

**Committee:** Advisory Panel

**Agenda Item:** The issue of Afghanistan; inspecting the aftermath of the U.S. invasion and the repercussions of military withdrawal

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## Introduction

The United States invasion and withdrawal from Afghanistan is one of the most complex events in recent history, lasting two decades, starting with the invasion in 2001 and ending in 2021 with the completion of the withdrawal. The invasion aimed at dismantling al-Qaeda, who were responsible for the September 11 attacks, and



also removed the Taliban from power who were in support of al-Qaeda. After the invasion, the mission evolved into stabilizing Afghanistan by establishing a government and improving civil rights while also securing the region. However, these efforts faced many difficulties such as insurgency, corruption, and weak governance. The withdrawal in 2021 led to the fall of the Afghan government and the takeover of the Taliban. Taliban's return to power has raised a lot of questions regarding humanitarian issues, especially for minorities and women. The issue of Afghanistan has been a long-lasting conflict that needs to be addressed from different facades in order to end the ongoing struggle to stabilize the region.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Insurgency:** An armed action against a recognized government or occupying force is called insurgency. An example of this term would be the Taliban's actions against the Afghanistan government and the U.S. since both of them were considered governments and the Taliban was and still is not recognized as a government.

**Counterinsurgency:** Action taken against insurgency, which could be both political or military action with the support of the people. The U.S.'s strategies towards the Taliban are an example of counterinsurgency.

**Withdrawal:** The process of pulling out military forces from a zone of conflict. The U.S.'s decision to end its military presence in Afghanistan is an example of withdrawal.

**Resurgence:** Resurgence could be described as rising back or coming back into power in the context of this issue. After twenty years of war, the Taliban came back into power (resurged) and re established control over the country in 2021.

**Nation-Building:** The entirety of the efforts to either construct or reconstruct a country's political institutions, infrastructure, and civil society after a war or a disaster. The efforts from 2002 to 2014 to rebuild the Afghan government is an example of nation-building. The government was tried to be rebuilt with its constitution, governance, infrastructure, and society.

**Humanitarian Crisis:** A situation causing widespread human suffering, often requiring international support. After the withdrawal, a humanitarian crisis started in Afghanistan, with concerns rising about the human rights abuses under Taliban rule, especially for women and minorities.

## Major Actors Involved

### United States of America

The United States (U.S.) is central to the issue of Afghanistan due to its major role in both the invasion and withdrawal, which both had long-lasting impacts on both the U.S. 's and Afghanistan's stability and politics. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001, to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power, following the September 11 attacks. Over twenty years, the U.S. followed different policies towards the issue, including both nation-building efforts and bombings. With the agreement signed in 2020, the U.S.'s withdrawal was finally discussed properly. After the withdrawal an international question raised whether the withdrawal was a good idea or not because of the Taliban takeover.

### Taliban

Taliban emerged in the 1990s and took over until 2001, ruling with strict Islamic law, restricting many freedoms and rights, especially for women. After the invasion the Taliban was thrown out of power, however, it still remained as a strong insurgent force, against the U.S. and the Afghan government. Taliban's resurgence in 2021, following the Afghan government's fall, led to the return of the old Taliban rule that suppressed women and gave violent punishments. The return of the Taliban raised significant concerns over human rights as well as the overall stability of the country.

### al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is a terrorist group that played an important role in the events leading up to the invasion. It was founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s. The group gained international recognition after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, which killed nearly 3,000 people. At the time, al-Qaeda was based in Afghanistan, where it was protected and supported by the Taliban.

After 9/11 the U.S. launched Operation Enduring Freedom to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. While al-Qaeda's leadership was severely disrupted following bin Laden's death in 2011, the group is still a threat worldwide.

## Afghan Government

The Afghan Government refers to the government that came in charge after the U.S. invasion. After the Taliban was removed from power, a new government came in charge with the help of global powers such as the UN and the U.S. While the Afghan government was in charge the government was democratic however it faced problems such as corruption, weak control, and attacks from the Taliban. The government eventually collapsed after the withdrawal of the U.S. in 2021.

## NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was mostly related to the issue through its involvement with ISAF. After NATO got control over ISAF in 2003, ISAF expanded throughout the country with the troop numbers going up from five thousand to sixty-five thousand over the years, with all of the NATO member states contributing. NATO's main objectives were to help the newly established Afghan government and combat insurgent groups. Their mission shifted more to training the Afghan army created. What is special about NATO's involvement with the issue is that this was the first operation that NATO was committed to outside of Europe. NATO left Afghanistan with the U.S. withdrawal.

## General Overview of the Issue

In order to understand the withdrawal process of the United States of America (USA) from Afghanistan, understanding the reasons for the invasion is necessary. Although the historical timeline of American ties with the Afghan government and Taliban goes back further, it was in 2001 when the events started to heat up. On September 11th, 2001, al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial

airlines and crashed them into the World Trade Center (in New York), the Pentagon (in Washington, DC), and a field (in Shanksville, Pennsylvania). This devastating event (also known as 9/11) led to almost three thousand people's deaths. Even though none of the hijackers were Afghan nationalists since al-Qaeda was an Afghanistan-based terrorist group (recognized as a terrorist group by Resolution 1267), U.S. President George Bush called upon the Taliban, since the Afghan government wasn't active at that time, to hand the al-Qaeda leaders over to the U.S. authorities. However, an event that took place just two days before 9/11 assured Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, that the Taliban would be in support of them. On September 9th, 2001, the commander of Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud, was assassinated by al-Qaeda forces. Northern Alliance was an anti-Taliban coalition and Massoud's death would benefit the Taliban greatly since the leader of this coalition would be out of the picture. Because of this, after his assassination al-Qaeda got the Taliban's support and anti-Taliban forces lost power.

A week after 9/11 took place, on September 18th a joint resolution was signed into law by President Bush, which permitted the use of armed forces against "those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States" (United States, Congress). This resolution was a huge step at the start of Operation Enduring Freedom



(OEF) since it laid a legal ground for all the actions that were taken against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. OEF was the name for the entirety of the operations that would happen in Afghanistan, starting with the October 7th bombings and ending with the withdrawal. Additionally, another name for these operations was the campaign called Global War on Terror (GWOT). Even though military action in Iraq and Afghanistan was a part of this campaign unlike OEF, GWOT also included any financial or political action taken against terrorism. The two main objectives for all these actions were to dismantle the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

On October 7th, 2001, when OEF began, the US bombing campaign with British support, on the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The bombings were actually purposed as support forces for the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban forces (from Pashtun). The attack lasted till December when the Taliban forces retreated and bin Laden escaped. During that period most of the military action was between the Afghan forces and the Taliban or al-Qaeda, and the U.S. forces didn't take the expected assertive roles in these battles (more information on The Battle of Tora Bora in the Useful Links). On December 5th, the Bonn Agreement was signed by major Afghan factions, following the UN Security Council Resolution 1383. The agreement mainly focuses on the reestablishment of a government in Afghanistan. December 9th is considered the end of the Taliban regime when the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar and the rest of their forces fled Kandahar. On December 20th, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1386, establishing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to assist the new Afghan security and armed forces training.

Even though the Taliban rule was over al-Qaeda leaders continued to hide in the mountains. In March 2002, Operation Anaconda was launched in Paktia Province. It was considered to be the biggest ground operation since the Battle of Tora Bora. However, the war that started in Iraq, following the joint resolution passed by the U.S. government authorizing Bush to use military force towards Iraq, which caused the shift of military and intelligence to Iraq. While military action was going on, the question of governance was still discussed. In June 2002, during an emergency loya jirga (the name for the Afghan assembly) Hamid Karzai was affirmed as the head of the transitional government, ensuing the Bonn Agreement. The transitional government's security forces were mostly organized by the Northern Alliance. In 2002 many developments happened for the Kabul government, even a part of the government was formed called the Ministry of Women's Affairs dedicated to women's rights. These kinds of actions show that after the fall of the Taliban major action was being taken to improve the country.

By May 3rd, 2003 most of the major combat was ended in the area and a period of stability was entered. States from all around the world (mostly Europe) were sending their assistance to Afghanistan, concerning military or other supplies. In August NATO got control over ISAF and started to expand the forces with the help of the member states. With all twenty-eight NATO members and additionally fourteen other states contributing, the troops go up from five thousand to sixty-five thousand over the course of four years.

In January 2004, a constitution was passed by the Afghan government and finally, after years of Taliban rule, Afghanistan came one step closer to democracy. Following the constitution's establishment, on October 9th, the first democratically elected president, President Karzai, comes into power. This is the first time since 1969 that the Afghans went to the ballots and even then they only voted for parliamentary elections since the country was run by monarchy. Just three weeks after the elections and a few days before the U.S. election, bin Laden released a videotape of himself, admitting to 9/11 and mocking the Bush administration. President Bush was reelected in the U.S. election in the following days.

In May 2005, to strengthen the ties between the governments, President Bush and President Karzai issued a joint declaration concerning the relationship between the two states, and in the agreement the U.S. government to help the new Afghan government with security forces and help solidify the democracy and prosperity in the state. Later that year in the councils Afghanistan had one of the most democratic elections and the overall state of the country got better compared to the Taliban rule. However, in July 2006, the number of suicide attacks and bombings increased by large numbers. The reason for these attacks is thought to be the conditions that the Afghan people are living under such as the lack of services, the government's lack of order, and weakness of security forces caused by the lack of international support on these fields. After these events, NATO held a meeting in November and set a time to 2008, for the Afghan National Army to take control of the security issues throughout the country.

In August 2008, as a result of investigations done by the UN and the Afghan government, it was discovered that U.S. bombings caused the death of many innocent civilians. After this information was made public, in 2009 General Stanley A. McChrystal stopped the air strike operations for a while after stating in one of his writings that the lives of innocents aren't worth the victories gained. After the elections when President Obama was elected, he declared that the military forces present in Afghanistan would be increased, decreasing the number in Iraq. Later in March, President Obama announced that they would follow a new strategy in the war by dismantling al-Qaeda's safe havens in Pakistan and preventing their entrance to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. This way it was thought that the root cause of the problem could be solved. The U.S. military called on NATO in April of that year and asked the NATO nations to send assets and NATO promised to send troops for additional security for the upcoming elections. In July 2009 a major marine operation was launched regarding the increasing Taliban activity in the southern part of the country.

In August 2009, the elections were done and President Karzai was reelected, however, after the UN investigation it was discovered that Karzai only got 49,67% of the votes meaning he didn't reach the fifty percent limit and a runoff was called. Although the runoff was set for November 7th, a week before Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's main rival, pulled out. Therefore, President Karzai was automatically elected. Later that year, in December President Obama stated in one of his speeches that an additional troop would be sent to Afghanistan one last time to strengthen their own security forces and in July 2011 the official drawdown of these military forces started so that the Afghan government and military can take responsibility over their own affairs. In July 2010, General McChrystal was replaced with General David Petraeus and President Obama stated that this was just a change in personnel and that their policies and operations would not change.



In November NATO held a summit in which NATO nations signed an agreement that stated that they would hand over the responsibility of security to Afghan forces by the end of 2014. With both the U.S. and NATO declaring that they would draw down their forces, the transition process was expected to start in July 2011 and continue until 2014 when NATO countries pulled their troops over.

On May 1st, 2011, bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan by the U.S. forces. The death of the leader of al-Qaeda raised the question of the continuity of the war. President Karzai suggested the international help troops focus on the Afghan borders to Pakistan, while Afghan hate toward Pakistan started to grow. In June 2011, as expected, President Obama announced the start of withdrawal and also announced that the U.S. government was in talks with the Taliban leaders for peace. In December many states gather in Bonn to discuss the future of Afghanistan to mark the tenth year of the first Bonn Conference. However, the conference did not reach its purpose of facilitating Afghanistan's transition to a self-sufficient government. Pakistan doesn't attend the conference. In 2012 Taliban suspended the peace talks with the U.S. claiming that they didn't comply with their promises. The U.S. army faces several accusations such as the burning of Qurans and the murder of sixteen villagers. President Karzai asks the international troops to withdraw from villages.

Finally, in 2013 the Afghan government took full control over the security forces from NATO and the remaining U.S. troops focused on the training of the Afghan military or operations of counterterrorism. The U.S. and the Taliban continue their peace talks after the Taliban opens an office in Qatar. The U.S. mandate ended in 2014, so the U.S. government has to negotiate with President Karzai in order to have a military in the country. In 2014 President Obama released a plan of withdrawal, which states that by the end of 2016, most of the troops will be drawn down, leaving just enough forces to combat al-Qaeda and train the Afghan army.

However, after the 2016 elections, when Donald Trump is elected, the withdrawal plans were pushed back when on April 13th, 2017, the U.S. bombed (with their most powerful non-nuclear bomb) in eastern Nangarhar Province. President Trump stated that more troops will be sent to the region, while the Taliban is getting stronger day by day, with already controlling more than one-third of the country. In August Trump clarified his policy towards the Taliban and Afghanistan, stating that the withdrawal will not be taking place and rather than sticking to timelines his policy will be focusing on the current conditions. Later in 2018, the Taliban carried out major attacks in Kabul killing 115 people. Trump implemented his plans for Afghanistan by sending troops and launching air strikes.

In 2019, the peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban reached their peak when an agreement was suggested for the U.S. to withdraw its troops in exchange for the Taliban blocking any and all terrorist groups from working in Afghanistan. However, Trump calls this agreement off when one of the American soldiers is killed during a Taliban attack. The Taliban in response



states that they are still willing to continue their peace talks but they also warned the U.S. government that if the agreements are not reached then there would be more deaths. On February 29th, 2020, the agreement was signed for the U.S. to withdraw its forces, and the

Taliban promised that Afghanistan would not be used for terror activities. However, combat doesn't end immediately, since the agreement doesn't start for a while. On September 12th, 2020, the Taliban and Afghan government representatives met for the first time after twenty years of combat. Negotiations over swapping the prisoners were brought back to the table after the government released five thousand Taliban prisoners. Both sides wanted different things: the Afghan government wanted a ceasefire and the Taliban wanted the country to be ruled by Islamic rules.

Finally, on November 17th, 2020, U.S. Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced that the troops would be halved, while the military action between the Afghan government and the Taliban is still going on. In 2021, when President Biden was elected, he announced that the withdrawal would not be as it was stated in the agreement and instead the withdrawal would be completely finished by September 11, 2021 (twenty years after the September 11 attack). However, Biden states that the U.S. will support the Afghan government during the peace talks and also their security forces. On August 15th, 2021, the Taliban resurged into power facing almost no resistance. After this takeover, Biden defends the U.S. withdrawal by blaming the Afghan security force for not countering the Taliban strongly enough.

After twenty years of war, the U.S. finished the withdrawal on August 30th, 2021. While the initial mission aimed to dismantle al-Qaeda and throw the Taliban over, the outcome shows that political and military interventions are complex and stability is not reached easily. The swift resurgence of the Taliban after the



withdrawal highlights the fragility of two decades of work done in the region. Since the Taliban regained control over the region, civil and political rights have been abused, especially for women. Taliban has restricted press freedom, violently suppressed the protests that occurred, and reinforced harsh punishments following Islamic law. Women especially face extreme limitations on education, employment, and even public presence. Almost 90% of the population can't reach sufficient food. The humanitarian crisis since the Taliban resurgence is one of the major issues that needs immediate attention from international parties.

## Timeline of Important Events

Date:	Event:
9 September 2001	Assasination of Ahmad Shah Massoud
11 September 2001	9/11
18 September 2001	Joint Resolution
7 October 2001	Operation Enduring Freedom launches
5 December 2001	The Bonn Agreement
9 December 2001	Taliban regime ends
March 2002	Operation Anaconda is launched
8 August 2003	NATO gains control over ISAF
9 October 2004	President Karzai, the first-ever democratically elected president, comes into charge
29 October 2004	Osama bin Laden resurfaces
July 2006	Increase in bombing and suicide attacks by terrorist groups
20 August 2009	President Karzai is reelected
1 May 2011	Osama bin Laden is killed by the U.S. forces
7 October 2011	10 years of war
27 May 2014	The full withdrawal plan has been announced
13 April 2017	U.S. bombs Nangarhar Province
29 February 2020	Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan
12 September 2020	First-time representatives from the Afghanistan government and the Taliban meet face-to-face after twenty years of war

15 August 2021	Taliban takeover
30 August 2021	Complete withdrawal

## Related Documents

Resolution 1267

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n99/300/44/pdf/n9930044.pdf>

September 18, 2001, Joint Resolution

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/23/text>

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>

Resolution 1368

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/448051?ln=en&v=pdf>

Resolution 1378

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/452431?ln=en&v=pdf>

Resolution 1383

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/454021?ln=en&v=pdf>

Resolution 1386

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/454998?ln=en&v=pdf>

The Bonn Agreement

<https://eoi.gov.in/kabul/?pdf0652?000>

Midyear Report on Afghanistan (UN)

[https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_in\\_armed\\_conflict\\_midyear\\_report\\_2017\\_july\\_2017.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf)

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

## Past Solution Attempts

In 2002 provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) were formed and they ran for a few years with the help of both the U.S. and NATO. However, especially during the early years, they lacked organization and central control which was a huge issue considering that the Kabul government and the state as a whole weren't organized completely.

Over the years both the U.S. and the Afghan governments tried to hold peaceful conversations with the Taliban, in an agreement done in 2020 U.S. agreed to withdraw its forces in exchange for the Taliban blocking any terrorist activity that might be going on in the country. However, these peace talks never satisfied both sides and most of them were broken by the Taliban. Additionally, over the years both NATO and the U.S. trained the Afghan military to combat the Taliban, but those efforts didn't also provide a solution, which can be seen through the fact that the Taliban got back in power as soon as the American forces withdrew. Humanitarian aid was sent to the region however since the Taliban came into power 90% of the population doesn't have access to sufficient food, which indicates that humanitarian aid wasn't enough.

## Possible Solutions

Addressing the issue of the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan requires a multifaceted approach considering past attempts, with solutions addressing the humanitarian crisis, long-term stabilization efforts, and targeting counter-terrorism. One of the most crucial issues is human rights and the lack of humanitarian aid in the region. Especially helping the vulnerable groups, such as women and children should be one of the priorities, by ensuring access to food, water, and basic necessities. This could be done by expanding international aid however an important aspect to consider is the possible misuse of any kind of help that is sent to the region.

Healthcare and educational support in the region should be a part of these supports as well. Working with international organizations such as the World Health Organization, UN World Food Programme or NGOs is crucial to success. Another aspect of the humanitarian crisis is the refugee issue. The withdrawal has resulted in a major refugee crisis, with thousands of people fleeing to neighboring countries. Resettlement and reintegration initiatives in neighboring or other willing countries could be discussed, however, it should be kept in mind the states of the neighboring countries and whether they would be able to hold more people.

Additionally, the question of healthcare, food, and education for these refugees being provided should also be considered. Holding the Taliban responsible for the human rights abuses that are happening in the region by sanctions or other kind of discouraging policies and possibly setting some kind of monitoring system to address these human rights abuses could be considered. International cooperation to target counter-terrorism and mitigate extremist activities in the region could also be a part of the solution. However, the planning of these operations should be done accordingly to not interfere with the civil casualties and cause even further destabilization.

## Useful Links

President Bush's speech on the GWOT

<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

An article on the significance of Ahmed Shah Massou's death

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/the-complex-legacy-of-ahmad-shah-massoud/>

Battle of Tora Bora

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Tora-Bora>

An article on President Bush's speeches on rebuilding Afghanistan

<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/17/international/bush-sees-a-large-role-for->

[us-in-rebuilding-afghanistan.html](#)

The following three websites are on the humanitarian aid that was provided by the U.S. government to Afghanistan during the 2001-2010 period

<https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/14330.htm>

<https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/c5550.htm>

<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011004-5.html>

Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Riga Conference

<https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s061128a.htm>

Trump's Speech on Afghanistan

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/trump-speech-afghanistan.html>

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Iberdrola. “What Are the Largest Humanitarian Crises in the Planet Today?” Iberdrola, 22 Apr. 2021, [www.iberdrola.com/social-commitment/humanitarian-crises-causes-effect-s-solutions#:~:text=A%20humanitarian%20crisis%20is%20a,and%20epidemics%20and%20health%20emergencies](http://www.iberdrola.com/social-commitment/humanitarian-crises-causes-effect-s-solutions#:~:text=A%20humanitarian%20crisis%20is%20a,and%20epidemics%20and%20health%20emergencies). Accessed 04 Dec. 2024.

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“What Is the Taliban?” Council on Foreign Relations, [www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan). Accessed 04 Dec. 2024.