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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Definition of Key Terms.....	4
De jure.....	4
De facto.....	4
Sharia Law.....	4
Mahram.....	5
Hijab.....	5
Forced Marriage.....	5
Impunity.....	6
Gender Based Violence (GBV).....	6
Background Information.....	6
History of Afghanistan.....	6
Timeline of Events.....	7
Security Concerns.....	11
Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP).....	12
Miscellaneous Jihadist militant groups.....	13
Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).....	14
Water Tensions.....	15
Human Rights Abuses.....	15
Women’s and girls’ rights.....	16
Ethnic Discrimination.....	17
Unlawful attacks and killings.....	17
LGBTQ+ people’s rights.....	18
Death penalty, torture and other ill-treatment.....	18

Freedom of religion and belief.....	18
Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.....	18
Refugees’ and internally displaced people’s rights.....	18
Humanitarian Crisis.....	19
Major Parties Involved and Their Views.....	21
Taliban.....	21
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan - Government in Exile.....	21
NRF under Ahmad Massoud.....	22
Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).....	22
IS-KP.....	22
UNAMA.....	23
Pakistan.....	23
United States of America.....	24
UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events.....	25
UN Involvement.....	25
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).....	25
Relevant Resolutions.....	26
Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.....	26
Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue.....	26
Foreign Intervention.....	26
Sanctions.....	27
UNAMA.....	28
Fund for the Afghan People.....	28
Possible Solutions.....	29
Increased diplomacy and cooperation with the DFA?.....	29
Security Concerns.....	29
Human Rights Abuses.....	30
Humanitarian Crisis.....	31
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography.....	33

Introduction

“As a matter of moral responsibility – and regional and global security and prosperity – we cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan”, United Nations Secretary General Guterres told the Security Council in 2022, adding that “at this moment, we need the global community – and this Council – to put their hands on the wheel of progress, provide resources, and prevent Afghanistan from spiraling any further.”

Twenty years after the Taliban were ousted from power by US-led forces for failing to extradite Osama bin Laden, leader of al-Qaeda in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and four years after the Taliban regained power in 2021, shall this council convene.

Since 2021, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated and the international community has failed to find an effective solution for the betterment of the crisis. Three key areas that must be addressed are the humanitarian crisis, human rights abuses as well as security concerns. Widespread food insecurity, economic collapse, exacerbated by the effects of climate change and natural disasters as well as by limited access to healthcare and education, particularly for women and children, have pushed the country to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. The Taliban's draconically harsh interpretation of Sharia Law has led to severe human rights infringements, especially for women but also for other demographics. Furthermore, the international community must remain wary of Afghanistan once more becoming a hotspot for terrorists, as extremist groups within Afghanistan contribute to instability and regional security threats. Furthermore, the large numbers of migrants that have left Afghanistan for neighboring countries further strain regional stability, as do tensions over water. Simultaneously, the Taliban regime is isolated internationally, a pariah on account of its human rights violations, debilitating dialogue.

As the UN Organ with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council must find solutions to the ailments of this country, scarred by brutal conflicts and terrorism, with a long history of usage as a geopolitical playing field for ideological and territorial dominance. This is vital for upholding the rules-based international order and the human rights codified therein, which are at the heart of the United Nations.

Definition of Key Terms

De jure

The term *de jure* refers to what is codified in legally binding laws. The *de jure* government of a country refers to the administration that has the legal right to authority over said country, regardless of whether it is actually able to exercise that authority or not. The government of Afghanistan prior to the Taliban takeover in 2021 remains the *de jure* authority and controls the Afghani UN seat, with the United Nations rejecting the Taliban government's bid for the UN seat for the fourth time on November 20th, 2024. Thus, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan's *de jure* government to the United Nations, Naseer Ahmad Faiq, remains in his position.

De facto

De facto, in contrast to *de jure*, describes the actual situation, regardless of legality. A *de facto* government is a government that has power over a country, even though the government's legitimacy is rejected by the international community and it has gained power through illegitimate means. The Taliban government is the De Facto Authority (DFA) of Afghanistan. No countries have extended *de jure* diplomatic recognition to the Taliban and many have demanded concessions on human rights issues for this to happen. However, some non-western Member States (e.g. China & the UAE) have accredited diplomats nominated by the DFA at a chargé d'affaires level, though they do not recognise the Taliban as the *de jure* government of Afghanistan. In 2024, Afghan Taliban officials attended the COP29 climate summit in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, their most high-level United Nations meeting since their takeover.

Sharia Law

Sharia law is the legal system derived from Islamic principles, based on the Quran (Islam's holy book), as well as the Sunnah and Hadith - the deeds and sayings respectively of the Prophet Muhammad. Sharia literally means "the clear, well-trodden path to water" in Arabic. The Sharia is more than merely a system of law in the classical western sense, but also a comprehensive code of behaviour according to God's wishes, encompassing guidelines for both personal conduct and societal governance. Interpretations of Sharia vary widely, depending on the school of interpretation. The four Sunni schools are Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanafi, and the one Shia school is Jaafari. The Taliban adhere to the most strict and conservative school, namely the Hanbali, and use it to justify their policies and methods of governance, such as public executions of adulterers and restrictive policies towards women.

Mahram

A mahram is a woman's husband or close male relative (like a brother or a father) that she is not allowed to marry. The Taliban have imposed strict regulations regarding mahram, mandating, for example, that women must be accompanied by a mahram for journeys more than 72 kilometres, that women cannot take a taxi without a mahram present, that women must be accompanied by a mahram when going to the doctor, or that female healthcare workers (who are partly exempt from the ban on women working as women are only allowed to be treated by female doctors) must be accompanied by a mahram during work hours. These mahram restrictions infringe upon many human rights, including freedom of movement.

Hijab



The term “hijab” in its literal translation means “to cover” and in a religious context refers to living a pure and modest lifestyle. In general usage however, it denotes a variety of head coverings worn by religious Muslim women as an expression of faith. This should not be equated with repression. However, under the Taliban rule, adherence to the Taliban's veiling

regulations is obligatory for all women, with strict punishments being administered for disobedience. The Taliban's official decree praises “not venturing out without cause” as the “first and best type of adherence to Sharia hijab”, while otherwise mandating wearing a Burqa/ chadari or a full hijab that covers the entire body and face, leaving space for the eyes only. Women are obliged to follow these dress codes at all times when they are in the vicinity of men who do not belong to their mahram.

Image: Traditional blue Burqa - woman walking & closeup on face mesh¹

Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is defined by the United Nations as, “a marriage in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union.” Forced Marriage is a violation of international human rights law, as enshrined in Article 16 of the

¹ Image sources: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Woman_walking_in_Afghanistan.jpg & <https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article208076825/Unterschiede-von-Burka-Niqab-und-Co.html>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Since the Taliban takeover in 2021, the rates of forced (& child) marriage in Afghanistan have skyrocketed.

Impunity

Impunity is when an individual is exempt from punishment or rendered free from the consequences of an action that would otherwise be deemed punishable. In International Human Rights Law, impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of crimes constitutes a failure to investigate, prosecute and punish human rights abuses.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Forms of violence that individuals of a certain gender are (disproportionately) afflicted by due to their gender are known as Gender Based Violence. GBV is a human rights violation that may, but does not invariably have to, lead to death. The abuse can be of physical, sexual or psychological nature. GBV includes “honour” crimes² which are crimes that are carried out in order to protect the so-called “honour” of a family or community, which has supposedly been tarnished by the “immoral” conduct of the (usually female) victim. In order to restore the “honour” of the family, the individual must ostensibly be punished for their behavior.

Background Information

This report and the background information therein shall address three key issues that Afghanistan faces today: the humanitarian crisis, security concerns, and the human rights situation. However, in order to understand the situation and how it came to be, it is essential that delegates understand the history of Afghanistan, which shall be outlined first.

History of Afghanistan

The territory of today’s Afghanistan has a long history of foreign conquest and internal conflict, shaping the country in ways that profoundly affect the situation today.

Located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, it was invaded by, among others, Darius I of Persia around 500 B.C., Alexander the Great in 329 B.C., Mahmud of Ghazni, an 11th-century

² This report refers to “honour” in quotation marks or as “so-called honour”. This is done, in accordance with the recommendations of UN Women, to emphasize the nature of “honour” as a subjective social construct. Additionally, this terminology attempts to mitigate the risk of reinforcing discriminatory sentiments which imply that there is any “honour” in committing such heinous crimes.

ruler who established an empire stretching from Iran to India, and Genghis Khan's forces in the 13th century.

Only in the 1700s did Afghanistan become unified as a single nation. By 1870, after a series of Arab invasions, the religion of Islam had become firmly established.

In the 19th century, Britain, aiming to protect its Indian empire from Russian expansion, sought to annex Afghanistan, leading to a series of British-Afghan Wars between 1838 and 1842, 1878 and 1880, and again in 1919-21.

Timeline of Events

Date	Events
1921	The British, weakened in the aftermath of the first World War, are defeated in the Third British-Afghan War (1919-21). Afghanistan becomes an independent nation. Its ruler, Amir Amanullah Khan, sets a series of socioeconomic reforms into motion.
1926	Amir Amanullah Khan declares Afghanistan to be a monarchy and himself to be king, as well as restricting the power of the National Council (Loya Jirga). Armed opposing political factions force Amanullah to abdicate and go into exile in 1929.
1933	Mohammed Zahir Shah becomes king. He will remain so for the next 40 years.
1953	Mohammed Daoud Khan, a pro-Soviet General, is named prime minister. He sets into motion social reforms, granting women more rights, such as allowing them to attend university and work (in 1957). Within the next few years, Afghanistan and the USSR become close allies, with Afghanistan receiving economic and military support.
1973	Khan orchestrates a military coup to oust the king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, and abolishes the monarchy. Khan declares Afghanistan to be the The Republic of Afghanistan, with himself as president.

1975-1977	Khan's new constitution grants women more rights and attempts to modernize Afghanistan. His government cracks down on political opponents.
1978	Khan is killed in a coup led by the communist Nur Mohammad Taraki, who becomes president. While the new government declares themselves to be independent from USSR influence, and state their policies to be grounded in the principles of Islam, nationalism and socioeconomic justice, they sign a friendship treaty with the USSR. Concurrently, conservative Islamic leaders form the guerrilla movement Mujahadeen, to combat social reforms and the current Soviet-backed government.
1979	<p>Rivalries within the communist leadership lead to infighting, and President Taraki is killed.</p> <p>The USSR launches an invasion of Afghanistan on Dec. 24 in order to aid the crumbling communist regime. Deputy Prime Minister Babrak Karmal becomes prime minister. However, in the wake of widespread public opposition to Karmal and the USSR, by early 1980, the different Mujahadeen rebel groups have united to fight against the Soviets as well as the USSR-supported Afghan Army.</p>
1982 - 1986	Afghan Mujahadeen guerillas hold most rural areas, while the Soviets control urban areas. The Mujahadeen receive military aid from the US, UK and China. 2.8 million and 1.5 million Afghans have fled from the war to Pakistan and Iran respectively.
1989	The peace accords signed in Geneva by the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the USSR promise the withdrawal of 100,000 Soviet forces and Afghan independence. However, even after the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan remains a puppet state of the USSR and the Mujahadeen continue fighting against communist president Dr. Mohammad Najibullah.

1992	Najibullah is removed from power as Mujahadeen (among others) storm Kabul. Afghanistan becomes an Islamic state under professor Burhannudin Rabbani as president. The Mujahadeen begin to fracture into warlords.
1995-2001	A newly formed Islamic militia, the Taliban, rises to power, governing Afghanistan in accordance with their draconically strict interpretation of Sharia law. Their policies, which they enforce via public executions and amputations, amount to major human rights violations. The Taliban control most, but not all, of Afghanistan. Most notably, ethnic groups in the north under Massoud's Northern Alliance fight against the Taliban for territorial control.
Sep. 11, 2001	The 9/11 attacks, in which al-Qaeda terrorist hijackers crashed four commercial airplanes into the World Trade Center Towers in New York, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, kill thousands. Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect, is believed to be hiding in Afghanistan.
Oct. 7, 2001	After the Taliban did not respond to demands to extradite bin Laden, US and British airstrikes target Afghanistan.
Dec. 9, 2001	The Taliban are forced to surrender their final Afghan territory (Zabul province).
Dec. 22, 2001	Hamid Karzai, backed by the US, becomes leader of the 6 month interim government in Afghanistan via a U.N.-sponsored conference.
2004	The Loya Jirga adopts a new constitution for a democratic state with gender equality for women. More than 10.5 million Afghans register to vote in democratic Presidential elections in which the interim leader Karzai is elected with 55 percent of the vote.
Dec. 2014	The NATO combat mission (The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)) in Afghanistan is officially ended. However, US-led NATO troops remain in training and advisory positions to the Afghan army, in the so-called Resolute Support Mission.

Feb. 29, 2020	The <i>Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan</i> - a peace deal denoting the preliminary terms for US withdrawal from Afghanistan is signed by both the US (under President Trump) and Taliban.
Aug. 15, 2021	The Afghanistan government collapses as the Taliban take over Kabul shortly after the remaining NATO forces' chaotic departure from the country. The current de facto ruler of Afghanistan (Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan), Hibatullah Akhundzada, comes to power. He is part of the - even for Taliban standards - ultraconservative clerical faction.
March 23, 2022	The Taliban reverse their pledge to allow girls to attend high school on the day high schools were scheduled to reopen.
May 7, 2022	The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice decrees that women must wear full body veil, encompassing their entire face except for their eyes while adding that "not venturing out without cause is the first and best type of adherence to Sharia hijab".
Nov. 20, 2022	19 individuals are publicly lashed for accusations including adultery, marking the Taliban's first public flogging since their return to power.
Dec. 8, 2022	The Taliban hold their first public execution since the takeover.
Dec. 21, 2022	Female students are barred from attending university.
Dec. 24, 2022	Women are prohibited from working in national and international NGOs as well as UN organisations, with only narrow exceptions for e.g. female healthcare workers.
Sept. 13, 2023	China sends a new ambassador to Afghanistan, later, the Taliban officially send their new ambassador to Beijing.

Oct. 4, 2023	Pakistan announces that it will begin a major campaign to expel non-nationals residing illegally within its territory, including 1.7 million Afghans.
Oct. 7, 2023	Thousands of people are killed by a 6.3 magnitude earthquake in the province of western Herat, worsening the already dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.
May 11, 2024	Flash floods in the north of Afghanistan from extreme rainfalls kill hundreds of people.
June 4, 2024	The leader of the UAE meets with a Taliban official subject to a U.S. bounty for his role in an attack that killed an American citizen as well as other assaults. This underscores the widening rift over approaches to handling the Taliban.
Aug. 2024	The Taliban's new "vice and virtue" laws, approved by supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, prohibit women from speaking or even laughing in public, and even within their homes if people outside the house could overhear it. Additionally, they are forbidden from making eye contact with men outside their mahram.

Security Concerns

Unlike western and international powers, which place a focus on Afghanistan's human rights and humanitarian situation, security issues dominate the regional agenda, with Afghanistan's neighbors closely scrutinizing Kabul's approach to managing Islamist militant groups. While initial fears that Taliban rule would devolve into a civil war have proven unfounded as the DFA have consolidated power and internal peace and stability has improved, significant security risks remain. Internally, there is no meaningful threat to the Taliban's control, despite operations by the National Resistance Front (NRF). However, Afghanistan remains a source of instability for Central Asia. Prior to the Taliban takeover, U.S. forces ran counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. While these were criticised in regard to human rights, neighboring states trusted them to be effective. Now that the Taliban are in charge of policing groups that, partly, are long-standing ideological allies, fears have arisen that Afghanistan will once again

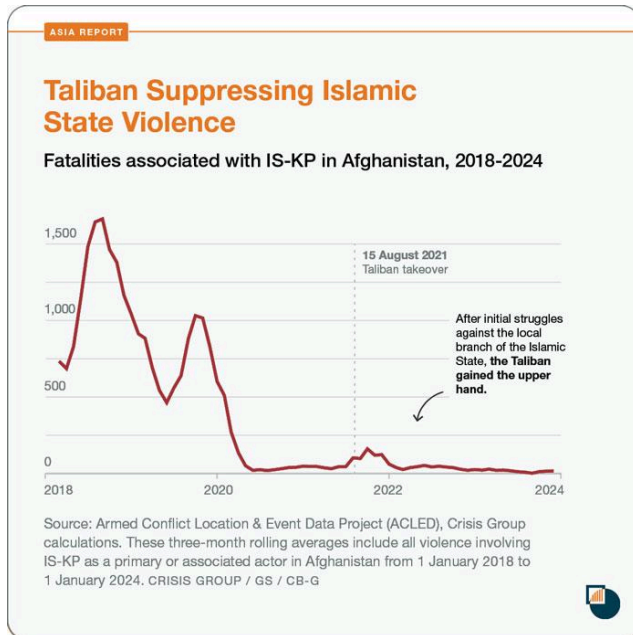
become a terror-hotspot. Despite some success against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant- Khorasan (ISIL-K.), specifically its local branch Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP), the grouping represents a serious threat for the region and also further abroad. Additionally, the DFA have so far been unable or unwilling to deal with the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which have scaled up their attacks in Pakistan. While the Taliban seem to wish to maintain a facade of respecting the *Agreement For Bringing Peace to Afghanistan*, they have allowed al-Qaeda significant liberties in regard to training and travel within Afghanistan, with the acting interior minister found to have housed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, prior to his death via US strike. According to a regional diplomat, who spoke on conditions of anonymity to the Think Tank Crisis Group, “Afghanistan continues to remain a safe haven for terror groups; now, it is just not as blatant as in the 1990s.”

The DFA have been unwilling to eradicate militant groups in the region and have resorted to answering (most) regional concerns not by killing or detaining suspected terrorists, but by relocating them and aiding them in the establishment of new livelihoods - partly by incorporating them into their own command structures. This approach has raised tensions in the region as the Taliban seek diplomatic relations with the very governments that the groups they harbour wish to overthrow. Worries remain that the Taliban, being a fundamentalist Islamist government that gained power through military strength, constitutes a galvanizer for Islamists in the region, especially in regard to the islamistic propaganda the Taliban continue to publish. Furthermore, arms proliferation is a further point of concern in the region. When western military coalitions left Afghanistan in 2021, billions of dollars of military equipment and armaments remained behind. In the ensuing chaos and looting, parts of this stockpile found their way into the hands of private individuals and smugglers, with the contraband being spread across the region. Even now, illicit arms caches remain and pose further proliferation risks, despite the DFA's (insufficient) attempts to address this issue.

Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP)

The most widely discussed security risk is the IS-KP. While there have been rare instances of cooperation between the Taliban and the IS-KP in the past, the two groups are rivals on account of ideological differences: The Taliban's primary focus lies on establishing an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, as they adhere to a more localized interpretation of Sharia law and governance. Their goals are largely nationalist, prioritizing control over Afghanistan's territory while the IS-KP, as an offshoot of the Islamic State (ISIS), follows a global jihadist ideology. It seeks to establish a transnational caliphate, thus rejecting national boundaries.

IS-KP views the Taliban's nationalist goals as un-Islamic and accuses them of betraying the principles of global jihad. Thus, IS-KP aims



of delegitimizing the Taliban are centred around their opposition to Afghanistan as a nation state. Notably, the IS-KP was responsible for the 2021 Kabul airport attack during the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan, killing 13 American military personnel and 169 or more Afghan nationals. However, Taliban counter-terrorism against the IS-KP has grown more effective, with a series of raids since mid-2022 killing influential IS-KP members, such as its (alleged) deputy leader and intelligence chief. During 2023–2024, the Taliban are said to have

executed over 100 operations against the IS-KP and efforts to curb recruitment, including on university campuses, have also shown progress. Thus, overall fatalities in Afghanistan have fallen (see diagram)³.

However, the group has now expanded its regional operations. Notably, the IS-KP launched rockets at Termez (Uzbekistan) in April 2022, followed by a similar attack on Tajikistan the next month. In October 2022, the IS-KP launched an attack on Iran, targeting a Shia shrine, resulting in at least 20 deaths and 60 wounded individuals. IS-KP's ability to expand internationally remains uncertain; although cross-border operations have declined after the Taliban cracked down on the cells that had targeted Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the group continues to recruit from across Central and South Asia, incites external attacks and has encouraged operatives and suicide bombers to travel to Europe. Its operational capacity remains strong, maintaining its status as a significant regional (and international) threat.

Miscellaneous Jihadist militant groups

Furthermore, the region remains concerned about a multitude of smaller jihadist groups with operating bases in Afghanistan, with Central Asian states' concerns focused on northern

³Image Source: https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/337-talibans-neighbourhood-regional-diplomacy-afghanistan#_ftn1

militants near their borders. These groups, often belonging to Uyghur, Uzbek, Tajik and other ethnic groups, have links to ethnic communities in neighboring countries and ambitions to incite rebellion in their home countries. Concerns of ethnic tensions resulting in conflict are further exacerbated by the fact that Taliban leadership is ethnically non-inclusive, being predominantly Pashtun and incorporating this identity into policies and ideology, further stressing the social cohesion of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a highly multiethnic society, the four main ethnolinguistic groups (from largest to smallest) being Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek. However, there are many others, with the pre-2021 Afghan Constitution mentioning 14 different ethnic groups.

Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - also known as the Pakistani Taliban - are an umbrella terrorist group for different tribal factions. The TTP has gained strength since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and has significantly intensified its attacks against Pakistan, with 573 attacks in 2021, 715 in 2022 and 1,210 in 2023, and with the trend continuing into 2024.

Pakistan, claiming that the TTP operates from operational bases in Afghanistan, has strongly urged the Taliban to act against the group, utilising methods such as pausing diplomatic advocating for ending the international isolation of the Taliban, accusing Kabul of violating the *Agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan*, conducting air and artillery strikes on Afghan territory, mass deportations of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, as well as restriction of goods flow between the countries. All of these methods have been without success however, as the Taliban continue to deny that the TTP is present in Afghanistan.

While the Taliban publicly deny the TTP's presence, they have taken their "standard playbook" measures, including removing fighters from border regions, splitting them up, providing alternative housing and embedding them within their own units. However, given the size of the TPP, questions remain on the effectiveness of these methods and it is unclear if these measures have altered TPP's behaviour for the better at all. Furthermore, the Taliban remains reluctant to crack down on the TPP, as they represent a significant and longstanding ideological ally. Additionally, members of the group, if angered against the Taliban, could defect to the IS-KP.

Kabul's approach to the situation has angered Islamabad, which threatens further mass deportations and cross-border military engagement. Frictions between Pakistan and

Afghanistan threaten regional stability and affect major powers like China, which has large economic interests in Pakistan.

Water Tensions

Tensions over water resources, exacerbated by climate change, are an additional regional security issue. Afghanistan is reliant on snowmelt and glaciers for 80% of its water supply and now faces severe shortages, with 60% of households affected by water scarcity. A major point of contention is the Qush Tepa Canal in northern Afghanistan. Initiated in March 2022, the canal aims to divert water from the Amu Darya River, traversing 285 km and irrigating up to 550,000 hectares of farmland in northern Afghanistan to meet rising irrigation demands, desperately needed in light of climate change and a transition to more water intensive crops after the banning of opium poppy cultivation. The canal has raised concerns among downstream Central Asian neighbors like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, which depend on the Amu Darya for their agricultural sectors. The Taliban argue the project adheres to international customary law regarding "reasonable and equitable" use of water, but neighbors criticize Afghanistan for not notifying or consulting them as required under international norms.

Human Rights Abuses

The human rights situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated with the Taliban takeover in 2021. Most notable are the Taliban's annihilation of women's rights, with Afghanistan being considered the most repressive country for women. These policies have led to international calls to investigate whether these policies constitute a crime against humanity. Additionally, ethnic and religious minorities have faced human rights abuses, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals. Freedom of expression and demonstration have also been practically abolished, as forced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as torture, have risen. Moreover, the Taliban have reintroduced measures of punishment including public executions and corporal punishment, such as stoning and flogging.

The human rights violations by the DFA, as well as by private individuals and groups, take place in a zone of near absolute impunity, as access to justice has been heavily restricted and the Taliban have replaced previous laws with a strict interpretation of Sharia law. Thus, not only is there widespread impunity for crimes under international law committed by the Taliban, but e.g. acts of GBV are often not even brought to court as the verdict is clear to begin with.

In the following, a regrettably non- exhaustive overview of areas of human rights violations will be presented.

Women's and girls' rights

Despite the fact that, on the 17th of August 2021, Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, emphasised that “We are going to allow women to work and study. Women will be very active in society, but within the framework of Islam”, the DFA have near-completely erased women from public life.

After taking control, the DFA nullified the 2004 Constitution and key domestic laws, including the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. They also dismantled institutions dedicated to promoting gender equality and addressing gender-based violence, such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. They have replaced these laws with more than 80 edicts restricting women and girls' lives, with these regulations often phrased in a vague manner, to be enforced at the interpretation of Taliban officials, further creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. Now, girls above grade 6 are banned from receiving education, leaving 1.4 million teenage girls out of school. Women's freedom of movement is heavily constrained, as they require a mahram for many trips. They must veil themselves, save only their eyes, completely - this policy extending to girls as young as fourth grade. Women are not allowed to enter a variety of public spaces and cannot work, including not in UN organisations, save for a few exceptions such as in women's prisons or healthcare, and even those jobs only with severe restrictions. Women cannot attend university, effectively also guaranteeing a future exacerbation of the health crisis for female demographics, as they are only allowed to be treated by female doctors. Recently, women have been prohibited from speaking outside of the house.

Punishments have been extremely harsh, such as flogging women and stoning them to death in public for adultery. The supreme leader defended these policies, saying that while western powers “may call it a violation of women's rights when we publicly stone or flog them for committing adultery because they conflict with your democratic principles, [he] represent[s] Allah, and you represent Satan.”

Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists have identified the Taliban's severe restrictions on the rights of women and girls, alongside their practices of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and the use of torture and other ill-treatment against protesters of these measures, as potentially constituting the crime against humanity of gender persecution.⁴

⁴ For the report that concluded this, please see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/6789/2023/en/>

Additionally, these regulations blatantly violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to which Afghanistan is a State Party, and human rights conventions.⁵ Furthermore, multiple UN agencies have reported marked increase in child and forced marriage. Additionally, rates of abuse, GBV and femicide have risen starkly, with regime officials implicated in over half of reported incidents, though it is safe to assume that reported incidents are a minute fraction of the actual situation. The DFA have progressively dissolved institutional support for GBV survivors, and there have been widespread reports of women and girls suffering from depression and frequent suicide attempts.

Ethnic Discrimination

Ethnic groups such as the Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik communities have increasingly experienced marginalization and forced displacement from their homes and lands. Disputes involving minority groups and the dominant Pashtun group have practically always been resolved by the Taliban in favour of the latter. Especially the Hazaras have been targeted through violence including beatings, destruction of homes, vehicles, and crops, and murders - all with absolute impunity. Reports of Hazara killings are fairly frequent, including killings of community leaders.

Unlawful attacks and killings

In their fight against the National Resistance Front (NRF), the Taliban have utilised arbitrary collective punishments to spread terror and stifle dissent, for example, mass or village-wide arbitrary arrests impacting civilians in the Panjshir province in 2023. At least three civilians were tortured to death in this province the previous year due to suspected allegiance to the NRF. Furthermore, there has been a continuous pattern of mass extrajudicial executions of people associated with the former government and members of armed groups resisting the Taliban, constituting war crimes. 218 cases could be verified by the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) between August 2021 and June 2023 and many more are suspected. These crimes have once again occurred with impunity.

⁵ Violated conventions include, but are not limited to: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the three Optional Protocols thereto, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Optional Protocol thereto, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

LGBTQ+ people's rights

Consensual same-sex relations are punishable with death and LGBTQ+ individuals are subjected to a plethora of human rights violations, including frequently being forced into marriage.

Death penalty, torture and other ill-treatment

Activists, human rights defenders, and members of civil society are at high risk of arbitrary arrest, detention and disappearance, often followed by execution, death in custody, sexual abuse, torture and other cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment. The UNAMA recorded at least 1,600 incidents of human rights violations during detention between January 2022 and July 2023. Furthermore, the Taliban's continued use of public executions and corporal punishment have been sharply criticised by the UN.

Freedom of religion and belief

Freedom of religion and belief has been drastically infringed upon as religious minorities such as the Shia, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Ahmadiyya and Ismaili have faced restrictions on religious customs, which have ended fatally in some cases, with Taliban forces shooting at worshippers. The state, its policies and education are based exclusively on the Taliban's interpretation of Sunni Islam.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly

Freedom of expression has all but been exterminated, with frequent arbitrary arrest, detention, harassment and murder of journalists. Media outlets and journalists expressing criticism have been shut down. Freedom of expression has also been curtailed on social media, with instances of criticism on social media being punished through detention. Unlawful violence, including firearms and beatings, have been used against peaceful protests, including many led by women. Participants in peaceful protests risk arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, once again occurring in a culture of impunity.

Refugees' and internally displaced people's rights

After Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, Afghan refugees constitute the third largest displaced population in the world. There are 3.25 million people internally displaced by conflict in Afghanistan and 5.3 million Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers *registered* in neighbouring countries, that number likely being even higher in reality. However, due to tensions over the TPP with the Pakistani government, undocumented Afghans in Pakistan are facing deportation, with further refugees facing deportations in Iran and Türkiye. More than a million Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2024, deepening the humanitarian crisis.

Humanitarian Crisis

The current humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire, to say the least. In total, 23.7 million people - amounting to roughly 50% of the population - including 9.2 million children, are dependent on humanitarian assistance and 69% of people lack items needed for basic subsistence. 14.7 million people are food insecure and 48% of people in Afghanistan live below the poverty line. 6.3 million people are living as internally displaced peoples for protracted amounts of time and the Afghan refugees returning from Iran and Pakistan have placed even more strain on the system. To make matters worse, the country is disproportionately affected by climate change, being the country at fourth most risk due to the climate crisis (INFORM Risk Index 2023), and eighth most vulnerable and ill prepared for climate change on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index. 60% of the population is impacted by severe drought and the average temperature has risen faster than the global average, having already reached 1.8°C warming. Climate change-related extreme weather events like the May 2024 flash floods in northern Afghanistan worsen the situation. Recovery from over 40 years of poverty and conflict would be difficult for any country, yet frequent natural disasters like earthquakes, widespread explosive ordnance contamination - 3.4 million people are at high risk, living within 1km of such explosives - political isolation as well as heavily conditioned aid and restrictive policies by the Taliban, such as prohibiting women from working in aid organisations, have hampered humanitarian assistance efforts.

Furthermore, funding is a major issue. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) was only 37.5 percent funded (\$ 1.15 billion of 3.1 billion dollars) in 2024, endangering the existence of critical life-saving programmes. Humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan are reliant on international aid as Afghanistan's economy has, according to the United Nations Development Programme, essentially collapsed and is reliant on international aid. The freezing of international assets, sanctions, trade disruptions, international isolation, lacking investment and heavily decreased international financial support have crippled the economy, which has shrunk by 27% since the takeover. Furthermore, opium poppy cultivation accounted for a third of the total value of agricultural production in Afghanistan when the Taliban banned opium poppy agriculture. As a result, production plummeted by 95 per cent. While this, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), has had positive impacts on the fight against drugs like heroin, produced from opium, it has had devastating consequences for the rural population. Farmers' income from opium sales has fallen from an

estimated 1.36 billion US dollars in 2022 to 110 million US dollars in 2023, as they have had to switch to growing other significantly less lucrative produce. Additionally, the exclusion of women from the workforce has further cost the Afghan economy 1 billion USD per year.

Precisely this demographic - women and girls - bear the brunt of the economic crisis, for example through a sharp increase in child, early and forced marriage. Before the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan's rates of these marriages were already some of the highest in the world, and while there have been no examination of nation-wide trends since the Taliban takeover, organisations working in the field have consistently indicated sharp increases since 2021. For example, the organisation Too Young to Wed found, in a rapid assessment survey, that nearly one third of all interviewed families were planning to force their daughters into marriage. This is (in part at least) due to the fact that the economic crisis has left many unemployed and the cost of living has risen starkly, causing many families to marry their daughters off - in ages as young as six years old - for the dowry money in order to feed the remaining family. Since women lack any educational, economic, or professional future, the economic gain from marriage is how they are the most "useful" to their families. Despite the fact that the Taliban issued a decree in December of 2021 that "no one can force women to marry by coercion and pressure", no measures have been taken to combat child marriage, members of the Taliban have been implicated in cases of forced marriage and the Taliban-controlled courts virtually always side with the husband in divorce and marital abuse cases. Women impacted by child and forced marriage are at increased risk of marital abuse and rape, and are unable to make own reproductive choices. Currently, birth complications are the main cause of death for 15-19 year old girls in Afghanistan and will rise if medical humanitarian assistance cuts out.

The insufficient funding for humanitarian programs, if not alleviated in 2025, will cause around 1.34 million children under five to remain at increased risk of malnutrition-related death, and nutrition services for 17,524 children as well as 8,300 pregnant and breastfeeding women affected by acute malnutrition will have to be cut off. Levels of food insecurity will rise, again affecting women and children disproportionately. Around 8.4 million people will be left without safe water, and 2 million people will be left without personal hygiene supplies, including menstrual hygiene products for women and girls. Hundreds of thousands of individuals will be left without heating and winter clothing, increasing the chances of respiratory infections, hypothermia, and fatalities, including individuals displaced through extreme weather events. More than 4.5 million people could be cut off from life-saving health services.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Taliban

The Taliban originated as a student militia in the early 1990s. The word "Taliban" means "students" in Pashto, and the group was initially composed of Islamic theology students from madrassas (religious schools) in Pakistan and Afghanistan, aiming to establish an Islamic government based on their interpretation of Sharia law. The group ruled Afghanistan from 1995-2001, until they were displaced by a U.S. led military coalition. The Taliban returned to power in 2021 after the withdrawal of international troops. The group is notorious for their draconian interpretation of Sharia law and their human rights infringements. Currently, the Taliban leadership is (broadly speaking) divided into two camps - Kabul and Kandahar. The interim government based in Kabul has been more open to concessions with the West, while the faction in the Kandahar headquarters of the hardline Supreme Leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, has rejected this.

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan - Government in Exile

The former Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was established in 2004 and existed until the Taliban takeover in 2021, at which time its government institutions collapsed and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country. Some members of the former government remained in office, yet there have also been reports of specific targeting of former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces personnel, judges and prosecutors. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is still recognised as the official government of Afghanistan by the UN, though it is no longer able to operate from exile and has no foothold in its former territory (notwithstanding the NRF, see below). Afghanistan's United Nations seat also lost its voting rights in May 2024, due to \$900,000 in membership dues that have gone unpaid since 2021. While the Afghani delegation attempted to gain an exemption under article 19 of the United Nations Charter which states that "a Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The General Assembly may, nevertheless, permit such a Member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the Member." However, the United Nations Committee on Contributions rejected the Afghanistan Chargé d'Affaires' bid to have the current domestic situation in Afghanistan be classified as such an extraordinary situation warranting exemption from the fees.

NRF under Ahmad Massoud

The NRF (National Resistance Front of Afghanistan) is a military alliance of various anti-Taliban fighters loyal to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Ahmad Massoud is the founder and leader of this organisation, which constitutes the only organised resistance to the Taliban in the country. The NRF exercised de facto control over the Panjshir Valley in northeastern Afghanistan until the 6th of September 2021, when the Taliban claimed victory, though the resistance denied this claim and insisted that NRF fighters have remained in Panjshir. After this, Ahmad Massoud was forced to flee to Tajikistan with former Vice President Amrullah Saleh. He has called for a general uprising among Afghans and also appealed to the international community to support his cause. The NRF seeks to establish a democratic Afghanistan and promote social justice and human rights through “the rekindling of a tolerant, rational interpretation of Islam”. As of August 2024, the NRF controls no territory, though they have launched guerrilla attacks in 20 provinces across Afghanistan; almost 200 attacks were reported in the first half of 2024. These attacks have been relatively effective for their modest scope, though the group is aware of its limited capabilities in comparison to the Taliban, who control billions of dollars’ worth of US military materials. As such, the NRF is also pursuing a strong diplomatic avenue through the Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan, seen as an alternative to the Taliban-dominated *2020 Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan*.

Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The TTP’s stated objective is the destabilization of and the overthrowing of Pakistan’s government, in order to establish an emirate in accordance with its own interpretation of Islam. It has gained strength since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and has significantly intensified its attacks against Pakistan from operational bases within Afghanistan, with Taliban tolerance and outright support. Despite pressure from Pakistan to crack down on the TTP, the Taliban have been unable and unwilling to do so, since they do not conceive of the TTP as a terrorist organisation, and retain strong ideological ties.

IS-KP

The terrorist group IS-KP, as an offshoot of the Islamic State (ISIS), follows a global jihadist ideology and clashes strongly with the Taliban ideologically (in spite of rare historical examples of cooperation between the two, particularly in the form of brutal attacks on the

Hazara minority). IS-KP views the Taliban's nationalist goals as un-Islamic and accuses them of betraying the principles of global jihad. Since their takeover in 2021, the Taliban have consistently engaged in violent counterinsurgency struggles with IS-KP, which have grown more effective in curbing their operations within Afghanistan, though the group has expanded regionally, as well as launching attacks against representatives of more pro-Taliban countries, such as Pakistan. Its operational capacity remains strong, maintaining its status as a significant regional threat. The Taliban have attempted to gain international legitimacy by portraying themselves as a bulwark against IS-KP terror.

UNAMA

See section on UN Involvement.

Pakistan

As a long-time ally, Pakistan's position towards the Taliban is a multifaceted one. The country has been a major source of military, financial, and diplomatic aid for the Taliban for years. Pakistan's support for the Taliban stems from its regional rivalry with India, which had a good relationship with the de jure president Ghani and has refused to recognise or cooperate with the Taliban's regime. Additionally, Pakistan has vested ideological interests in the Taliban's perceived prioritisation of Islam nationalism over Pashtun identity, which has historically complicated the coherence of various territories on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. After the toppling of Afghanistan's former government by the Taliban, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan declared that Afghans had "broken the shackles of slavery", though Pakistan has yet to formally recognise the new government, a position contrary to the one espoused during the Taliban's previous reign. This stance is chiefly driven by concern for the strain which such an endorsement would place on Pakistan's relations with major powers such as the US. Furthermore, the worsening economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan weakens already tenuous trade ties across the border, and could also cause waves of Afghan refugees to flee into Pakistan seeking better conditions. The Pakistan government is also strongly concerned with the increasing threat from the TTP, whose support from the Taliban appears to have strengthened, with the latter refusing to sever their ties. Kabul's approach to the situation has angered Islamabad, which threatens further mass deportations and cross-border military engagement. Frictions between Pakistan and Afghanistan threaten regional stability and affect major powers like China, which has large economic interests in Pakistan. Nevertheless,

Pakistan continues its advocacy for the Taliban on an international level, urging for engagement and the lifting of punitive measures like economic sanctions, as well as providing humanitarian aid. They argue that worsening the current economic situation will be counter-productive to the promotion of human rights in Afghanistan, while also attempting to encourage Taliban authorities to make compromises to Western pressure.

United States of America

The United States has always had a strong anti-Taliban stance, being the ones to oust the Taliban's first government in 2001. The 20-year war in Afghanistan constitutes the longest war ever fought by the US. A significant development in this relationship came with the signing of the *US-Taliban Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan* (see below) under President Trump in 2020. This ultimately led to the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent fall of Kabul. Though not personally responsible for the signing of the deal, President Biden chose to uphold its promise of withdrawing American troops, calling it “the right decision, a wise decision, and the best decision for America” to avoid further escalation. He also vowed to continue the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries, promising that America would “hunt [...] down to the ends of the earth” any groups engaging in terrorism against the US or its allies. The US has yet to recognise the legitimacy of the Taliban regime and strongly condemns the Taliban's human rights violations. Since leaving office, Donald Trump has insisted that he would have handled the US pullout differently, despite the fact that the *Agreement* signed under his administration substantially paved the way for the Taliban takeover. He has also previously threatened that he would “bomb the hell out of” Afghanistan if the Taliban did not pay back the value of the military equipment left behind in 2021. In light of his 2024 reelection, it is unclear how precisely the President-elect will handle the situation in Afghanistan. On one hand, tensions after his reelection seem to be running lower than might be expected after such inflammatory previous remarks, with the Taliban approaching his second term with cautious optimism and a call for “a pragmatic approach to ensure tangible advancement in bilateral relations”. Members of Trump's administration are vocal critics of the Taliban and have called for increased pressure on the group, including a fuller implementation of the 2020 *Agreement*, many of whose promises the Taliban has not fulfilled. However, experts have also stated that Afghanistan is not a current priority for the US government.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UN Involvement

The United Nations' involvement in the region goes back to 1946 when Afghanistan joined the General Assembly. Recently, on 16 March 2023, the Security Council once again reaffirmed, through its resolution 2678, "the important role that the United Nations will continue to play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan."

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), established on 28 March 2002 by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401, is a UN Special Political Mission. Its overall mandate is to aid the people of Afghanistan. This mandate must be renewed annually, and has been altered over the years to reflect the situation on the ground. Most recently, it was extended for a year on 14 March 2024, by UN SC resolution 2727.

The UNAMA has its headquarters in Kabul, offices in field presence across the country, as well as liaison offices in the region, namely Pakistan and Iran. It is staffed by roughly 990 members (as of September 2024), consisting of both Afghan and international staff. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Afghanistan, currently Roza Otunbayeva, leads the UNAMA.

In 2008, via directive of UN SG, UNAMA became an integrated mission, which means UNAMA works to coordinate all UN agencies and offices in the country to form a UN Country Team for increased efficiency. The work of the UNAMA is structured around two pillars - the political pillar and the development and humanitarian assistance pillar, each led by its own Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG).

The Political Affairs pillar of UNAMA is responsible for political outreach - coordinating with the liaison offices in Islamabad and Tehran - conflict resolution, and regional cooperation as well as the areas analysis and reporting, political affairs, rule of law, gender.

The Development and Humanitarian Assistance pillar serves to coordinate development efforts in Afghanistan, working closely with the UNCT which comprises 20 sub-bodies.⁶

⁶ The UNCT in Afghanistan comprises 20 sub-bodies, these being the: FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), ILO (International Labour Organization), IOM (International Organization for Migration), OCHA (UN Office Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), UN WOMEN (United Nations Development Fund for Women), UNAIDS (United Nations program on HIV/AIDS), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UN-HABITAT (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements), UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization), UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research), UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service), UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), UNOPS (UN Office for Project Services), WFP (World Food Programme), WHO (World Health Organization). Each of these organisations have dedicated web pages for their work in Afghanistan. For more information on each agency's specific activities, please access these.

Relevant Resolutions

For a list of Security Council Resolutions pertaining to Afghanistan, please see:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/?ctype=Afghanistan&cbtype=afghanistan

For a list of General Assembly Resolutions pertaining to Afghanistan, please see:

<https://unama.unmissions.org/un-general-assembly-resolutions>

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

The *Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan*, formally the *Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America* was a peace deal signed on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar, between the U.S. and the Taliban, aiming to end the 2001–2021 war. It was signed under the Trump administration and did not include the Afghan government. The agreement gives security guarantees to the United States, with the Taliban pledging that they will prevent any group or individual acting against the security of the United States and its allies from Afghan soil. In exchange, the United States agreed to pull out all troops from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the agreement calls for intra-Afghan talks, including a ceasefire. Critics argue the agreement sidelined the Afghan government and emboldened the Taliban, prioritizing rapid U.S. withdrawal over lasting stability.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Foreign Intervention

The most notable previous attempt to solve the security situation in Afghanistan was the NATO-Led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Mission. The ISAF was deployed by the NATO from 2001 to 2014 to combat terrorism and bolster security. It supported Afghan forces in securing the country from insurgents like the Taliban and the IS-KP. Following the end of the ISAF, NATO focused on training and advising Afghan security forces - the so-called resolute support mission. During the foreign intervention, there was a period of democracy in Afghanistan and the human rights situation was substantially better. However, the mission clearly did not cause long-lasting, stable change in the region, as the Taliban gained power immediately after the withdrawal of foreign forces.

Sanctions

Afghanistan currently faces a range of sanctions from international organizations such as the UN and the EU, as well as individual countries, such as the UK and the US. These sanctions have been implemented mainly in response to the Taliban's human rights infringements and their status as a terrorist organisation, as well as their ties to other militant groups such as al-Qaeda. Current UN sanctions on Afghanistan, authorised by the UN Security Council Resolution 1988, are overseen by the 1988 Sanctions Committee and include:

1. Asset Freezes: Approximately \$9 billion in foreign exchange reserves are frozen abroad in order to prevent funds from being used to finance terrorism or to support the Taliban's policies. In 2021, the Federal Reserve Bank in New York held 7 billion USD while another 2.1 billion USD were held in Europe and other countries. In September 2022, the Fund for the Afghan people (see below for more information) was established using some of this money.
2. Travel Bans: Many Taliban officials are subject to travel bans imposed by the UN Security Council. These restrictions prevent listed individuals from crossing international borders, limiting their diplomatic and economic interactions.
3. Arms Embargoes: An arms embargo, initially aimed at the Taliban during its insurgency, continues to restrict the supply of weapons and military support to Afghanistan under the current regime. This embargo includes bans on technical training or assistance related to military activities.
4. Sanctions on Financial Transactions: Restrictions on Afghanistan's access to international banking systems have crippled its ability to engage in global trade and finance. This includes limitations imposed by entities such as the U.S. Treasury and other Western financial regulators.

These sanctions, while aimed at pressuring the Taliban to respect human rights and curbing extremism, have also contributed to worsening humanitarian conditions in the country. Legal unclarity about the scope of sanctions exemptions for humanitarian organisations lead to so-called chilling effects, meaning that financial institutions “de-risk”, so refuse or delay transferring funds to humanitarian agencies because they are afraid of being found guilty or investigated (which harms their reputation) of violating the sanctions as well as anti-money laundering and countering terrorism financial regulations.

UNAMA

The UNAMA (for more information on the UNAMA itself see previous section on UN involvement) works to provide humanitarian assistance on the ground. While the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire and there is lacking financial support for UNAMA's work, the crisis would be even worse without the work of the UNAMA. The UNAMA is also an important player in the monitoring of the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

Fund for the Afghan People

The US, authorised through Executive Order (E.O.) 14064 of President Biden in cooperation with other partners, including the Swiss government, established the Fund for the Afghan People (the Afghan Fund) in September 2022. The Geneva-based fund is a non-profit foundation with a mandate “to protect, preserve, and—on a targeted basis—disburse its assets for the benefit of the Afghan people”. Its assets, half of the Afghan central bank reserves that the US froze in 2021, initially amounted to USD 3.5 billion. As of September 2024 its assets have surpassed USD 3.8 billion with investment earnings. The Board of Trustees that manages the fund's activities consists of two Afghan economic experts, a U.S. government representative, and a Swiss government representative. The Taliban DFA neither have access to nor recognise the legitimacy of the Fund. The Board of Trustees have the authority to allow targeted disbursements to promote monetary and macroeconomic stability and benefit the Afghan people, such as paying for critical imports such as energy. However, the funds must be preserved and returned to the Central Bank of Afghanistan once it is considered independent from political influence and has implemented anti-money laundering and countering-the-financing-of-terrorism (AML/CFT) controls.

The fund, contrary to common misconception, is not meant primarily for humanitarian purposes, but to stabilise the Afghan financial system (which does however have indirect effects on the humanitarian situation). Currency reserves, assets held by central banks in foreign currency, aim to protect central banks from a rapid devaluation of the national currency. As of November 2024, no disbursements have been made.

Possible Solutions

Increased diplomacy and cooperation with the DFA?

According to UN SG Antonio Guterres, the only real leverage that the Security Council has over the Taliban regime is their desire for recognition by the international community, stating that "It's very important for the international community to be united, for all members of the Security Council to be united, to use the only leverage that exists, which is the interests of the Taliban for legitimacy for recognition."

Cooperating with the Taliban, however, poses a distinct moral dilemma, with the international community broadly being split into two camps.

One side argues that an increase in engagement and cooperation with the Taliban normalises the regime and their policies. Thus, this camp argues for a continuation of the international isolation of the Taliban regime, save for strictly necessary humanitarian aid, with the aim of forcing the regime to far-reaching concessions on human rights and their claim to power. There has also been some interest internationally in maintaining dialogue with and supporting the NRF. While no western officials have supported directly arming the NRF, there have been proposals for governments to provide non-lethal aid to the group.

The other faction argues that the Taliban are the DFA authorities in Afghanistan, will remain so for the foreseeable future and will likely not be persuaded to respect women's and human rights. However, this camp argues that cooperation is still necessary on security and, in order to achieve true betterment of the humanitarian situation, economic issues. While this means not placing a focus on human and womens' rights, it is women and minorities that bear the brunt of the economic and humanitarian crisis; thus withholding cooperation only harms these already oppressed groups. These steps could alleviate poverty among Afghans, including women, in the long term.

Security Concerns

The main avenue for addressing security concerns is through cooperation with the DFA. An important step for creating efficient security cooperation would be mechanisms of information sharing in the region. In order for this to happen, it is important that the regional rhetoric is cooled down, with different countries having been accusing each other of harbouring militant groups and inflating the numbers of suspected fighters in the region. In this context, UN

monitoring teams, which have not conducted independent assessment of terrorist threats in Afghanistan since 2021, could help provide impartial information. Fundamentally, a common platform for dialogue in the region on security concerns is necessary, for example to discuss the disparity on how the Taliban deal with militant groups and how the neighbouring governments would prefer they deal with them.

Concerning water tensions, the situation also calls for regional dialogue. While the fact that Afghanistan is not part of the 1992 water sharing agreement between Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan complicates matters, there are avenues of cooperation that could be pursued. For example, Uzbekistan has offered technical support for the Qush Tepa Canal in order to minimize water wastage, which is likely to occur due to the rather rudimentary construction methods the Taliban utilise. Until now, the Taliban have declined such an offer.

Human Rights Abuses

In his most recent report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, recommended Member States to take the following actions:

- a. Urgently adopt a comprehensive action plan to address the human rights, humanitarian and political crisis in Afghanistan. The plan should include clearly defined human rights benchmarks for the Taliban, timelines for implementation and the bodies responsible for monitoring and reporting on progress. Specific efforts should be made to consult with women, children and young people, ethnic and religious minorities and other minority or marginalized groups;
- b. Ensure that any normalization of engagement with the de facto authorities is based on demonstrated, measurable and independently verified improvements in human rights, in particular for women and girls, assessed against clearly established human rights benchmarks;
- c. Ensure the representative, equal, meaningful and safe participation of Afghan women in all deliberations concerning the country's future, including while defining the international community's policies towards the de facto authorities;
- d. Take proactive steps to keep the situation in Afghanistan meaningfully on the international agenda, in particular in international and multilateral forums and institutions,

including those dedicated to women and peace and security and to children in armed conflict;

- e. Ensure sustained funding for the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan, including by increasing funding to Afghan civil society organizations, especially women-led and women's rights organizations;
- f. Release assets belonging to the people of Afghanistan, subject to strict safeguards, to make funds for central banking and humanitarian actions that benefit all Afghan people;
- g. Identify and strengthen survivor-centred pathways for accountability, including but not limited to:
 - i. Ensuring that the International Criminal Court has the resources and cooperation needed to investigate and prosecute those responsible for international crimes;
 - ii. Supporting efforts to bring Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice for violations of international human rights treaties to which it is a party;
 - iii. Supporting the codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity;
- h. Explore all avenues to exert pressure on the Taliban, including the imposition of additional targeted sanctions.

Humanitarian Crisis

In order to address the humanitarian crisis, a continuation and increase of humanitarian aid is necessary in order to alleviate the immediate effects of the situation. Furthermore, measures to reinvigorate the economy and humanitarian systems are vital in order to create a self-sufficient state in the long run.

In order to alleviate the immediate humanitarian crisis, reliable funding must be secured to be able to consistently cover the costs of humanitarian aid, unlike in the past. This humanitarian aid should also be gender-responsive, recognising the disproportionate impacts the Taliban regime has on female demographics and the increased challenges they have had in accessing humanitarian aid and support services. Furthermore, increased dialogue and engagement with the DFA are necessary to coordinate current actions and facilitate knowledge transfer, capacity building and technical assistance - necessary steps to decrease dependency. Long term measures should be taken to spur socioeconomic recovery, for example through addressing difficulties in international transactions. For this, it is vital that the sanctions regime increases in clarity, to avoid adverse chilling effects on banks and other actors.

Conclusion

Thus, the situation in Afghanistan, consisting of the triple crisis of human rights, humanitarian situation and security concerns, is a most worrisome mixture that demands thought-through solutions of the Security Council. As a country that has been long used as a playing ground for international powers - as during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in which the Mujahideen groups were supported by western powers - it is vital and, to return to UN Secretary General's remarks, a matter of moral responsibility, that in this current polarised situation, the security council prepares and convenes wisely in order to take the urgently needed measures.

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