raise concerns about radicalizing Afghan citizens, but they also highlight a key ethical problem faced by the US and Afghanistan: can they justify the deaths of civilians for the sake of ensuring national stability in Afghanistan, especially since little progress has occurred in recent years?

Civilian casualties are not, however, the only source of anti-American sentiment in Afghanistan. In September 2017 the US military distributed pamphlets in the country depicting "a lion, representing the American-led coalition forces, chasing a dog, an animal seen as dirty in Islamic tradition, wrapped in the Taliban flag." The pamphlets angered many Afghanistan citizens because the Taliban flag in the image used "the text most sacred to Muslims: the shahada, the foundational declaration of faith in God." The US apologized for the incident, and avoided reactions as caustic as those to previous mistakes, such as a NATO Quran burning and a video showing US Marines "urinating on dead Taliban fighters," both of which occurred in 2012.⁴⁰

With this in mind, one of the most important things to know about insurgencies is that insurgents do not have to win any military battles in order to win the war. Instead, they simply have to wear down their opponent's will to continue fighting. If civilians do not see the state as credible, then it makes it easier for insurgent groups to thrive, and for conflict in the country to continue. Because Taliban forces are able to hide, regroup, and obtain supplies in Pakistan, there is a good chance that the Taliban is just fighting hard enough now to demoralize member of the Afghan military and contributing countries to the RSM. When this occurs, the Taliban is likely to try to retake control of the Afghan government. This kind of waiting strategy is common to insurgencies and has been used with success in many anti-colonial wars and revolutions, including Mao's 1949 communist revolution in China.⁴¹

Among the most powerful branches of the Taliban is the Haqqani network, which was originally allied with the CIA against the Soviets but which, since the fall of the Taliban during the US-led war in 2001, has carried out attacks on the Afghans and ISAF forces. It is likely the Haqqani network was responsible for a high-profile attack on the US embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul in September 2011.⁴²

Government Corruption and Human Rights Abuses

According to Transparency International, an advocacy organization that tracks government corruption around the globe, Afghanistan ranks as the world's eighth most corrupt country.⁴³ Corruption can take many forms but is usually associated with bribes and other "side payments" for official favors. According to the US and other NATO member states, the Afghan government engages in many forms of corruption, including diverting foreign aid to personal bank accounts.⁴⁴

³⁹ UN condemns jump in Afghan civilian deaths," *Aljazeera*.

⁴⁰ Mujib Mashal, Fahim Abed, and Fatima Faizi, "Afghan Anger Simmers Over U.S. Leaflets Seen as Insulting Islam," *New York Times*, 8 September, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/world/asia/afghanistan-leaflets-islam-american-military.html?mtrref=www.nytimes.com>.

⁴¹ Fick and Nagl, "Counterinsurgency Field Manual."

⁴² "Haqqani Network," *New York Times*, updated 31 Aug7st 2011, available at http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/h/haqqani_network/index.html?scp=9&sq=pakistan%20isi%20haqqani&st=cse

⁴³ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016," https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016.

⁴⁴ Katzman, "Afghanistan," p. 11.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

Allegations of human rights violations by the police, military, and government officials have also plagued the Afghan government. In 2010, the US State Department accused the Afghan government of a number of human rights deficiencies, “including extra-judiciary killings, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, restriction on freedom of the press, limits on freedom of assembly, official corruption, violence against women, sexual abuse of children, child labor, and abuse of workers’ rights.”⁴⁵ In September 2017, Afghan and US military authorities announced plans to potentially create a contract-based militia force for Afghanistan. These militias would serve local areas under the army. Human rights groups, however, criticized the creation of the militias, noting that the militias were similar to former groups of Afghan Local Police, who were paid and trained by the US and accused of numerous human rights violations.⁴⁶

Together, government corruption and human rights abuses have weakened the support of the Afghan people for the Afghan government. As a result, many wonder if the government will be able to maintain legitimacy, security, and order in the state. According to Middle East specialist Kenneth Katzman, some US officials “say that Afghan governance is lagging to the point where the Afghans will not be able to hold U.S./NATO gains on their own and insurgents will be able to regroup as soon as international forces thin out.”⁴⁷

Opium Production and Trade

The explosion of opium poppy production is another major security concern. Under the Taliban, poppy production was illegal. Since 2001, however, warlords have encouraged the planting of opium instead of food and other crops. Since 2005, Afghanistan has accounted for 67-83% of the world’s annual opium production.⁴⁸

In 2005, according to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, due to counter-narcotics efforts by the Afghan government, ISAF, and UN Office on Drugs and Crime – as well as cold weather and drought – there had been a significant decline in the extent of poppy production:

more than half of the country’s 34 provinces are now poppy-free. Thus, poppy production is no longer an Afghanistan-wide phenomenon but, rather, concentrated in areas where insurgent and organized crime groups are particularly active. At present, 98 per cent of the country’s opium is grown in seven southern and south-western provinces.⁴⁹

But because yields increased in the areas that were still under cultivation, opium production increased in 2006 and 2007. Poppy production has surged further in Afghanistan in recent years due to the cultivation of poppy seeds that can be grown year-round.⁵⁰

This is a security concern for several reasons. First, when people are addicted to opium they may be easier to distract and bribe. This is a common problem in the Afghan military forces. Second, opium production is the

⁴⁵ Katzman, “Afghanistan,” p. 12.

⁴⁶ Mujib Mashal, “U.S. Plan for New Afghan Force Revives Fears of Militia Abuses,” *New York Times*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/world/asia/afghan-local-police.html?mcubz=1>.

⁴⁷ Katzman, “Afghanistan,” p. 27.

⁴⁸ Livingston and O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” pp. 24-25.

⁴⁹ Ban, “The situation in Afghanistan,” p. 9.

⁵⁰ Mariam Amini, “Afghanistan’s relentless opium woes have a ‘new seed in town,’ and it comes from China,” *CNBC*, 25 March 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/24/afghanistans-relentless-opium-woes-have-a-new-seed-in-town-and-it-comes-from-china.html>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

means by which warlords finance their mini-states within Afghanistan. Third, the illegal international trade in opium and its derivatives morphine and heroin is a major source of revenue for the Taliban and Al Qaeda and a destabilizing factor in many countries.⁵¹ Opium smuggling has stretched to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. Iran, too, has felt the effects of Afghan opium production, seizing 180 tons of opium in the first half of 2007 alone.⁵²

Fourth, emphasis on poppy production has reduced the ability of Afghan farmers to feed themselves and the nation. Fifth, efforts to curtail poppy production are extremely dangerous. In 2007, Canadian troops destroying crops came under attack by disgruntled farmers. As a result, the Canadian government has been reluctant to participate in further eradication efforts and has come under public pressure to end its participation in the NATO operation.⁵³ Finally, trade in opiates finances international criminal organizations that are of concern to many UN Member States, including many European countries, where there is high demand for the drugs.

Previous Committee Work on Afghanistan

Since 2001, the Security Council and General Assembly have passed a number of resolutions related to Afghanistan's political and military security. As mentioned, in 2001, the Security Council passed Resolution 1386, which established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan to help the new government establish military control of the country.⁵⁴ Until it ended operations in 2014, the Council passed a resolution each year extending ISAF's mandate. In addition, in 2002, the Security Council passed a resolution authorizing UNAMA, whose mandate is to "support the Government in its efforts to improve critical areas, including security, governance and economic development, and regional cooperation."⁵⁵ UNAMA has continued to be reauthorized by the Security Council each year. Most recently, in March 2017, the Council extended UNAMA's mandate to 2018.⁵⁶

According to former UN Secretary Ban-Ki Moon, in recent years there has been a "worrying trend" of "a significant increase in the number of attacks against aid workers, convoys and facilities. More than 120 attacks [were] targeted at humanitarian and development programmes in 2008, as a result of which 30 humanitarian aid workers ...died and 92 [were] abducted."⁵⁷ These attacks imperil the ability of UNAMA personnel to work in the country and also inhibit the work of non-governmental organizations that bring food and other supplies to Afghan citizens in the midst of the 10-year war.

⁵¹ Gretchen Peters, "How Opium Profits the Taliban," US Institute of Peace, August 2009, available at www.usip.org/files/resources/taliban_opium_1.pdf

⁵² Thomas Land "Drugs trade takes its toll in Middle East region" *The Middle East*, 390, (June 2008), pp. 20-23.

⁵³ Nicholas Kohler "War of the Poppies" *Maclean's*, Vol 20, No 7, (February 26, 2007), 25.

⁵⁴ "Security Council Authorizes International Security Force for Afghanistan," Security Council press release SC/7248, December 20, 2001, available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/sc7248.doc.htm>

⁵⁵ United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), "About UNAMA: Mandate," available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1742>

⁵⁶ What's in Blue, "UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan: Mandate Renewal," 16 March 2017, <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2017/03/un-assistance-mission-in-afghanistan-mandate-renewal.php>.

⁵⁷ Ban Ki-Moon, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General," A/63/372-S/2008/617, September 23, 2008, 5-6, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/situation-afghanistan-and-its-implications-international-peace-and-security-46>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

The Security Council continues to receive quarterly updates on Afghanistan. The most recent of these occurred in September 2017, in which the Council received the most recent report from the Secretary-General on UNAMA.⁵⁸ While members of the Council tend to agree that they want to stabilize Afghanistan, the approach taken to achieve this can be contentious. For instance, China and Russia recently argued that resolutions should specifically identify the Taliban as a terrorist organization. Other permanent members have, however, critiqued this idea because they hope to foster reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Thus, they argue that it is best to separate the terrorist activities of the Taliban from terrorist groups.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Despite US and ISAF military operations in Afghanistan, the security situation has failed to stabilize and appears to be worsening, especially in terms of insurgent attacks by Taliban forces. In addition, although there have been some reductions in opium production, the humanitarian situation looks increasingly grave. As you research your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- How has your country been affected by the war in Afghanistan? Consider terrorism, refugee movements, drug trafficking and consumption, etc.
- To what extent is your country involved in the war? Has it contributed troops to the ISAF operation? Has it contributed humanitarian aid? How has it voted on past UN resolutions? What more could it do?
- What can the GA do to supplement the Security Council's, UNAMA's, and ISAF's efforts to bring peace and security to Afghanistan? In particular, How can the Afghan government be strengthened? How can civilians be better protected from the fighting between Afghan, US, ISAF, and insurgent forces?
- How should the UN and UN member states prepare for the effects of the upcoming withdrawal of US and ISAF forces? What are those effects likely to be? What role should negotiation with the Taliban play in stabilizing Afghanistan and protecting US and ISAF forces during their departure? Should UNAMA personnel remain behind? If so, how should they be protected?

Recommended Reading

Almukhtar, Sarah. "How Much of Afghanistan is Under Taliban Control After 16 Years of War with the US?" *The New York Times*. 23 August 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/23/world/asia/afghanistan-us-taliban-isis-control.html>

This article provides recent maps and data on the Taliban's territorial control and attacks in Afghanistan.

BBC News. "Afghanistan Profile – Timeline." 4 September 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253>

This timeline from the BBC provides a brief but useful history of Afghanistan.

Guterres, Antonio. "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General." A/72/392–S/2017/783. September 15, 2017.

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/783.

⁵⁸ Security Council Report, "Afghanistan," <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/afghanistan/>, accessed 25 September 2017.

⁵⁹ What's in Blue, "UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan: Mandate Renewal."

Montana Model UN High School Conference

This recent report from the UN Secretary General gives a comprehensive update on all aspects of the security situation in Afghanistan.

Human Rights Watch. "Asia: Afghanistan." Available at <http://www.hrw.org/asia/afghanistan>

Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental organization that tracks human rights in various countries. This page provides access to reports on various topics, including the civilian effects of US and NATO operations, the treatment of Afghan refugees, and the Karzai government's policies on civil rights.

Katzman, Kenneth, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, 22 August, 2017. Available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>

This recent report by a Middle East expert who works for the US Congress provides a comprehensive history of US military operations in Afghanistan, as well as a good summary of the political history of Afghanistan. This source also addresses many of the current security concerns facing Afghanistan and does so on the basis of interviews with US policy makers and military officials.

Livingston, Ian S. and Michael O'Hanlon. "Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post 9/11 Afghanistan." Brookings Institution. 25 May 2017. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/afghanistan-index/>

This report from the Brookings Institution, a foreign policy think tank, uses a variety of data to evaluate the progress Afghanistan has made since 2001 in various aspects of security. It is a terrific way to get a sense of historical trends and current challenges. It addresses everything from civilian living standards to the readiness of the Afghan military and recent casualties.

Posen, Barry. "It's Time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else's Problem." *The Atlantic*. 18 August 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/solution-afghanistan-withdrawal-iran-russia-pakistan-trump/537252/>

While focused heavily on the US's interests, Posen presents a case that the situation in Afghanistan could be ameliorated by the US (and by extension NATO) withdrawing from the region.

United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA). Website. Available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/>.

This is the website for the UN organization that coordinates all UN activities in Afghanistan. It has a wealth of historical and current information, as well as links to all Security Council and GA resolutions. See also the UNAMA mid-year report, which provides information on The protection of civilians in armed conflict as it relates to Afghanistan. The document is available at: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf

Mujib Mashal, "U.S. Plan for New Afghan Force Revives Fears of Militia Abuses," *New York Times*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/world/asia/afghan-local-police.html?mcubz=1>.

This article discusses the potential creation of a new militia force in Afghanistan. It also details the problems that Afghanistan experienced with human rights abuses from a similar force in the past.