



IJEMD-SS, 1 (1) (2022), 1 – 16

<https://doi.org/10.54938/ijemds.2022.01.1.102>

International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinaries: Social Science

Research Paper

Journal Homepage: www.ojs.ijemd.com

ISSN (print): 2957-5311



US Incursion in Afghanistan: Right or Necessity

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Abstract

Throughout history, Afghanistan has been beset by warlords, internal strife and also subjected to foreign invasions. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, it was at the centre of the "Great Game" played between the Russian Empire and British India. In the late twentieth century the last Afghan War, which involved the mujahedeen with support from Pakistan, the US and other powers on one side and the Afghan communist government and the Soviet Union on the other, ended with the latter's withdrawal in 1989. In the mujahedeen and Taliban, the people of Afghanistan hoped for a future of peace and prosperity, rather than the hostility that was to come. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, international forces invaded the country. Although the Taliban were toppled within a month, much was left to rebuild and reconstruct. This paper delineates the role US played in Afghanistan, why did the US went there in the first place, to what extent can we say US has rights to be in Afghanistan, which mandate are they fulfilling and what are the reasons behind their pulling back? These and many more questions are what this paper attempt to answer.

Keywords: Peace-keeping; Economic Development; Military; Foreign Aids; Political Will.

1. Introduction

The United Nations has been present in Afghanistan since 1949. In recent years, the Organization's activities have been focused on assisting Afghans lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. The UN Security Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in March 2002 Resolution 1401. The Mission's mandate, which extends until 17 September 2021, stresses the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process to achieve sustainable peace.

On 3 January 1980, a number of Member States of the UN requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. The Council met from 5 to 9 January 1980, and on 9 January decided, in view of the lack of unanimity of its permanent members, to call for an emergency special session of the General Assembly to examine the

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matter resolution 462 (1980). The item was included in the agenda of the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, in 1980, at the request of 35 Member States (A/35/144 and Add.1). At that session, the Assembly adopted a resolution on the question (resolution 35/37). At its sixty-first session, the General Assembly, expressing strong commitment to the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact and the annexes thereto (S/2006/90, annex), which provided the framework for the partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, recognizing the urgent need to tackle the challenges in Afghanistan, including terrorist threats, the fight against narcotics, the lack of security, in particular in the south and east (O'Hanlon, Michael E. 2010).

The comprehensive nationwide disbandment of illegal armed groups and the development of Afghan Government institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law, the acceleration of justice sector reform, the promotion of national reconciliation, without prejudice to the fulfillment of the measures introduced by the Security Council in its resolution 1267 (1999) and other relevant resolutions, and an Afghan-led transitional justice process, the safe and orderly return of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons, the promotion and protection of human rights and the advancement of economic and social development, and expressing strong support for the central and impartial role that the Secretary-General and his Special Representative continued to play in the consolidation of peace and stability in Afghanistan, called upon the Government of Afghanistan, with the assistance of the international community, to continue to rest the threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups as well as by criminal violence; stressed the importance of meeting the benchmarks of the Afghanistan Compact, with the support of the international community; underlined the need to finalize the Afghanistan National Development Strategy as soon as possible, and urged the international community actively to support that process; and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly every six months during its sixty-first session on developments in Afghanistan and on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution (resolution 61/18).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

• **Peace-Keeping:** Lester B. Pearson of Canada, one of the originators of the concept, described it as an intermediary technique between “merely passing resolutions and actually fighting.” Since the UN does not have military forces of its own, it has to depend on its member states to provide such forces for peacekeeping and other peace-support operations. In effect, UN peacekeeping became the employment, under UN auspices, of military, paramilitary, or nonmilitary personnel or forces in a theater of political conflict. Its immediate purpose is to separate warring factions long enough so as to allow negotiations to take place between them.

• **Economic Development:** Whereas economic development is a policy intervention aiming to improve the well-being of people, economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and increases in GDP; economist Amartya Sen describes economic growth as but "one aspect of the process of economic development". Economists primarily focus on the growth aspect and the economy at large, whereas researchers of community economic development concern themselves with socioeconomic development as well.

• **Military:** Military, also known collectively as armed forces, is a heavily armed, highly organized force primarily intended for warfare. It is typically officially authorized and maintained by a sovereign state, with its members identifiable by their distinct military uniform. It may consist of one or more military branches such as an army, navy, air force, space force, marines, or coast guard. The main task of the military is usually defined as defence of the state and its interests against external armed threats. In broad usage, the terms *armed forces* and *military* are often treated as synonymous, although in technical usage a distinction is sometimes made in which a country's armed forces may include both its military and other paramilitary

forces. There are various forms of irregular military forces, not belonging to a recognized state; though they share many attributes with regular military forces, they are less often referred to as simply *military*.

• **Foreign Aids:** Foreign aid is the voluntary movement of money or other resources from one nation to another. The transactions are mostly from developed countries to developing countries. A developing nation typically lacks a strong manufacturing base and is distinguished by a low value of the Human Development Index (HDI). Foreign aid may be offered as a contribution or a loan, which can either be a hard or soft loan. If the loan is in a foreign currency, it is termed as a hard loan.

• **Political Will:** Derrick Brinkerhoff has defined political will as ‘the commitment of actors to undertake actions to achieve a set of objectives...and to sustain the costs of those actions over time’. In few sectors is the need for political will – the sustained commitment towards developmental objectives – more important than in extractives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

• **The State Fragility Theory**

In order to better understand fragile states, we need to know how states become fragile in the first place. The first scholar to write about state fragility theory is Joel S. Migdal in his book *Strong Society and Weak State* (1988). There is no nationally or internationally definition of fragile states but for the purposes of this paper. States are considered to be fragile when government cannot or will not deliver the core functions to its people, including the poor and the masses. Thus, the concept of fragile states can be best understood when their features are juxtaposed with the features of strong and efficacious states, which are anchored on the capability to discharge important functions and drive forward development. Such functions include: the capability of assuring basic security, maintaining rule of law and justice, or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens.

A fragile state or weak state is a country characterized by weak state capacity or weak state legitimacy leaving citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks. The World Bank, for example, deems a country to be ‘fragile’ if it (a) is eligible for assistance (i.e., a grant) from the International Development Association (IDA), (b) has had a UN peacekeeping mission in the last three years, and (c) has received a ‘governance’ score of less than 3.2 (as per the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) index of The World Bank). A more cohesive definition of the fragile state might also note a state's growing inability to maintain a monopoly on force in its declared territory (*World Bank 2009*). While a fragile state might still occasionally exercise military authority or sovereignty over its declared territory, its claim grows weaker as the logistical mechanisms through which it exercises power grow weaker (David 2011). While many countries are making progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a group of 35 to 50 countries (depending on the measure used) are falling behind. It is estimated that out of the world's seven billion people, 26% live in fragile states, and this is where one-third of all people surviving on less than US\$1.25 per day live, half of the world's children who die before the age of five, and one-third of maternal deaths occur (*World Bank 2009*).

According to Osaghae (2007: 4-5) fragile states are usually characterized by pervasive corruption, poverty, low levels of economic growth, underdeveloped institutions of conflict management and resolution as well as unstable and divided population. He also posited that state fragility may be regarded as an all-encompassing summation of the pathologies of problematic states that have over the years been variously described as weak, soft, over-developed, illegitimate, poor, irrelevant, de-rooted, rogue, collapse, and failed, each description attempting to capture one or a few problematic elements. The indices of fragile

states apply to the Afghanistan situation; it is safe to conclude that Afghanistan is indeed a fragile state. This is more so because the country manifests almost all the indices of fragility.

Collier et al. (2000: 45-64) identify three people ripple effects that emerge from armed conflicts; they are the internal effects (as a result of the burdens of internally displaced persons), the regional effects and the global effect. According to him, these three ripple effects generate unique challenges. While the internal effects constitute a problem of food insecurity, loss of means of livelihood, rise in displacement of people. The regional effect constitutes spread of contagious diseases across borders from the inflow of refugees and the global effect constitutes the growth in narcotics trade across borders sponsored by foreign non-state actors.

Fragile states are also referred to as dysfunctional states where the government is extremely repressive or weak are unable to maintain law and order. Here, citizens freely engage in large-scale disobedience. At a more theoretical level, state fragility can be understood as a composite measure of all aspects of a state performance such as authority, service delivery, and legitimacy that underline the state (Mantzikos 2010). The views is that Afghanistan frail nature serves as a breeding ground for insurgency movements and its susceptibility makes it less proactive, reactive and responsive to the Taliban scourge. Hence, this is the context in which we anchor the theoretical framework of this research work.

DOHA AGREEMENT 2020

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 The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a member of the United Nations and recognized by the United States and the international community as a sovereign state under international law, and the United States of America are committed to working together to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that ends the war in Afghanistan for the benefit of all Afghans and contributes to regional stability and global security. A comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will include four parts: 1) guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil by any international terrorist groups or individuals against the security of the United States and its allies, 2) a timeline for the withdrawal of all U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan, 3) a political settlement resulting from intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and 4) a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. These four parts are interrelated and interdependent. Pursuit of peace after long years of fighting reflects the goal of all parties who seek a sovereign, unified Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have partnered closely since 2001 to respond to threats to international peace and security and help the Afghan people chart a secure, democratic and prosperous future. The two countries are committed to their longstanding relationship and their investments in building the Afghan institutions necessary to establish democratic norms, protect and preserve the unity of the country, and promote social and economic advancements and the rights of citizens. The commitments set out here are made possible by these shared achievements. Afghan and U.S. security forces share a special bond forged during many years of tremendous sacrifice and courage. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan reaffirm their support for peace and their willingness to negotiate an end to this war.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes the Reduction in Violence period and takes note of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, an important step toward ending the war. The U.S.-Taliban agreement paves the way for intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its readiness to participate in such negotiations and its readiness to conclude a ceasefire with the Taliban.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan furthermore reaffirms its ongoing commitment to prevent any international terrorist groups or individuals, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS-K, from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States, its allies and other countries. To accelerate the pursuit of peace, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan confirms its support for the phased withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement and any agreement resulting from intra-Afghan negotiations. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States therefore have made the following commitments:

•PART ONE:

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States recognize that al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K and other international terrorist groups or individuals continue to use Afghan soil to recruit members, raise funds, train adherents and plan and attempt to conduct attacks that threaten the security of the United States, its allies, and Afghanistan. To address this continuing terrorist threat, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States will continue to take the following steps to defeat al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and other international terrorist groups or individuals:

- 1) The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its continued commitment not to cooperate with or permit international terrorist groups or individuals to recruit, train, raise funds (including through the production or distribution of narcotics), transit Afghanistan or misuse its internationally recognized travel documents, or conduct other support activities in Afghanistan, and will not host them.
- 2) The United States re-affirms its commitments regarding support for the Afghan security forces and other government institutions, including through ongoing efforts to enhance the ability of Afghan security forces to deter and respond to internal and external threats, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments. This commitment includes support to Afghan security forces to prevent al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals from using Afghan soil to threaten the United States and its allies.
- 3) The United States re-affirms its readiness to continue to conduct military operations in Afghanistan with the consent of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in order to disrupt and degrade efforts by al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals to carry out attacks against the United States or its allies, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments and with the existing understanding that U.S. counterterrorism operations are intended to complement and support Afghan security forces' counterterrorism operations, with full respect for Afghan sovereignty and full regard for the safety and security of the Afghan people and the protection of civilians.
- 4) The United States commits to facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side.

•PART TWO:

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have consulted extensively on U.S. and Coalition force levels and the military activities required to achieve the foregoing commitments including through support to Afghan security and defense forces. Subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and the Coalition jointly assess that the current levels of military forces are no longer necessary to achieve

security objectives; since 2014, Afghan security forces have been in the lead for providing security and have increased their effectiveness. As such, the parties commit to take the following measures:

- 1) The United States will reduce the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 and implement other commitments in the U.S.-Taliban agreement within 135 days of the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will work with its allies and the Coalition to reduce proportionally the number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan over an equivalent period, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S. Taliban agreement.
- 2) Consistent with the joint assessment and determination between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete the withdrawal of their remaining forces from Afghanistan within 14 months following the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.
- 3) The United States re-affirms its commitment to seek funds on a yearly basis that support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of Afghan security forces, so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats.
- 4) To create the conditions for reaching a political settlement and achieving a permanent, sustainable ceasefire, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will participate in a U.S.-facilitated discussion with Taliban representatives on confidence building measures, to include determining the feasibility of releasing significant numbers of prisoners on both sides. The United States and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will seek the assistance of the ICRC to support this discussion.
- 5) With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan commits to start diplomatic engagement with members of the UN Security Council to remove members of the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, and in any case no later than 30 days after finalizing a framework agreement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

•PART THREE:

- 1) The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the UN Security Council for this agreement and related arrangements.
- 2) The United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are committed to continue positive relations, including economic cooperation for reconstruction.
- 3) The United States will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.
- 4) The United States will continue to work to build regional and international consensus to support the ongoing effort to achieve a political settlement to the principal conflict in Afghanistan.

THE LEGALITY OF US INVASION IN RELATIONS TO UN CHARTER AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES?

•UN Charter

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 to destroy al-Qaida, remove the Taliban from power and remake the nation. On Aug. 30, 2021, the U.S. completed a pullout of troops from Afghanistan, providing an uncertain punctuation mark to two decades of conflict.

In a number of respects, the Afghan War can be viewed as 'just war'. In the first place, the war can be justified on the basis of self-defense, as a way of protecting the USA in particular and the West in general from the threat of terrorism, as demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. Commentators such as Elshstain (2003) argued that the 'war on terror', of which the Afghan War was a

crucial part, was just in that it was fought against the genocidal threat of ‘apocalyptic terrorism’, a form of warfare that posed a potential threat to all Americans and Jews and made no distinction between combatants and non-combatants. The 2001 attack on Afghanistan also had a clear, and clearly stated, goal: the removal of a Taliban regime whose links to al-Qaeda were clearly established and undisputed. Furthermore, the USA and its allies acted as a legitimate authority, in that they were backed by NATO and enjoyed wide international support, including from Russia and China. Finally, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks could not have been reliably neutralized by diplomacy or non-violent pressure. The UN, for example, lacked the capability, authority and will to respond to the threat posed to global security by Islamist terrorism (Andrew Heywood 2011).

However, critics have portrayed the war as unjust and unjustifiable. Their arguments have included the following. First, the purpose of the war and the intentions with which it has been fought may be unjust to the extent that the USA was motivated by a desire to consolidate its global hegemony or by a wish to strengthen control of oil resources in the Middle East. In this respect, the attack on Afghanistan amounted to unwarranted aggression. Second, the USA and its allies could not be considered as legitimate authorities in that, unlike the 1991 Gulf War, the Afghan War had not been authorized by a specific UN resolution. Third, although the chances of success in toppling the Taliban regime were high, the likelihood of defeating Islamist terrorists through the Afghan War was much more questionable. This was because of the probability that an invasion would inflame and radicalize Muslim opinion and also because of the dubious benefits of technological superiority in fighting a counter-insurgency war against an enemy using guerrilla tactics. Fourth, the USA violated accepted conventions of warfare through its treatment of prisoners of war (who were dispatched to Guantanamo Bay and subjected to forms of torture) and in launching strikes against al-Qaeda and Taliban bases that often resulted in civilian deaths. Fifth, Islamists would argue that justice was on the side of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not the invading forces, as they were engaged in a jihad – in this case, literally a ‘holy war’ – to purify Islam and expel foreign influence from the Muslim world (Andrew Heywood 2011).

On Sept. 18, 2001, the U.S. House of Representatives voted **420-1** and the Senate **98-0** to authorize the United States to go to war, not just in Afghanistan, but in an open-ended commitment against “those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States.” U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee of California cast the only vote opposed to the war. In other words, the U.S. Congress took **7 days** after the 9/11 attacks to deliberate on and authorize the war.

According to the Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice (San Francisco 1945) stated in Chapter VII article 39-42, in Article 41 emphasized the role of UN and the security council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures (UN Charter 1945). These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations. What this implies is that, UN is primarily in charge of maintaining world peace as its required using all applicable means or instrument while some scholars has said the US been a prominent member of the Security Council uses this clause as may be required times to times.

Also in Article 42 of the UN Charter said that when the instrument or techniques of maintaining peace has failed, the Security Council can use the instrument of force in ensuring the restoration of peace in the global world. This has necessitated the continuous invasion of the US in Afghanistan considering the aftermath of 9/11 attacks in world trade centre (UN Charter 1945).

At **7,262 days** from the first attack on Afghanistan to the final troop pullout, Afghanistan is said to be the U.S longest war. But it isn't – the U.S. has not officially ended the Korean War. And U.S. operations in Vietnam, which began in the mid-1950s and included the declared war from 1965-1975, also rival Afghanistan in longevity.

U.S. President George W. Bush told members of Congress in a joint session on Sept. 20, 2001 that the war would be global, overt, and covert and could last a very long time.

“Our war on terror begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. ... Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen,” he said.

•**The Geneva Conventions Of 12 August 1949.**

Common Article 3 establishes a minimum set of protections that apparently apply to all other conflicts in which one party to the Conventions is engaged. Common Article 3 states: In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

- 1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed *hors de combat* by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria. To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:
 - a. violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
 - b. taking of hostages;
 - c. outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
 - d. the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.
- 2) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for. An impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict. The Parties to the conflict should further endeavor to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention. The application of the preceding provisions shall not affect the legal status of the Parties to the conflict (W. Michael Reisman and James Silk 1988).

Furthermore, it only applies to conflicts between the government and insurgents. Protocol II is to apply automatically if its requirements are met; it requires no declaration. But important humanitarian activities of relief societies such as the ICRC are "subject to the consent of the High Contracting Party concerned." Perhaps most salient to the present inquiry is the fact that the relevant parties to the Afghan conflict have ratified the 1949 Geneva Conventions but not the Protocols Additional to the Conventions (James Silk 1988).

FACTS BEHIND US PULLING OUT

The United States Armed Forces completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan on 30 August 2021, marking the end of the 2001–2021 War in Afghanistan. The withdrawal took place in the context of the Doha

Agreement (formally titled the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan), signed in February 2020 by the Trump administration and the Taliban without participation by the Afghan government, which provided for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan, in return for a Taliban pledge to prevent al-Qaeda from operating in areas under Taliban control, and future talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government for a permanent ceasefire.

1. **Financial Costs**

In March 2013, Linda Bilmes, a Senior Lecturer of Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School, estimated that the total costs of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq would come to total at least US\$4 to \$6 trillion. The two wars were counted as one cost due to their occurring simultaneously and using many of the same US troops. Collectively, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are expected become the most expensive wars in US history.

The \$4 to \$6 trillion cost includes long-term medical and disability costs for service members, military replenishment, and social and economic costs. The costs of benefits for veterans were expected to continue increasing over the following 40 years. A significant part of the expected final cost was due to "the budgetary impact of a war that is funded largely by borrowing", and the resulting additional interest costs—out of the \$9 trillion of US debt accrued since 2001, around \$2 trillion had been borrowed to finance the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

As of 2021, Brown University estimates that the war in Afghanistan has already cost \$2.261 trillion, out of which \$530 billion has been spent on interest payments and \$296 billion has been spent on veterans' care.

United States Costs to date of the War in Afghanistan, 2001–2021*
Estimated Congressional Appropriations and Spending in Current Billions of US Dollars, Excluding Future Interest Payments and Future Costs for Veterans Care (Rounded to nearest billion)
Defense Department Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) (War) Budget
State Department OCO (War) Budget
Defense Department Base Budget War-Related Increases
Veterans Care for Afghan War Vets
Estimated Interest on War Borrowing
Total, in Billions of Current Dollars

*Source: www.google.com

2. **Human Cost**

Most Afghans alive today were not born when the U.S. war began. The median age in Afghanistan is just **18.4 years old**. Including their country's war with the Soviet Union from 1979 to 1989 and civil war in the 1990s, most Afghans have lived under nearly continuous war. There are, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, **980,000 U.S. Afghanistan war veterans**. Of these men and women, **507,000 served in both Afghanistan and Iraq**. As of mid-August 2021, **20,722** members of the U.S. military had been wounded in action in Afghanistan, not including the 18 who were injured in the attack by ISIS-K outside the airport in Kabul on Aug. 26, 2021. Of the veterans who were injured and lost a limb in the post-9/11 wars, many lost more than one.

In all, **2,455 U.S. service members** were killed in the Afghanistan War. The figure includes 13 U.S. troops who were killed by ISIS-K in the Kabul airport attack on Aug. 26, 2021. U.S. deaths in Operation Enduring Freedom also include 130 service members who died in other locations besides Afghanistan, including Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

The U.S. has paid **US\$100,000 in a “death gratuity”** to the survivors of each of the service members killed in the Afghanistan war, totaling **\$245.5 million. More than 46,000 civilians have been killed** by all sides in the Afghanistan conflict. These are the direct deaths from bombs, bullets, blasts and fire. Thousands more have been injured, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. And while the number of Afghans leaving the country has increased in recent weeks, more than **2.2 million displaced Afghans** were living in Iran and Pakistan at the end of 2020. The United Nations Refugee Agency reported in late August 2021 that since the start of that year, more than 558,000 people have been internally displaced, having fled their homes to escape violence.

According to the United Nations, in 2021 about a third of people remaining in Afghanistan are malnourished. **About half of all children under 5 years old** experience malnutrition. The human toll also includes the hundreds of Pakistani civilians who were killed in **more than 400 U.S. drone strikes** since 2004. Those strikes happened as the U.S. sought to kill Taliban and al-Qaida leaders who fled and sheltered there in late 2001 after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistani civilians have also been killed in crossfire during fighting between militants and the Pakistani military.

3. Political Cost

In a 2008 interview, the then-head US Central Command General David H. Petraeus, insisted that the Taliban were gaining strength. He cited a recent increase in attacks in Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistan. Petraeus insisted that the problems in Afghanistan were more complicated than the ones he had faced in Iraq during his tour and required removing widespread sanctuaries and strongholds. Observers have argued that the mission in Afghanistan is hampered by a lack of agreement on objectives, a lack of resources, lack of coordination, too much focus on the central government at the expense of local and provincial governments, and too much focus on the country instead of the region.

According to Cara Korte, climate change played a significant role in increasing instability in Afghanistan and strengthening the Taliban. More than 60% of the Afghan population depends on agriculture and Afghanistan is the sixth most vulnerable country to climate change in the world according to the United Nations Environment Program and Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency. The Taliban used resentment over government inaction to climate change induced drought and flooding to strengthen its support and Afghans were able to earn money supporting the Taliban than from farming.

In 2009, Afghanistan moved three places in Transparency International's annual index of corruption, becoming the world's second most-corrupt country just ahead of Somalia. In the same month, Malalai Joya, a former member of the Afghan Parliament and the author of "Raising My Voice", expressed opposition to an expansion of the US military presence and her concerns about the future. "Eight years ago, the US and NATO—under the banner of women's rights, human rights, and democracy—occupied my country and pushed us from the frying pan into the fire. China has also been quietly expanding its influence. Since 2010 China has signed mining contracts with Kabul and is even building a military base in Badakshan to counter regional terrorism (from the ETIM), China has donated billions of dollars in aid over the years to Afghanistan, which plays a strategic role in the Belt and Road Initiative. The Diplomat says that China has the potential to play an important role in bringing peace and stability to the region.

4. Leadership Idiosyncrasies

In 2010, the Afghan National Army had limited fighting capacity. Even the best Afghan units lacked training, discipline and adequate reinforcements. In one new unit in Baghlan Province, soldiers had been found cowering in ditches rather than fighting. Some were suspected of collaborating with the Taliban. "They don't have the basics, so they lay down," said Capt. Michael Bell, who was one of a team of US and Hungarian mentors tasked with training Afghan soldiers. "I ran around for an hour trying to get them to shoot, getting fired on. I couldn't get them to shoot their weapons." In addition, 9 out of 10 soldiers in the Afghan National Army were illiterate.

The Afghan Army was plagued by inefficiency and endemic corruption. US training efforts were drastically slowed by the problems. US trainers reported missing vehicles, weapons and other military equipment, and outright theft of fuel. Death threats were leveled against US officers who tried to stop Afghan soldiers from stealing. Afghan soldiers often snipped the command wires of IEDs instead of marking them and waiting for US forces to come to detonate them. This allowed insurgents to return and reconnect them. US trainers frequently removed the cell phones of Afghan soldier's hours before a mission for fear that the operation would be compromised. American trainers often spent much time verifying that Afghan rosters were accurate — that they were not padded with "ghosts" being "paid" by Afghan commanders who stole the wages.

According to a 2017 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), between of 2010 and 2016, the Department of Defense made 5,753 Leahy Law vetting requests for Afghan security forces. The Leahy law prohibits U.S. funding of foreign security units if there are credible reports of gross violation of human rights. According to SIGAR, between 2010 to 2016, 75 allegations of gross violations of human rights by Afghan security forces, including murder and 16 cases of child sexual assault were reported to the Department of Defense. Around a dozen Afghan units accused of abuses continued to receive U.S. funding due to an exception in the law allowing funding to continue if units are deemed to be important for "national security concern."

THE FALL OF THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO AFRICA AND EUROPE

The rapid collapse of Afghan government forces and the Taliban's seizure of power have shocked Europe and led to an intense debate about the implications for European policy. While the United States was the prime mover and decided the strategy of Western intervention in Afghanistan, several European countries made a big investment of troops and resources in the effort. Now that effort lies in ruins, and Europeans are left with several unavoidable questions. In the first instance these revolve around the best ways to get their citizens, and those who worked with them, out to safety. But, further ahead, they must consider the lessons of the Afghan experience for their policies on security, stabilization, relations with the US and other regional powers, and migration, among other areas. This collection brings together ECFR policy experts from across our programmes to share their analysis of what the Taliban's takeover means for Europe's core interests and major partners (Qazi, Shereena 2020).

▪ The United States

Several of America's European allies have complained vociferously about Joe Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the competence with which it was carried out, and the lack of meaningful consultation with NATO allies that also had forces in Afghanistan. But from the beginning of NATO's operation in Afghanistan, European contributors willingly, even eagerly, subordinated themselves to US strategy,

regardless of whether it made sense. Complaining now, when everything has fallen apart, seems at best petulant, at worst irresponsible.

The US has become a normal country. It is time to wake up and smell the post-American coffee. The fundamental lesson of the collapse in Afghanistan for Europeans is not about a lack of consultation or even US competence. It is that the third US president in a row has demonstrated that his country will no longer police the world or use its power to support the elusive goal of stability in faraway regions. The tragedy in Afghanistan is a logical outcome of that now well-established position (Qazi, Shereena 2020).

The US has become a normal country. It will not be isolationist or unilateral. It can and will work effectively with allies, but only when it's vital interests are at stake. It sees those interests in the competition with China. Increasingly, however, in places such as central Asia, the Sahel, and perhaps even Europe's eastern neighborhood, it does not.

▪ **The Middle East And North Africa**

As Europeans consider the impact on the Middle East of the United States' Afghan withdrawal, they will be focused primarily on security implications. There is no love lost between the Taliban and the Islamic State group, but there are still fears that Afghanistan could re-emerge as a haven for extremist groups such as al-Qaeda – with which the Taliban allegedly maintains ties – potentially helping them re-energize wider efforts in Iraq, Syria, and beyond. The Taliban's spectacular success could also inject new confidence into extremist groups disheartened by years of military setbacks across the Middle East, fuelling new mobilization (though some groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, are also seeking to emulate the Taliban's strategy of political legitimization to cement gains on the ground).

But the potential threat remains shrouded in uncertainty. The Taliban may demonstrate some interest in safeguarding international assistance flows into Afghanistan, an outcome which will be impossible if the group provides space for extremist groups. Western governments may use the carrot of international engagement to encourage this sentiment and moderate the group's behavior. Meanwhile, the increased localization of extremist actors across the Middle East – whereby local rather than transnational legitimacy is becoming more relevant – may also dilute possible ties between the Taliban and regional groups.

Europeans, for whom a stable Middle East is an absolute imperative given migration and terrorism challenges, will need to ask themselves how to proceed without the same degree of US leadership. This will partly be a question of European commitment and resources. But it will also necessitate a more profound questioning of the Western – European, as much as American – stabilization model that has so evidently failed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere over the past 20 years. Europeans will need to ask if and how they can support more realistic objectives rooted in more legitimate and locally owned processes across the Middle East. This will, for one, require a sharper focus on the rampant corruption that is so central to regional instability and which more often than not – as in Afghanistan – is encouraged rather than countered by Western stabilization efforts.

▪ **Russia**

Russia's views about the US withdrawal remain equally ambivalent. Inevitably, there are people who enjoy noting that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan – long viewed as a symbol of failure – now looks orderly in comparison. But much of such messaging is actually driven by Russia's domestic context and is aimed at agents of change inside Russia, who – as the Kremlin is trying to persuade itself and the wider population – are supposedly puppets of the West and kept active by its help. But some of this thinking also has a bearing on Moscow's foreign policy thinking. Several people, including Nikolay Patrushev, the secretary of the Security Council, have said that Afghanistan enjoyed a status similar to Ukraine – that of a major US ally outside NATO. Given how many in Moscow also choose to believe that the current power-holders in Ukraine are Western stooges, rather than leaders the Ukrainian population truly voted for, one can wonder about the dangers of Moscow over-interpreting the parallels and simply waiting for America to 'leave' Ukraine.

At the same time, though, Western fears that Moscow, emboldened by the United States' failure, will now start testing all of Washington's foreign commitments, seem misplaced too. Another line of thinking in Moscow sees the US as having finally abandoned its unrealistic goals – those of being the world's policeman, or designer and enforcer of universal democracy. And they view this as something that strengthens, rather than weakens, the US. According to this logic, America will now have resources freed up to pursue the aims it sees as vitally important, and which it will defend tooth and nail – so Russia had better prepare.

Finally, Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban will also worsen Russia's own security situation: an influx of Islamist extremists and terrorists to central Asia and, thereafter, to Russia is a longstanding concern for the Kremlin. But this will not happen overnight, and Moscow has had time to make preparations. It has boosted its military presence in central Asia, enhancing border patrol capabilities, and it has invested in ties with the Taliban (though, officially, the organization is still outlawed in Russia). Moscow is also overall a lot less vulnerable than it was in 1996, when the Taliban last took Kabul. Unlike back then, it does not face a separatist rebellion in its own Muslim republics; and the countries of central Asia – Russia's buffer from Afghanistan – are functioning states, not mired in civil wars.

- **China**

Beijing long saw the conflict in Afghanistan as a war that it wanted neither side to win. In the short term the Chinese government will make as much hay as possible out of the United States' and the West's "defeat", selling the story that the withdrawal has ramifications for US commitments to partners and allies writ large. When Washington goes through one of its periodic redefinitions of what its vital interests are, it argues, you too may find yourself abandoned: better to reach terms with the rising power.

China's worries, however, are twofold. Beijing worries that the US withdrawal finally reflects a ruthless US focus on China as the principal strategic concern;

Firstly, it is worried that it will be left cleaning up the mess. The Chinese leadership did not want to see an outright Taliban victory and they still fear the consequences of an Islamist regime next door. Although China has longstanding dealings with the Taliban, these have only reinforced their sense that, whatever political promises the Taliban makes, Afghanistan will be a permissive environment for a disturbing assortment of militant groups. The cross-border threats are minimal, given that China can easily seal off the Wakhan corridor – Afghanistan's narrow strip of territory that reaches over to the Chinese border. Still, Beijing remains concerned about the spillover effects in central Asia and, even more so, Pakistan. China has investments and soft targets across the region that are now at greater risk. Nor does Beijing want to get too deeply involved in addressing these problems: although they are stuck having to take on a more active diplomatic role now, Chinese policymakers see Afghanistan as a trap that smart great powers avoid. While they will be happy to dangle the promise of major investments, and provide some short-term assistance to the new government, any serious economic presence in Afghanistan will be contingent on a political and security environment in which Beijing has confidence – which is years away, at best.

The second Chinese worry is that, while the disastrous execution of the withdrawal will have its costs, this finally reflects a ruthless US focus on China as the principal strategic concern. Beijing's sense is that it experienced a long window of opportunity for the last two decades, in which every time it looked like China was about to command the attention and resources it merited, US policymakers would be pulled away yet again to deal with a more urgent matter, typically in the greater Middle East. The rebalancing of US energies from continental to maritime Asia, from counter-insurgency to great-power competition, had always been at the mercy of the implication of some moral and political responsibility to leave Afghanistan with a semi-

acceptable outcome. With that responsibility abdicated, the US now has a freer hand to address the Indo-Pacific and the China challenge, and would be more than happy if Beijing decided that it really wants to 'fill the void' in Afghanistan. China's view, infused with the US and Soviet experiences, remains that doing so could prove a mortal mistake.

CONCLUSION

British Secretary of State for Defense Ben Wallace said the US put Britain in a "very difficult position" following the withdrawal, though they subsequently followed suit. The chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan had a negative impact on United Kingdom–United States relations, with the British government briefing media against the American government. The fall of Afghanistan also had a negative impact on United States–European Union relations. At the 2021 Raisina Dialogue, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of Iran, said that the withdrawal was a welcome move, adding that foreign troops could not bring peace in Afghanistan.

On 25 May 2021, Australia closed its Embassy in Kabul due to security concerns. Belgium and France withdrew their diplomats. May 10th, France began evacuating Afghans working for it, resulting in being called "pessimistic". The Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan issued a travel warning on 19 June, urging Chinese citizens to "leave Afghanistan as soon as possible" and demanding Chinese organizations to "take extra precautions and strengthen their emergency preparedness as the situation deteriorated" in the country. The Chinese government dispatched a charter-flight operated by XiamenAir to evacuate 210 Chinese nationals from Kabul on 2 July.

The two presidents of Afghanistan after the 2001 invasion, Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, both criticized the "abrupt" withdrawal of US troops from the country as giving momentum to the Taliban advance, with Karzai calling on the United States to "end this failed mission".

The Biden Administration faced further domestic criticism after Afghanistan fell to the Taliban following the Fall of Kabul in August 2021. President Biden's approval rating dropped to 41% and only 26% of Americans said they support Biden's handling of the situation in Afghanistan. Some Republicans, including Senator Josh Hawley, Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn, and former Ambassador Nikki Haley, called on Biden to resign. Former American presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, each of whom had overseen significant developments in the War in Afghanistan, also faced criticism. In the UK, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab faced calls to resign after it was revealed he had gone on holiday to Greece just prior to the fall and had refused attempts to contact him as developments occurred.

Some white nationalists and related extremists celebrated the Taliban takeover and American withdrawal on social media. White nationalist Nick Fuentes posted on the Telegram messaging service, "The Taliban is a conservative, religious force, the US is godless and liberal. The defeat of the US government in Afghanistan is unequivocally a positive development." Some experts warned American extremists would use events in Afghanistan to push disinformation, organize and recruit.

Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, condemned the US withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan stating that the US' decision to leave was "political" rather than "strategic". In an article on the website of Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, he wrote, "The abandonment of Afghanistan and its people is tragic, dangerous, and unnecessary, not in their interests and not in ours." Blair further accused Biden of being "in obedience to an imbecilic political slogan about ending 'the forever wars'," and warned that "The world is now uncertain of where the West stands because it is so obvious that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in this way was driven not by grand strategy but by politics."

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