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TWENTY YEARS OF STRUGGLE IN AFGHANISTAN: A HISTORICAL
ANALYSIS FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF THE MASS MEDIA.

Foreign Policy Analysis

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Abstract

L’Afghanistan si appresta ad entrare in una nuova fase cruciale per i futuri equilibri del Paese.

Dopo quasi vent’anni dall’inizio del conflitto, infatti, Stati Uniti e Paesi NATO hanno annunciato, il 21 aprile 2021, il ritiro dei contingenti internazionali del Paese, facendo seguito anche allo storico accordo firmato da Washington e alla leadership dei talebani a Doha nel febbraio 2020. Al termine della missione in Afghanistan, molti interrogativi sulla sostenibilità del sistema costruito a Kabul in questi anni e sui possibili nuovi equilibri che emergeranno tra le diverse anime del panorama politico afghano si fanno presenti.

Il rapporto contrastante con l’Occidentale ebbe inizio l’11 settembre 2001, quando due aerei si schiantarono all’interno delle Torri Gemelle, abbattendo una cortina di sicurezza e inviolabilità che sembrava proteggere il mondo “occidentale”. Le luci della ribalta furono tutte puntate verso un remoto Paese dell’Asia Centrale, ritenuto dalle forze militari statunitensi il rifugio dei terroristi responsabili degli attentati sul suolo americano: l’Afghanistan.

La dichiarazione di “guerra al terrorismo”, nello specifico, implicò il bombardamento del territorio afghano e la copertura mediatica destinata a quella guerra fu completa. Gli speciali che in televisione mostravano a ripetizione le immagini del crollo delle Torri non dedicavano però uguale attenzione al dramma che le popolazioni dell’Afghanistan stavano vivendo.

Questa tesi è dedicata ad una tragedia umanitaria, con particolare riguardo al ruolo che le riviste occidentali ed orientali hanno avuto nella diffusione del conflitto afghano. Infatti, i mass media sono attori determinanti nelle comunicazioni interne ed esterne di una società, capaci anche di alterare il modo in cui i cittadini si relazionano, conversano e scambiano informazioni, idee e notizie. Da un lato, grazie a questi mezzi di comunicazione, i cittadini di Paesi come l’Afghanistan hanno trovato nuovi canali per poter esprimere la situazione che stavano vivendo e rovesciare il regime che ha governato fino al 2001, dall’altro si tenta di analizzare se realmente l’utilizzo di queste riviste possa aver avuto un peso positivo nel rispondere ad ogni immagine di oppressione, o se si sia focalizzata l’attenzione su un fattore che in Occidente si sente maggiormente proprio, quello della comunicazione, a discapito di dinamiche sociali e di potere che possano aver avuto un ruolo maggiore nell’intervento in guerra.

La ricerca si apre con un breve excursus storico e politico per ripercorrere le principali tappe che hanno scandito il destino del Paese, considerato indispensabile per scavare alle origini di un

fenomeno, quello della tragedia umanitaria e sanitaria, e per mettere in luce le condizioni che hanno reso possibile la formazione di un tale quadro. L'Afghanistan, è vittima delle mire espansionistiche di grandi condottieri del passato e degli interventi militari di superpotenze del presente. Sebbene ripetutamente invaso, tuttavia il Paese non è mai stato colonizzato anche grazie alle capacità militari dei suoi guerrieri, divisi da un antagonismo interetnico ma uniti nel cacciare il nemico straniero. Solo così l'Afghanistan è stato in grado di tenere in scacco due grandi imperi, Gran Bretagna e Unione Sovietica, e di influenzare nei secoli gli equilibri dell'Asia Centrale.

Conseguentemente, l'attenzione sarà posta sul tema considerato come conseguenza diretta di una guerra, quello dei flussi di rifugiati in cerca di protezione internazionale. Infatti, a partire dal 1979 le popolazioni in fuga diedero vita ad un esodo di immani proporzioni in seguito al quale l'Afghanistan guadagnò il primato di Paese con la più numerosa popolazione rifugiata al mondo. L'enfasi non poteva non essere puntata sul collasso del sistema, ritenuto uno specchio della situazione generale; un bacino ove interagiscono problematiche inerenti alla violazione dei diritti umani ed il citato dramma dei rifugiati. La comunità internazionale è chiamata a far fronte all'emergenza dei rifugiati, in ottemperanza ai principi contenuti nella Convenzione relativa allo status dei rifugiati, al fine di favorire la condivisione del peso rappresentato da questo fenomeno, che troppo spesso grava solo sui Paesi confinanti con i luoghi d'origine dei profughi.

Infine, si cercherà di confrontare e mettere in evidenza la relazione dei mass media coinvolti, ovvero Newsweek, The New York Times, BBC News, CNN e Al Jazeera.

La finalità specifica della ricerca è stata quella di risalire alle vere origini della crisi umanitaria del Paese, di far conoscere le precarie condizioni di vita delle popolazioni afgane, ma soprattutto di sottolineare come un tale quadro fosse già presente da oltre un trentennio, benché passato sotto silenzio dall'opinione pubblica mondiale, fino a quando, a seguito degli attacchi terroristici del 2001, l'Afghanistan ricevette un'attenzione senza precedenti.

In altre parole, nel contesto afgano, i media hanno giocato un ruolo estremamente importante poiché la copertura mediatica derivante dalle citate riviste internazionali hanno creato un forte impatto sull'opinione pubblica; spingendola ad adottare posizioni in linea con la politica estera del proprio Paese. Nonostante l'evoluzione dei mass media afgani, le loro informazioni rimangono ancora troppo incomplete. La divisione principale riguarda l'Oriente e l'Occidente, evidenziandone gli aspetti in comune come la ricerca dell'anima e la valutazione di come è stata trattata questa storia; ed altrettante differenze, marcate sulla stessa questione. Al Jazeera ebbe il vantaggio di essere sul posto e il privilegio di avere accesso all'intelligence di Osama Bin Laden, mentre la CNN ha inquadrato il contesto afgano in base al supporto dato dal governo e dai leader

politici di ciascun Paese, compresa la questione dell'unità nazionale e del sostegno pubblico al governo stesso.

Tale obiettivo è stato raggiunto attraverso la raccolta, selezione ed il confronto di numerosi documenti, soprattutto telematici, disponibili sull'argomento. Anche le testimonianze di chi ha vissuto quegli anni e di chi era presente sul territorio afghano hanno giocato un ruolo importante durante la mia tesi al fine di accompagnare le descrizioni dei temi affrontati con le parole vive dei protagonisti della crisi afghana.

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Introduction

*"War is but the continuation of politics by other means. War is, therefore, not merely a political act, but a true instrument of politics, a continuation of the political process, a continuation of it by other means."*¹

Nowadays, the term "war" has acquired a more ideological, political, and cultural aspect that has seen the development of a new actor capable of informing and persuading the public opinion by pushing it to adopt positions and attitudes in line with their country's foreign policy: the mass media.

The first part of this dissertation is about a political and historical *excursus* of Afghanistan to understand the war from the perspective of the mass media. Since the core of the dissertation is based on this actor, the research question that will help to develop this thesis is: how can a conflict be described differently by the international magazines and channels?

Specifically, this study aims at investigating how Afghanistan is being represented and portrayed in two leading U.S. magazines: *Newsweek* and *Times*.

Finally, a significant comparison between other international and more national channels, such as, *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, *BBC News* and *CNN* will help to understand the framing of wartime news coverage of the Afghanistan war. This investigation aims to advance the conflicting 'two-sided' media perspectives and the way the war in Afghanistan has been reported on *CNN America* also on the Arab television network *Al Jazeera*, which has become a significant primary source of news from the front lines inside of Afghanistan

¹ K. Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832-1835.

Chapter I

Afghan scenario: from the past to our days

1. *Understanding Afghanistan*

This section aims to describe the Afghan scenario, through the analysis of the past events to the present with the scope to understand the peculiar nature of insurgency in Afghanistan, to explore the other variables to highlight the conflicting interests of various involved actors and the quest for regional pre-eminence by a few states.

Afghanistan has historically been a ground of power struggles and repeated transfers of power making the country prey to high degrees of instability.²

The land of Afghans³ is a mountainous landlocked country in central Asia without connection to sea, but Afghanistan has a long history of meddling neighbours due to its geo-strategic location.⁴ Despite of the exact population is not clear⁵, Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country; it is divided into many ethnic groups: Pashtun estimated (42%), Tajik (27%), Hazara (9%), and Turks (12%), but the state is not unified in any ethnic or linguistic sense. Although most of the people speak languages that are related to Farsi, the official language of the western neighbour Iran, they differ from most Iranians in their continued adherence to the Sunni stream of Islam, which Iran abandoned in the 16th century in favour of the Shia sect of tendency.⁶ In addition, the local system, based on communal loyalties, makes Afghanistan a highly decentralized society.

Until 1747, when Ahmad Shah founded the Durrani Empire⁷, Afghanistan had never been ruled as one country, except as part of larger foreign empires. In fact, the kingdom was more a constellation of independent fiefdoms than anything approaching a cohesive nation state.⁸ Additionally, Ahmad Shah allowed his enemies to govern their territories like vassals, enabling them to maintain their local base of support. Consequently, remote provinces were never fully

²A. Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2000, 2001; G. Chiesa, V. Senesi, *Afghanistan: anno zero*, Guerini e Associati, 2001; A. King, *Why did the Taliban win?*; E. Giunchi, *Afghanistan: storia e società nel cuore dell'Asia*, Carocci editore, 2007.

³ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Legal System and Research – *Qasim Hashimzai Ph.D*, October 2010.

⁴ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, pag. 12-14.

⁵ *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2012.

⁶ S. Wahab, B. Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, pag. 7.

⁷ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, pag. 27.

⁸ T. Barfield, *Afghanistan: a cultural and political history*, pag.3.

incorporated during his lifetime, and they gradually withdrew after he died.⁹

Under the “*Iron Amir*”¹⁰ Afghanistan became a centralized state with the aim to eliminate autonomous regional leaders, their feudal clients, tribal and ethnic opponents. But this led to distort country’s “*climax state*”; what ecologists call “*a self-perpetuating stable relationship among species in which the community is in equilibrium.*” In other words, for Afghanistan, a political center dominating distinct regions disrupted its natural equilibrium, thus sowing the seeds for perpetual conflict.¹¹ The region has perhaps seen more invasion than any other in Asia, or indeed the world.¹² Persians, Scythians, Macedonians, Greeks, Hans, Mongols, Arabs, Turks, Moguls, the British and the Soviets all attempted to conquer and subdue the Afghans (including tribal areas of Pakistan), but failed.¹³ In fact, “*Afghanistan is perhaps a classic example of Machiavelli’s ‘state of many princes’ in that, while easily entered, it has proven impossible to subdue.*”¹⁴ In other words, in the wake of weak central authority, Afghanistan has always been an easy state to invade¹⁵, but the diversity and autonomous character of Afghans has at times been advantageous to them, as foreigners are sucked into dealing with multiple targets instead of crushing one single entity that would thereby kill a rebellion.¹⁶

Moreover, the Afghan polity has always been fragile and complex; periods of stability have occurred, but they depend on delicate balances of power at local, regional and national level rather than an enduring central authority based on one ethnic group and one lineage.¹⁷ Even the most powerful polities have struggled to exert control over the region; Afghanistan has always been decentralized, fragmented, and federated from Kabul down to the Provinces and to village level.¹⁸ Indeed, the patrimonial regime of Afghanistan has been dominated by warlords, strongmen, and tribal leaders and based on patron-client hierarchies; personal relations and obligations between leaders, warlords, and followers to establish control in distant areas and perform core state functions such as tax collection.¹⁹ Yet the system of patronage has eroded by decades of war, multiple foreign interventions, and the disintegration of the state, in fact it is now traceable only in rural areas.

The above factors and the Afghan passion for independence have imparted a rugged

⁹ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁰ M. Ewans, P. Weber, R. Carr, *Afghanistan – a New History*, pag. 20.

¹¹ T. Barfield, *Afghanistan: a cultural and political history*, pag.6.

¹² O. Caroe, *The Pathans 550 B.C – A.D 1957* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1958), pag. 25.

¹³ J. J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflicts in Afghanistan* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pag. 12.

¹⁴ Goodson, *Afghanistan Endless War*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁷ T. Barfield, *Afghanistan: a cultural and political history*, pag 10.

¹⁸ A. King, *Why did the Taliban win?* pag. 5.

¹⁹ A. Jackson, G. Minoa, *Political and Economic Life in Afghanistan*, pag 3.

individualism to the Afghans²⁰; most of the Afghans tribes have remained self-sufficient and autonomous. “One of the most dominant characteristics of the Afghan is his intense love of independence. The Afghans patiently bears his misfortunes or poverty, but he cannot be made to reconcile himself to foreign rule... Foreigners who have failed to understand this point and who have tried to deprive him of his national independence or personal freedom had to pay heavily for the price of folly.”²¹

Afghanistan emerged as a nation-state in 1919 at the end of the third Anglo-Afghan war.²²

However, the process of state consolidation began in 1747 with Ahmed Shah Abdali.²³ It emerged independent in 1919, having defeated British colonialists. The Afghan monarchy remained intact until the early 1970s, but, politically, the nation bounced between left and right, with different governments using American and Soviet support against each other.²⁴

The current situation in Afghanistan is a result of a long history of events that includes a significant amount of influence of foreign powers.²⁵ In fact, in the 19th century, around 100 years after the formation of the state of Afghanistan in 1747, the British and the Russian Empires competed with each in “*The Great Game*”²⁶ for influence in Afghanistan.²⁷

This period of volatility ended with a leftist coup in 1978, causing Islamic and ethnic elements to revolt. Consequently, the URSS occupied Afghanistan in 1979 with a view to bringing its volatile neighbour under control, but the Soviet occupation continued for the following decade leading to the rise of the anti-communist Mujahedeen resistance movement.²⁸ From the mid-1980s, they became prominent, founded, and supported by the US government.²⁹

On the domestic scene, the Soviets apparently believed that a decisive show of armed might would reunite the ruling party, restore order in Afghanistan and prevent a possible encirclement of the Soviet Union. But the Soviet-Afghan war has lasted longer than World War II.³⁰

Because of the fierce Afghan resistance and massive covert support of Islamist mujahedin

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan*, 12.

²² Peace treaty between the British and the Afghans government after the third Anglo-Afghan war. It was negotiated at Rawalpindi and signed on August 8, 1919, by A.H. Grant, foreign secretary of the government of India, and Ali Ahmad Khan, commissary for home affairs.

²³ See reference n^o5 of this paragraph.

²⁴ J. Goodhand, *Aiding Violence or Building Peace? The Role of International Aid in Afghanistan*, 2002.

²⁵ C. Vigier, *Conflict Assessment Afghanistan*, Feb. 2009, pag. 4.

²⁶ “*The Great Game*” was a political and diplomatic confrontation that existed for most of the 19th century between the British Empire and the Russian Empire over Afghanistan and neighbouring territories in Central and South Asia.

²⁷ C. Vigier, *Conflict Assessment Afghanistan*, Feb. 2009, pag. 4.

²⁸ S. Beckwith, *The Militarisation of Aid in Afghanistan: Implications for Humanitarian Actors and the Way Ahead*, pag. 6.

²⁹ BBC News, 2011; U.S. Dept. Of. State, 2010.

³⁰ J.J. Collins, *The Soviet Afghan War: The First Four Years*, pag. 49.

resistance groups by Pakistan, US, Saudi Arabia and China, the Soviet Union suffered significant losses and in 1986 decided to leave Afghanistan.

Although the causes and consequences of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan will be better analysed and discussed in the following session, it can be stated that the URSS' embroilment in the Afghan civil war had been a disaster, in fact it had cost thousands of troops and billions of roubles and had produced a military stalemate which led to the "Second Cold War" of 1980s.³¹ Moreover, this war discredited the Soviet army: corruption, looting, and plundering by Soviet soldiers destroyed the army's moral legitimacy. "*Russian systematically entered all the houses, executing the inhabitants including women and children often by shooting them in the head.*"³² With such reports of looting and brutal treatment of Afghan civilians coming in, the army began losing its moral high ground among Soviet citizens. Finally, the ethnic split was accentuated when non-Russian soldiers displayed ambivalence toward fighting Afghans, deserted, and even revolted.³³

The ethnic strife within the army, the division between the citizens and the army, the secessionist movements, and anti-war demonstrations, represent the systematic factors that led to the Geneva Accord³⁴, defining conditions for the Soviet withdrawal, which was signed in 1988 between the communist government of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and the US and excluded the mujahedin parties. In 1989 the Soviet Union completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, but the US and Pakistan's covert support of mujahedin groups against the communist regime in Kabul continued for three more years.

Eventually in 1992, the Soviet Union and the US stopped all military aid to their respective proxies in Afghanistan.

Shortly after the official end of the Russian military aid to Afghanistan, the communist regime's most important militia leader, Abdur Rashid Dostum, defected to the mujahedin which contributed significantly to the fall of the regime in the first half of 1992.

With the loss of the communists as a common enemy, violent clashes between the mujahedin parties increased.

The civil war in Afghanistan entered a new stage that led to the failure of the state and the fragmentation of the country into different spheres of influence held by competing warlords. The

³¹ G. Hughes, *The Soviet Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview*, pag. 1.

³² R. Reuveny, A. Prakash, *The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union*, pag. 702.

³³ R. Reuveny, A. Prakash, *The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union*, pag. 699.

³⁴ On April 14, 1988, in Geneva, representatives of the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan signed three bilateral agreements intended to end the war in Afghanistan. An additional "Declaration on International Guarantees" was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union as states-guarantors. These documents, collectively known as the Geneva accords, have been hailed as the key to Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a settlement of the conflict which has held the world spotlight since the Soviet invasion of December 1979.

ongoing military battles between parties destroyed vast parts of Kabul and numerous human rights atrocities were committed on civilians.

In these times of violence and chaos, when Kabul fell to the mujahideen who had fought off the Soviets, gory civil war again gripped the country, fuelled by neighbouring countries trying to carve out areas of influence. The civil war has pitted the majority Pashtun population in the south and east against the ethnic minorities of the north. The predominantly Pashtun Taliban emerged in 1994 as a messianic movement made up of *taliban* (literally, students) from Islamic *madrassahs* (seminaries) who were living as refugees in Pakistan.³⁵ Welcomed by a war-weary Pashtun population and Saudi private citizens, the Taliban were able to quickly spread their influence in the country. They conquered Kabul in 1996 and by 1998 controlled about 90% of the country.

The main opposition force against the Taliban was an alliance of different remaining mujahedin parties led by Ahmad Shah Masoud which became known later in the West under the name *Northern Alliance*³⁶ It was financially supported by India (who thus promoted the opposition to Pakistan's perceived proxies the Taliban), Iran, as well as the Central Asian republics and Russia (which feared the further spread of Islamic extremism northward).³⁷

The Taliban established a strict Islamic regime based on Pashtun tribal values and a strict interpretation of *sharia*, the Islamic Law. The regime was most oppressive in the major cities with large non-Pashtun populations while rural areas were less negatively affected.³⁸ In fact, the Taliban were implicated in numerous human rights abuses and the leadership of an appalling regime, infamous for its harsh treatment of women. Aid agencies suffered a strained relationship with the Taliban as humanitarian access was constricted, becoming increasingly difficult to access. So, UN sanctions brought the regime to the attention of the International Community.³⁹

³⁵ A. Rashid, *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*, pag. 24.

³⁶ Ahmad Shah Massoud created the United Front (Northern Alliance) against the Taliban advance. The United Front included forces and leaders from different political backgrounds as well as from all ethnicities of Afghanistan. In 2001, the Northern Alliance became the local partner of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan because of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent refusal of the Taliban regime to hand over Osama bin Laden, who by that time was in Afghan territory. Although skirmishes with remaining Taliban forces continued in 2002, by the end of December 2001 the main strongholds of the Taliban were conquered by international forces and the militias of the Northern Alliance. Massoud was assassinated in a targeted killing via a suicide bombing on September 9, 2001 in Khvājah Bahā' od-Dīn by two Tunisians posing as journalists from a Moroccan broadcaster. The assassination of Massud by the Taliban and Bin Laden two days before the September 11 attacks was allegedly intended to neutralize the main anti-Qaeda military leader present in Afghanistan, in view of the predictable Western reactions to the September 11 attacks. There is, however, also the thesis that Bin Laden's criminal mindset also intended to foreshadow, with the killing of the Mas'ūd military chief, the goal of blowing up a plane over the Pentagon (home of U.S. military leaders) on Sept. 11, just as the destruction of the Twin Buddhas of Bāmiyān intended to foreshadow the attack on the Twin Towers in New York.

³⁷ C. Vigier, *Conflict Assessment Afghanistan*, Feb. 2009, pag. 6.

³⁸ *Ibidem.*,

³⁹ S. Beckwith, *The Militarisation of Aid in Afghanistan: Implications for Humanitarian Actors and the Way Ahead*, pag. 8.

Their nature, who they are and what they represent, has been difficult for the outsiders to understand because of the excessive secrecy that surrounds their leaders and political structure. Furthermore, due to the ban on photography and television, Afghans do not even know what their leaders look like.⁴⁰ The Taliban began as reformers, following a well-worn tradition in Muslim history based on the familiar notion of *Jihad*; holy war against infidels. Jihad, however, does not sanction the killing of fellow Muslims based on ethnicity or sect. Yet the Taliban has used it to do just that.⁴¹ In 1996, they handed control of training camps in Afghanistan, in fact, an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 Pakistanis trained and fought⁴² in the country which ensured a great Taliban penetration into Pakistani society. By 1998, Taliban had begun banning television and videos, imposing sharia punishment such as stoning and amputation, assassinating Pakistani Shiites, and forcing women to adopt the restrictive Taliban dress code.

Pakistan believed that a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will be an ally and give its army strategic depth in its ongoing conflict with India. Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, considered support for the Taliban necessary because of its dispute with India over Kashmir, but day by day, the danger grown for Pakistan, Kashmir, India, and the neighbour countries.⁴³

After the Al-Qaeda attacks of September 2001⁴⁴, a US-led coalition started a military offensive in Afghanistan a month later, seeking the track and destroy Al-Qaeda elements and the Taliban regime that supported them.

Before the fall of the last Taliban stronghold, in November 2001 the UN invited a series of Afghan political groups to come together at the Bonn conference in Germany⁴⁵. The International

⁴⁰ A. Rashid, *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*, pag. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*,.

⁴² S. Kumar, *Pakistan's jihadi apparatus: Goals and methods*, pag. 1.

⁴³ A. Rashid, *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*, pag. 28.

⁴⁴ "We have come together with a unity of purpose because our nation demands it. September 11, 2001, was a day of unprecedented shock and suffering in the history of the United States. The nation was unprepared." The 9/11 Commission Report; Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. The attacks represent a series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks committed in 2001 by 19 terrorists associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on U.S. soil; nearly 3,000 people were killed. It involved the attack of four planes, three of which were used to strike significant U.S. sites. American Airlines flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175 were flown into the World Trade Center's north and south towers, respectively, and American Airlines flight 77 hit the Pentagon. United Airlines flight 93 crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers attempted to overpower hijackers. The plane believed to be headed to the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵ On 5 December 2001, an International Conference on Afghanistan was held at the Hotel Petersberg in Bonn, Germany. The conference was hosted by Germany and chaired by Afghanistan. The conference, which was attended by 85 states, 15 international organizations and the United Nations, focused on three main issues involving the conclusion of the Afghan War and the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan Government, scheduled to occur in 2014. "Today in Bonn, we solemnly declare a strategic consensus on deepening and broadening the partnership between Afghanistan and the International Community founded at the Petersberg ten years ago. Building on the shared achievements of the past ten years, and recognising that the security and well-being of Afghanistan continue to affect the security of the entire region and beyond, Afghanistan and the International

Security Assistance Force (ISAF)⁴⁶ with an initial strength of 5,000 soldiers was deployed to Kabul to protect the government and the reconstruction of the state. While the presence of the ISAF apparently prevented Kabul from becoming once again the local of violent battles between competing fractions, clashes between rival warlords did re-erupt outside the capital shortly after the fall of the Taliban regime.

In June 2002, an emergency *Loya Jirga*⁴⁷ took place in Kabul and around 1,600 representatives from all provinces attended to put together the interim government. In January 2004, the new Afghan constitution was passed, and the first presidential elections took place later in October, but one year later the first parliamentary elections followed and a significant increase in security incidents was noted. This heralded the escalation of insurgent violence to come from 2006 onward.⁴⁸

Afghanistan's long history of complex intertwined conflicts reflects the magnitude of different root causes and escalating factors.

On the political level, the state struggles with the effects of bad governance, which is the result of endemic corruption and widespread impunity for powerful people and their followers, while on the social level, the adherence to archaic honour codes can lead to long-lasting blood feuds.⁴⁹ In addition, approaches to conflict resolution have been mainly re-active and limited to compensation for damages without addressing underlying root causes; in fact there is a high degree of traumatization among the population from decades of war.

Economically and environmentally, Afghanistan faces a growing scarcity of natural resources, such as water, pastures and wood, arable land, in combination with the high level of unemployment which makes people more responsive to offers of payment from criminal, or opposition groups. In

Community strongly commit to this renewed partnership for the Transformation Decade": The International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn 5 December 2011 Afghanistan and the International Community: From Transition to the Transformation Decade, Conference Conclusions.

⁴⁶ The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was a multinational military mission in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. It was established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 pursuant to the Bonn Agreement, which outlined the establishment of a permanent Afghan government following the U.S. invasion in October 2001. ISAF's primary objective was to enable the Afghan government to provide effective security across the country and develop new Afghan security forces to ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists. From 2011, responsibility for security was gradually transitioned to Afghan forces, which took the lead for security operations across the country by summer 2013. The transition process was completed and Afghan forces assumed full security responsibility at the end of 2014, when the ISAF mission was completed.

⁴⁷ Loya Jirga is a unique Afghan institution. The phrase "Loya J irg means "Grand Assembly" in the Pashto language. Loya Jirgas have bee convened throughout Afghan history to choose new leaders, ado constitutions, and decide important political and state issues, see: R. Singh, *Emergency Loya Jirga Shapes Afghanistan's future*, India Quartely, April-June, 2002, Vol. 58, No. 2, pag. 173-186.

⁴⁸ C. Vigier, *Conflict Assessment Afghanistan*, Feb. 2009, pag. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*,.

confirmation of what has been said, insurgency and government corruption are significantly supported by revenues from the drug economy⁵⁰ in Afghanistan. This leads to the lack of the security factors, and it contributes to the high proliferation of small arms and the presence of illegal armed groups organized as criminal gangs under the command of warlords who use these private militias to claim and maintain political power. National security forces, especially the police, are weak and in many cases negatively affected by corruption.

In addition, insurgency and criminal groups threatening civilians, offering protection in exchange for financial or logistical support. Regarding that, since the summer of 2005, the security situation has significantly deteriorated with 40-50% of the country now inaccessible to civilian aid programs. This has contributed to a *militarization of development aid* in which the military is using development projects as a means of *winning the hearts and minds* of the population and thus *force protection*; elements that will be analysed later.

A consequence of that appears to be the increasing number of attacks by insurgent forces on NGOs, who are considered as *soft target* allies of international governments and their military forces in Afghanistan.⁵¹

In other words, Afghan civilians are victims not only of attacks from insurgent groups but also of military operations by progovernment forces that are based on faulty information. In 2008 there were more than 2000 civilian casualties: the highest number since 2002. Among these, 552 civilians were killed in air strikes from international forces.

Both NGOs and the Afghan population are also subject to an increase in crime including robbery and abductions, or kidnapping.⁵²

In conclusion, a series of likely developments in the coming months and years have the potential to worsen the situation in Afghanistan. In the short term, a likely increase in security incidents triggered by the deployment of additional international forces and the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections will pose challenges.

In the medium and long term, ongoing bad governance, increasing anger about the behaviour and presence of foreigners in the country, population growth in combination with scarce resources and

⁵⁰United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Nov. 2021: “*income for opiates in Afghanistan amounted to some \$1.8-\$2.7 billion in 2021. However, much larger sums are accrued along illicit drug supply chains outside the state. Taxes on opiates cultivation, production and trafficking represent lucrative potential source of financing for non-state actors in the country.*”

⁵¹ C. Vigier, *Conflict Assessment Afghanistan*, Feb. 2009, pag. 10.

⁵² *Ibidem*,.

the effects of global warming have the potential to escalate conflicts.

Finally, the international community faces the risk of becoming morally trapped in Afghanistan if measures aimed at a short-term reduction in insurgency increase the risk of an outbreak of a new civil war after the international presence is reduced.

The long list of root causes and escalating factors of conflict in Afghanistan shows the complexity of the situation. There will not be “one solution” that can solve everything, everywhere, but very different small ways to improve the situation, instead of choosing a single approach that may not be applicable at the moment; for instance, if one of the parties in conflict is not willing to negotiate at the present time.

Yet the challenge remains that several influential Afghan and international actors have personal incentives in maintaining the current conflict situation rather than in resolving it. Allies for peacebuilding and conflict transformation can be found at each level, in each area and in each group. It may take some looking, some capacity building, some coordination, and some time to find them, but they are there.

1.1 Afghanistan post 70s and 80s

This paragraph is meant to provide an historical and military literature about Afghanistan and its occupiers, by analysing its wars and other violent conflicts, including, most recently, the more than three decades of foreign occupation, civil war, and insurgency since 1978.⁵³

Landlocked and bordered by Central Asia, China, Pakistan and Iran, its location and harsh terrain of mountains and desert were challenges to both rulers and invaders. But, also, its ethnic mix was another challenge.⁵⁴

Afghanistan, as a state, was born in the mid-eighteenth century as a dynastic, expansionist Pashtun-led power⁵⁵ under Ahmad Shah Durrani, in 1747–72, who conquered Delhi and took over parts of the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁶

⁵³ United States Institute of Peace – Special Report, pag. 2.

⁵⁴ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 49.

⁵⁵ Pashtunwali is the traditional lifestyle and best described as a code of honour of the Pashtun people, by which they live. Scholars widely have interpreted it as being "the way of the Afghans" or "the code of life". Pashtunwali is widely practised by Pashtuns in the Pashtunistan regions. In fact, in the Pushtu language, the name Pashtun denotes honour, goodness, bravery, loyalty and dignity. Pashtuns are renowned and respected fighters and will battle to the death over three things: wealth, women, and land. Inter-familial or tribal vendettas can continue for decades.

⁵⁶ T. Barfield, *Afghanistan, A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton University Press, 2010.

As discussed in the previous subchapter⁵⁷, the country was moulded into its present territorial boundaries during a century-long process of wars and diplomacy known as the Great Game; a geopolitical rivalry between British interests in India to the East and South, Russia expanding from the North, and to some extent Iran to the West⁵⁸.

In fact, the British empire, motivated by perceptions of Imperial Russian expansion southwards towards the Arabian Gulf, in 1837, as part of the Great Game between the two powers, sent an expedition to Kabul, the Afghan capital, aiming to install a pro-British ruler.⁵⁹

Brushing aside the Afghan Army, the British troops easily reached the capital, and they became seen as occupiers, which led to the rise of Afghan hostility. These military actions describe the so-called First Anglo-Afghan War, which lasted until 1842.

But, demonstrating incompetence in not taking action to stop the massacre and failing to secure the British encampment and supplies, the British troops abandoned Kabul in the harshness of the Afghan winter.⁶⁰ Moreover, the British retreat to Peshawar,⁶¹ was equally incompetent, leading to wholesale slaughter of the 4.500-strong Kabul garrison at the hands of Afghan tribesmen.

Seen the end of the First Anglo-Afghan War, the stain on British honour could not go unanswered⁶², so the Second Anglo-Afghan War went little better for the British. It began in 1878, caused by incompetent British diplomacy⁶³ which gave Russia an opening to interfere in Afghanistan. Although the Afghan ruler, Mohammed Yaquab Khan, agreed to the British demands, a local rebellion against the invaders just started. Britain suffered further humiliation⁶⁴ when its army was defeated by a larger Pashtun force, in 1880. However, the British military overturned the end of this unnecessary and very costly war⁶⁵ when Afghanistan ceded to British demands for control over Afghan foreign policy.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Chapter I, subchapter 1.

⁵⁸ See note 16, Chapter I, subchapter 1.

⁵⁹ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 49.

⁶⁰ T. Farrell, *Unwinnable*, October 30, 2018.

⁶¹ The capital of the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its largest city. It is the sixth-largest city in Pakistan and the largest Pashtun-majority city in the country. Situated in the broad Valley of Peshawar east of the historic Khyber Pass, close to the border with Afghanistan, Peshawar's recorded history dates to at least 539 BCE, making it the oldest city in Pakistan and one of the oldest cities in South Asia.

In Ancient era, the city was known as Purushpura and served as the capital of the Kushan Empire under the rule of Kanishka and was home to the Kanishka stupa, which was among the tallest buildings in the ancient world. Peshawar was then ruled by the Hephthalites, followed by the Hindu Shahis, before the arrival of Muslim empires. The city was an important trading centre during the Mughal era, before becoming part of the Pashtun Durrani Empire in 1747, and serving as their winter capital from 1776 until the capture of the city by the Sikh Empire in March 1823, who were followed by the British Indian Empire in 1846.

⁶² T. Farrell, *Unwinnable*, October 30, 2018.

⁶³ *Ibidem.*,

⁶⁴ *Ibidem.*,

⁶⁵ *Ibidem.*,

⁶⁶ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 50.

In 1893, the Afghans agreed a line of demarcation between their country and the British Raj⁶⁷, called Durand Line,⁶⁸ in a way to let the British to establish the same level of control as they had over the rest of the Raj.⁶⁹

Despite the agreement between the two parties, the Third Anglo-Afghan War started with Afghan forces against the full independence of Britain, following the *Amrirstart Massacre*, in 1919.⁷⁰ To win popular support for his rule and to take advantage of widespread unrest in British India, the new amir, Ghazi Amanullah Khan⁷¹, decided to invade.

The British were taken by surprise, but after a month, able to use air power and after bombing Kabul, they mobilised and drove the Afghans back across the border. By August, both sides had reached an equitable agreement: the British recognised Afghanistan as having full sovereign rights, and the Afghans recognised the Durand Line as demarking the border between Afghanistan and British India.⁷²

The British left Afghanistan by their own devices in 1947 and they tacitly accepted that whilst the Afghan forces might be defeated by British troops, any occupation of Afghanistan was unlikely to succeed.⁷³

Following the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, when restrictions on Afghan foreign policy that the British Empire had imposed⁷⁴ were removed, Afghanistan was left somewhat alone.

The country went through a major, and it maintained its neutrality during World War II,⁷⁵ while

⁶⁷ Period of direct British rule over the Indian subcontinent from 1858 until the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. The raj was intended to increase Indian participation in governance, but the powerlessness of Indians to determine their own future without the consent of the British led to an increasingly adamant national independence movement.

⁶⁸ See note n°20.

⁶⁹ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 50.

⁷⁰ Allianwala Bagh Massacre, also called Massacre of Amritsar, incident on April 13, 1919, in which British troops fired on a large crowd of unarmed Indians in an open space known as the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in the Punjab region (now in Punjab state) of India, killing several hundred people and wounding many hundreds more. It marked a turning point in India's modern history, in that it left a permanent scar on Indo-British relations and was the prelude to Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi's full commitment to the cause of Indian nationalism and independence from Britain.

⁷¹ He was the sovereign of Afghanistan from 1919 until his abdication in 1929, first as Emir and after 1926 as King.

⁷² T. Farrell, *Unwinnable*, October 30, 2018.

⁷³ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 51.

⁷⁴ The British government wished to place some of its personnel within the territory of the amir of Kabul. Edward Robert Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Earl of Lytton, known commonly as Lord Lytton was an English politician who served as Viceroy of India from 1876 to 1880. He is commonly regarded as a ruthless viceroy due to his approach to the Great Indian Famine of 1876-1878 and the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Lytton supplemented his wait-and-see policy with efforts to establish a 'powerful English party' in Southern Afghanistan by extending British influence northwards from Quetta. 'Afghanistan must be politically ours before it can be of any use to us from a military point of view'. So, Lytton's first concern was 'to prevent Russia from obtaining a foothold, or even a dominant influence in Afghanistan'. In July 1877, Lytton had contemplated war with Afghanistan. Kabul and Kandahar provinces would be incorporated in varying degrees into Britain's indirect empire, with the most intensive form restricted to southern Afghanistan. The will was also the creation of a 'Big Afghanistan' which the British could manage to their political and military advantage. In other words, the most important points of the British policy through Afghanistan were a) indirect control by peaceful penetration if possible; b) indirect control by war if necessary; c) direct rule when all else fails.

⁷⁵ United States Institute of Peace – Special Report, pag. 3.

Afghanistan's geopolitical role became important during the Cold War, when it benefited from major Soviet and U.S. assistance programs.⁷⁶

Generally, legitimacy was conferred by the ability to take power, defeat rivals, and provide peace and security, as well as by perceived independence from foreign control and it remained even after the collapse of the dynasty established by Ahmad Shah Durrani; who governed the state from 1747 to 1978.

In other words, the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s saw gradual modernization in what remained a very poor country with extremely low social indicators. After enjoying its longest period of relative peace, during 1933, until 1973, Afghanistan saw increasing instability leading to a bloodless coup in 1973⁷⁷; after which a republic was instituted, followed by a bloody communist coup and a takeover in 1978.⁷⁸

The defensive and opportunistic coup that brought a pro-Soviet communist Afghan government into power in April 1978 was followed by⁷⁹ ambitious reforms,⁸⁰ wholesale arrests, torture, execution of opponents, and ruling-party infighting.⁸¹

This repressive behaviour and mounting opposition to the government's radical agenda gave rise to widespread resistance that threatened the new regime, which in turn led to the Soviet military intervention at the end of 1979.

This was an important juncture in Afghanistan's history and precipitated several decades of conflict that has continued in various forms since then.⁸²

This invasion means period of active action of the armed forces of URSS in the territory of Afghanistan until February 1989. At the beginning of the war, the Soviet goal was to support

⁷⁶ From the 1950s to 1970s, considerable aid was provided by both the Soviet Union and the United States as part of their global Cold War rivalry, resulting in Afghanistan's becoming one of the highest per-capita recipients of development assistance in the world.

⁷⁷ In 1973, while Zahir Shah was undergoing medical treatment in Italy, his regime was overthrown in a coup d'etat by his cousin and former prime minister, Mohammed Daoud Khan, who established a single-party republic, ending more than 225 years of continuous monarchical government.

⁷⁸ On 27 April 1978, the PDPA and military units loyal to the PDPA revolted and killed Daoud Khan, his immediate family and bodyguards in a violent coup during the battle to seize control of the capital, Kabul in what became known as the Saur Revolution. Starting with the Saur Revolution military coup, an almost continuous series of armed conflicts has dominated and afflicted Afghanistan, including a Soviet invasion, a series of civil wars between mujahideen groups (notably the Taliban), a NATO invasion, a Taliban insurgency, and fighting between the Taliban and the local branch of the Islamic State.

⁷⁹ United States Institute of Peace – Special Report, pag. 5.

⁸⁰ Notably land reform and gender equality.

⁸¹ For an hour-by-hour account of the 1978 coup that brought a communist government into power and precipitated more than two decades of conflict, see Louis Dupree, *“Red Flag over the Hindu Kush, Part II: The Accidental Coup”* (Asia Series Report no. 45, American Universities Field Staff, 1979). Following the pattern set in the Anglo-Afghan wars, the first two communist leaders of Afghanistan died violent deaths and the third ended up in exile in the Soviet Union.

⁸² United States Institute of Peace, *Special Report*, pag. 7.

communist government and impose Marxist and socialist ideology, but due to the spread of armed uprisings in Afghanistan, Soviet Union decided to military intervene in the country, starting a conflict that lasted for ten years.

In fact, the Afghanistan war initially was visualized by Soviet leaders as a small-scale intervention, but soon it grew into a decade-long war involving nearly one million Soviet soldiers, killing, and injuring some tens of thousands of them.⁸³

During the early 1980s, the official Soviet media maintained that the Afghanistan Government had requested Soviet military assistance for humanitarian and non-combat tasks. But, as the conflict escalated, stories about combat casualties and the problem of disabled soldiers began appearing despite the media censorship.⁸⁴

The rebel *mujahideen* factions⁸⁵ were against the Afghan communists, while the Soviets were aided by neighbouring countries as Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, and the People's Republic of China. In 1986, meanwhile the *mujaheddin*, well-armed with US-supplied surface-to-air-missiles, rockets, mortars, and communication equipment, won many confrontations with the Soviet army⁸⁶, the number of Soviet casualties mounted, as well as the number of disabled soldiers and the war veterans increasingly became part of the Soviet urban landscape.

For this reason, there was a change of strategy by the new Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, who anxious to reduce the financial, human, political and diplomatic cost of the war, he directed that the Soviet military transition responsibility to the Afghan government forces.⁸⁷

By late 1986, the Afghanistan war had significantly impacted on Soviet domestic politics, in fact in his report to the 27th Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), on February 26th, 1986, Gorbachev gave a hint of his determination to end Moscow's military involvement. He admitted that Afghanistan had turned into a "*bleeding wound*" and said that "*we would like in the near future to bring the Soviet forces-situated in Afghanistan at the request of its government-back to their homeland.*"⁸⁸

⁸³ The newspaper of the Estonian Komsomol estimated 50,000 dead and 150,000 injured. See also V. Konovalov, *Legacy of the Afghan War: Some Statistic*, Radio Liberty Report on the USSR 1, pag. 3. Konovalov notes that Soviet official statistics report 15,000 dead, 37,000 wounded and 313 missing. The number of Soviet casualties is debated. R.B.Rais, *War Without Winners: Afghanistan Uncertain Transition After the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) pag. 116. It lists 30,000 dead, January 1986.

⁸⁴ Stories about the war appeared in the army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* on March 12th and 23rd 1983, and about war casualties on January 7th and 8th 1984. See, also, O. Roy, *The lessons of the Soviet Afghan War, Adelphi papers*, London: The Institute for Strategic Studies, 1991.

⁸⁵ The Afghan freedom fighters.

⁸⁶ H. Seling, *Inside the Afghan Talks, Foreign Policy*, pag. 72 and *Washington Post*, April 17, 1988, pag. A30.

⁸⁷ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 54.

⁸⁸ A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Aghanistan*, pag. 333.

So, Gorbachev tried to find a solution that would allow the Soviet forces to withdraw, and he made greater use of diplomacy by trying to seek a political compromise with the *mujahideen*. But the Soviet-Afghan regime forces intensified their military operations in 1986 and 1987⁸⁹, and despite the increased Soviet use of airpower, light troops, and an improved Soviet ability to interdict supplies and personnel crossing the border, the overall military situation was no more favourable for Moscow in 1987.

It is possible to confirm that the course of the war has changed due to the use of the *Stringers*⁹⁰; weapon that had turned the tide in favour of the *mujahideen*. In other words, the effectiveness of the Stringers “denied the Soviets uncontested domination of the air and dramatically enhanced the operational effectiveness and survivability of resistance units, apart from providing a major boost” to their morale. Moreover, this weapon enabled the *mujahideen* to exact “a steep price from the Soviets both in terms of lost aircraft and casualties.” Finally, the *mujahideen*’s greatly strengthened combat capabilities “may have contributed to a Soviet realization that they cannot win the war by military means, an important psychological barrier.”⁹¹

Their courage, their indomitable spirit, and their possession of the Stringer, the *mujahideen* forced Gorbachev to look for a diplomatic way out of the quagmire. Ideally⁹², he wanted a settlement that would enable him to withdraw Soviet troops and would assure him that a pro-Soviet Communist regime would be permitted to retain or to share the power in Kabul.

In December 1987, at the Washington summit, he found President Ronald Reagan willing to act as the guarantor of this settlement, but he was insistent on an unequivocal Soviet military withdrawal, with a definite and irreversible timetable.

So, on February 8, 1988, on the eve of a new round of United Nations-sponsored talks between Pakistan and the Afghan regime in Geneva, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union was prepared to begin the withdrawal of Soviet troops and “to complete their withdrawal within 10 months, if a final settlement could be hammered out in Geneva”⁹³ with the aim of having as a neighbour “an independent, neutral and nonaligned Afghanistan”.⁹⁴

Finally, on May 15, 1988, the Soviet troops began their withdrawal from Afghanistan. After nine years of fighting, Moscow seemed resigned to military defeat at the hands of the anti-Communist,

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*,

⁹⁰ American-made Stringer, a 35-pound, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile. Many Stringers were supplied to the Mujahideen in late 1986, at a time when they were suffering very heavy losses and their morale was sagging.

⁹¹ A. Alexiev, *U.S. Policy and the War in Afghanistan*, *Global Affairs*, vol. 3, n.1, pag 90.

⁹² A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 334.

⁹³ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service/Soviet Affairs*, February 8, 1988, pag. 34.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, pag. 35.

anti-Russian Mujahideen, or “*holy warriors*”.⁹⁵

The withdrawal agreement was fashioned under United Nations auspices and signed in Geneva on April 14, 1988, to end the Soviet Union Afghan’s war.⁹⁶ As a result, the Kremlin have failed its attempt to control strategically important real estate in the third world through the direct use of military power.

The Geneva package⁹⁷ of four separate, but interrelated agreements, entered into force on May 15, 1988, but its complexity and ambiguities rose new barriers to a quick and peaceful resolution of the Afghan war.

While the first and the second agreements were signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan,⁹⁸ the third accord, dealing with the interrelationships between the above-mentioned agreements, was entered into Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the United States and the Soviet Union signing as co-guarantors. Under this agreement, the Soviet Union agreed to begin the first phase of the withdraw of its forces on May 15: “*one half of the troops will be withdrawn by August 15, 1988, and the withdrawal of the troops will be completed within nine months.*”⁹⁹

Finally, the fourth agreement, a Declaration of International Guarantees, was signed by the Soviet Union and the United States with the aim to ensure respect for the “*sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-alignment*” of Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹⁰⁰

In other words, this package reflects the decision of Moscow and Washington to defuse the Afghan issue before President Reagan’s visit to the Soviet Union from May 29, 1988, to June 1, 1988.

It gave the Soviet Union a face-saving formula for military withdrawal, and it gave the United States an outcome that reverses Moscow’s expansion in the area.

However, there are serious shortcomings in the agreements and widespread doubt that they will

⁹⁵ A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Aghanistan*, pag. 334.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*,

⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*,

⁹⁸ “*With the United States and Soviet Union acting as guarantors, Pakistan and Afghanistan today signed a set of agreements under negotiation for nearly six years, providing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan by next February 15th.*”: The Washington Post, April 15th, 1988.

⁹⁹ The Soviet withdrawal was contingent on all the parties living up to the provisions of the accords – to the stipulations that “*there will be no interference and intervention in any form in the affairs of the parties*”; that the voluntary return of the refugees will start and will be completed within 18 months; that the Soviet withdrawal will be completed within the designated time; and that the international guarantees will be in operation.

¹⁰⁰ The two superpowers undertake “to invariably refrain from any form of interference and intervention” and to respect the commitments undertaken by Afghanistan and Pakistan toward one another. These guarantees were included at the insistence of the government of Pakistan.

soon bring peace to a devastated and politically divided Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ In fact, one of the most important problems was the continuation of the Communists in power¹⁰² and, in the other hand, the *mujahideen* have vowed to fight until the enemies are ousted. Thus, the failure to provide for an interim government that would serve as a bridge between the Communist regime in Kabul and a successor that reflects popular sentiments seems a prescription for prolonged civil war.¹⁰³

Another criticism of the Geneva Accords is that they did not include a cease-fire and they, therefore, create the possibility of a civil war.

The emphasis is on the fact that, at the press conference held for foreign correspondents in Kabul on April 29, 1988, the Soviet military advisers showed the will to remain in Afghanistan even after the withdrawal of the troops¹⁰⁴. So, the Reagan administration came under heavy criticism in the Senate for, apparently, agreeing to the Soviet troop withdrawal without obtaining guarantees against the possibility that Moscow might supply the Communists with arms after the agreements were signed. Because of this criticism, Secretary of State, George Shultz stated: “*we assert confidently our right to supply our friends in Afghanistan as we see the need to do so. And our sense of need will be affected by whatever restraint we see on the part of the Soviets*”.¹⁰⁵

Finally, there is not recognition of the role of the *mujahideen*, as they are the explosive ingredient accounting for the heavy toll on Soviet and Afghan Communist forces and resources; they are the key to war and peace in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

Much to the surprise of many Western governments, Kabul regime kept the *mujahideen* at bay for three years, but Afghanistan was ravaged by another civil war between *mujahideen* factions. Kabul was devastated and the war generated over half a million refugees. A *Mujahideen* government was eventually established, but the country soon descended into chaos with rampant infighting between former *mujahideen* commanders and other warlords.¹⁰⁷

During this period of tensions, the Taliban emerged from former *mujahideen*; a very small group

¹⁰¹ A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 336.

¹⁰² This represents a tacit acceptance of Moscow’s claim that the Najib regime is legitimate and permits the Soviet Union to extend assistance to Najib in accordance with the Soviet-Afghan friendship treaties of 1921 and 1978. In other words, there are ambiguities implicit in this situation, because Soviet aid would seem to contradict the accord on non-intervention.

¹⁰³ A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 336.

¹⁰⁴ *The New York Times*, April 29, 1988.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ A. Z. Rubinstein – Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania – *The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 336.

¹⁰⁷ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 54.

defending itself from the exploitation of civilians by warlords. But, in late 1994 it captured Kandahar and, supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services-Intelligence (ISI)¹⁰⁸, the Taliban overthrew the government in Kabul in September 1996.

Originally welcomed by a portion of Afghans as a force restoring peace, security, and stability, the Taliban leadership would, over the next five years, impose an increasingly isolationist and fundamentalistic Islamic regime over the country. Moreover, the Taliban introduced a stringent interpretation of sharia, banned women from work and punishments such as death by stoning and amputations.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that it was never able to eradicate the alliance of the warlords who styled themselves the Northern Alliance¹⁰⁹, while a different position was adopted by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognizing the new Taliban government. In fact, by September 2001, it was poised to wipe out the Northern Alliance, but the 9/11 attacks led to United States intervention on October 7, 2001, aimed at destroying Al Qaeda as well as removing the Taliban from Afghanistan.

The Soviet experience in Afghanistan ended in defeat in the eyes of the world and for some hastened the demise of the Soviet Union itself. Clearly, the Soviet leadership had underestimated the challenges in this country and not heeded warnings that they should have drawn from the British involvement there over the previous century.

On the other hand, Afghanistan had proven again to a world power that its terrain was easily to defend and difficult, if not impossible, to control. The Afghan had shown themselves to be tenacious, divided, but usually locally dominant and almost completely unwilling to compromise their values.¹¹⁰

Historian Victor Davis Hansen, among others, has argued that although even the ancient Greeks had difficulty subjugating the Afghans, Alexander the Great and his successors did dominate the region for nearly two centuries.¹¹¹

Unfortunately, the insights that could have been gained from the ancient Greek experience have

¹⁰⁸ ISI has over five decades of nationhood emerged into a powerful institution in Pakistan. It has been active as an organisation both under military rule and civilian regimes. The ISI gains importance from the fact that the political and the military leaderships have always perceived threats to their national security since independence. ISI has monolithic organisational structure which oversees both external and internal intelligence operations in the country, even if the organisation's internal intelligence operations tend to be generally associated with the abuse of power. Generally, the Inter-Services Intelligence is the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan, operationally responsible for gathering, processing, and analysing information relevant for national security from around the world.

¹⁰⁹ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 55.

¹¹⁰ J. R. Ballard, D. W. Lamm, and J. K. Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and back – The U.S. at war in Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 28.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem.*,

been lost to history, but the lesson to be learned from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan should have been clear to the Americans who followed them into conflict there.

1.2 The involvement of U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's history is a rich set of experiences and possible lessons for the country's current transition for the land and air forces of the United States and many of its allies. As a result, these forces have changed a great deal, as much as they changed in each of the previous century's world wars.¹¹² The wars have also resulted in changes to the key non-state actors¹¹³, particularly the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and its offshoot ISIS¹¹⁴.

The US-led attack on Afghanistan in 2001 was a direct consequence of the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. But to understand the American military intervention in Afghanistan and what it happened in this country, it is necessary to acquire the fundamental knowledge about the growth of Al Qaeda and why it had established its base in this state.

Moreover, the purpose of this paragraph is to provide information and analysis for Congress on Afghanistan and the nearly two-decade U.S. project there. Topics covered include U.S. military engagement and security dynamics; the regional context; reconciliation efforts; Afghan politics and governance.

Though its official start date will likely be debated for years, there can be no doubt that the first American experiences in Afghanistan began not in the twenty-first century, but rather in the late 1970s when the administration of President Jimmy Carter first began to seriously study the possibility of instability in that region in the context of the Cold War between United States and Soviet Union.¹¹⁵

It can be said that the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan had never been particularly warm, and it took a decisive turn in February 1979, when the US ambassador in Kabul, Adolph Dubs, was killed in an unsuccessful raid to rescue kidnap victims.¹¹⁶ Then, the leader of

¹¹² B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 11.

¹¹³ An individual or organization that has significant political influence but is not allied to any country or state.

¹¹⁴ ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), is a Sunni jihadist group with a particularly violent ideology that calls itself a caliphate and claims religious authority over all Muslims.

¹¹⁵ J. R. Ballard, D. W. Lamm, and J. K. Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and back – The U.S. at war in Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 25.

¹¹⁶ Adolph "Spike" Dubs was a career diplomat who served in Germany, Liberia, and the Soviet Union. He became a noted Soviet expert, and in 1973-74 he served as charge affairs at Embassy Moscow. In 1978, he was appointed Ambassador to Afghanistan following a coup d'état which brought the Soviet-aligned Khalq faction to power. On

Afghanistan, Nur Mohammed Taraki and leader of a faction within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the Afghan community party, established the new Taraki government after a coup on April 27, 1978.¹¹⁷ The violent reforms¹¹⁸ enforced by it led to the rebellion of large parts of Afghans and the rise of clashes between the Afghan government, aimed to provide security and to assist in the fight against rebels, known as *mujahideen*.

The Afghan government requested the introduction of troops in the country in the spring and summer of 1979 after the death of President Taraki and for the continuous rebellions all around the state. This chaos eventually resulted in the initial Soviet army deployment into Afghanistan, some months later in a two-axis attack supported by airpower and quickly occupied the major urban centres, military bases, and strategic installations in the centre of the country.¹¹⁹

Originally, the Soviets envisioned that they would strengthen the Afghan army and aid by securing a few major cities and maintaining the lines of communications around the country, freeing the Afghan army to put down the rebellion, but that never transpired.¹²⁰ In fact, the Soviet invasion seemed to excite even greater nationalistic feeling and to cause the rebellion to grow. In other words, instead of rapidly establishing a blanket of control, the Soviets soon faced a guerrilla war against the *mujahideen* divided into small groups.

Hoping to deprive them of resources and safe havens, the Soviets used massive force in response to Afghan guerrilla attacks, destroying villages and forcing local Afghans to flee their homes or die, making it impossible to live in contested areas.¹²¹

*"Born in chaos, spread and triumphed chaotically"*¹²² and despite heavy losses, the *mujahideen* were able to resist the Soviets and their Afghan allies thanks to an outside support that guaranteed them more sophisticated weapons and the aid received by United States, sympathetic Muslims around the world, including Afghan Arabs, and the foreign fighters who were drawn to wage jihad against the communists. *Osama bin Laden*, a Saudi national, became prominent among them and many of his followers formed the initial core group of *Al-Qaeda* terrorist organization.

February 14, 1979, Dubs was kidnapped by armed militants posing as police. The kidnappers demanded the release of the imprisoned leader of their party. Hafizullah Amin's government refused to negotiate with the militants. Dubs was then assassinated. A successor to Dubs was not named and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The U.S. embassy was finally closed in 1989 as security deteriorated.

¹¹⁷ See paragraph 1.1, note 71.

¹¹⁸ Indeed, modernization of the traditional Islamic civil law, the violent responses to any opposition by the people, the execution of thousands of prisoners, including village elders and mullahs. Finally, other members of the traditional elite, the religious establishment, and intelligentsia fled the country.

¹¹⁹ J. R. Ballard, D. W. Lamm, and J. K. Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and back – The U.S. at war in Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 27.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem.*,

¹²¹ *Ibidem.*,

¹²² *Ibidem.*,

The Afghan resistance continues to grow stronger and command widespread popular support and, in part, the success of the resistance was due to material support provided by United States and other nations. Moreover, the first state had begun training insurgents and directing propaganda broadcasts into Afghanistan from Pakistan in 1978.¹²³

In 1982, following the election of President Ronald Reagan, the American aid for the mujahideen significantly increased. In fact, in its support of the anti-Soviet opposition, the United States was assisted by United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, among others. As a confirmation of this, the United States donated over \$600 million in aid every year¹²⁴, with similar amounts coming from the Saudis. The People's Republic of China also sold tanks, assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and much more to *mujahideen*, in cooperation with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and did Egypt. Most notably, it provided the *mujahideen* Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems¹²⁵, which forced changes on Soviet tactics due to the importance the Soviets had placed upon heliborne transport in the challenging Afghan terrain.

The year 1985 was both the bloodiest year of the war for Soviet Union, because of the constant fighting, and the year of the election of President Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in this state.

*“Minimizing his country’s involvement in Afghanistan topped his to-do list. Gorbachev had become increasingly impatient with the counterinsurgency against the stubborn U.S and Pakistan backed mujahideen, which was costing the nearly bankrupt Soviet Union an estimated \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year. He was prepared to change course finally and decisively.”*¹²⁶ Focused on the buildup of the Afghan forces and transitioned the Afghans even more into the lead positions against the *mujahideen*, but without success, the final decision of the Soviet President was the withdrawal of the troops. In fact, the first half of the Soviet contingent was withdrawn from May to August 1988 and the second half from November to February 1989. Despite their losses,¹²⁷ the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in a *“coordinated, deliberate, professional manner”*.¹²⁸ The withdrawal was based on a *“coordinated diplomatic, economic, and military plan permitting Soviet forces to withdraw in good order and the Afghan government to survive.”*¹²⁹

¹²³ *Ibidem.*,

¹²⁴ *Ibidem.*,

¹²⁵ See paragraph 1.1.

¹²⁶ See: *Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Issue 14/15*, pag. 7.

¹²⁷ The Soviets had lost some 13,000 dead, over 35,000 wounded, and many more stricken by disease; it had also lost over 300 helicopters and some 13,000 vehicles.

¹²⁸ L. W. Grau, *Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* – Foreign Military Studies Office (Army), pag. 1.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem.*,

From the day the Soviets invaded, American diplomatic strategy was to mobilize world opinion against the Soviets. Indeed, President Carter deemed the Soviet invasion as “*the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War*”¹³⁰ and on January 23, 1980, he announced a policy that came to be known as the Carter Doctrine¹³¹: “*an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.*”¹³²

American ire was aroused not out of sympathy for the victims, but by the act of aggression itself and what it portended for the future. This is the reason of why the support for the *mujahideen* fitted perfectly with the Reagan Doctrine¹³³ and, therefore, the United States decided to play in the global game of guerrilla politics by introducing the US supplied support package which had three essential components: organization and logistics, military technology, and ideological support for sustaining and encouraging the Afghan resistance. In fact, advertisements, paid for from CIA funds, were placed in newspapers and newsletters around the world offering inducements and motivation to join the Jihad.¹³⁴

The other component of Reagan Doctrine was implemented through extensive propaganda in the global mass media by emphasizing ideological support to the Afghan resistance. U.S. television channels lavished praise on the “brave fighters for freedom” and special documentary programs were produced with adaptation for Islamic countries. Less well known is the effort that went into creating propaganda for Afghan children.¹³⁵ Furthermore, U.S. sponsored textbooks, which exhort

¹³⁰ P. Hoodbhoy, *Afghanistan and the Genesis of Global Jihad* – Peace Research, pag. 20.

¹³¹ Carter Doctrine, foreign policy initiative of the United States, introduced by U.S. President Jimmy Carter in his 1980 State of the Union address, that returned the country to its traditional strategy of containment of the Soviet Union. In his speech, Carter declared that the United States would employ military force against any country that attempted to gain control of the Persian Gulf region. That announcement marked a dramatic shift in U.S. foreign policy, which had been focused since the beginning of Carter’s presidency on promoting international human rights and on pursuing détente with the Soviet Union. Carter’s policy of détente had culminated in 1979 in the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II nuclear arms treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States.

¹³² P. Hoodbhoy, *Afghanistan and the Genesis of Global Jihad* – Peace Research, pag. 20.

¹³³ The Reagan Doctrine was stated by United States President Ronald Reagan in his State of the Union address on February 6, 1985: “We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.” It was a strategy implemented by the Reagan Administration to overwhelm the global influence of the Soviet Union in the late Cold War. The doctrine was a centrepiece of United States foreign policy from the early 1980s until the end of the Cold War in 1991. Under the Reagan Doctrine, the United States provided overt and covert aid to anti-communist guerrillas and resistance movements in an effort to “roll back” Soviet-backed pro-communist governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The doctrine was designed to diminish Soviet influence in these regions as part of the administration’s overall strategy to win the Cold War.

¹³⁴ P. Hoodbhoy, *Afghanistan and the Genesis of Global Jihad* – Peace Research, pag. 20.

¹³⁵ For example, the textbook series underwritten by U.S. grants through the mujahideen-operated “Education Center for Afghanistan” in the 1980s. These textbooks saw the counterbalance Marxism through creating enthusiasm in Islamic militancy. A third-grade mathematics textbook asks the following question: “*One group of mujahideen attack 50 Russian soldiers. In that attack 20 Russians are killed. How many Russians fled?*”. Another example from a fourth-grade mathematics textbook poses the following problem: “*The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per second.*

Afghan children to pluck out the eyes of their enemies and cut off their legs, are still available in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some in their original forms.¹³⁶ Years after, they were first printed, and then, approved by the Taliban for use in madrassas.

While U.S. had been pressing hard upon Arab governments to get more involved in the Afghan situation, after the Soviet invasion, the task of creating stability in this country fell upon Saudi Arabia, together with other conservative Arab monarchies. This duty was accepted readily, and they quickly made the Afghan Jihad their central cause.¹³⁷ Therefore, the Jihad in Afghanistan provided an excellent outlet for the growing number of militant Sunni activists in Saudi Arabia, and a deal with the daily taunts of the Iranian clergy.

Indeed, the interest will now be on discussing one of the topics of this paragraph, analysing the role of *Osama Bin Laden*, who was among the first Arabs to go to Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion. It was a turning point in his life. On the side of the Saudis, he encouraged and supported a flow of Muslim volunteers to fight the Soviets and, by the mid-1980s he was well established in the Pakistani city Peshawar, just across the Afghan border, using his wealth¹³⁸ to fund the building of roads across the Durand Line. In confirmation of the above, in 1986, he established a Mujahideen camp and set up training camps, meeting expenses by his own funds and helping his fighters to repel the Soviet attack.

The success that came from this defensive battle greatly enhanced Bin Laden's reputation as a jihadist and, in late 1980s, he founded the broad-based militant Islamist organization well known with the name of Al-Qaeda.

A salient feature of armed conflict in the Muslim world since 1980 is the involvement of so-called foreign fighters¹³⁹, that is, unpaid combatants with no apparent link to the conflict other than religious affinity with the Muslim side.¹⁴⁰ At the time of its introduction in the mid-1980s, the foreign fighter doctrine differed from existing jihad doctrines because it offered a diagnosis focusing on an outside enemy, whereas Islamist revolutionary doctrine focused on the enemy within.¹⁴¹ Indeed, most mainstream Islamic scholars in the twentieth century held that jihad may be declared in cases of clear aggression against Muslim countries by non-Muslim powers, but they

If a Russian is at a distance of 3200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian's head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead."

¹³⁶ P. Hoodbhoy, *Afghanistan and the Genesis of Global Jihad* – Peace Research, pag. 23.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*,.

¹³⁸ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Nov. 26, 2020, pag. 56.

¹³⁹ "Non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict": D. Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, pag. 9.

¹⁴⁰ T. Hegghammer, *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters – Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*, pag. 2.

¹⁴¹ F. A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, New York Cambridge University Press, 2006.

stressed that the responsibility for fighting lies primarily with the local population.¹⁴² Conversely, Osama Bin Laden's famous declaration¹⁴³ sanctioned "*all means in all places.*" In fact, Al-Qaeda originally began as a logical network to support Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union during the Afghan War, and its members were recruited throughout the Islamic world. But soon, it merged with several other militant Islamist organizations, like Egypt's Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Group, and other agents engaged in numerous terrorist attacks, including the destruction of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1998, and a suicide bomb attack against the U.S. warship *Cole* in Yemen in 2000.¹⁴⁴ In fact, on several occasions the leaders of the organization declared *holy war*¹⁴⁵ against the United States, leading to the attack of September 9th, 2001, staged by 19 militants associated with Al-Qaeda against the American enemy.

It is, now, essential to understand the chaotic conditions in which momentous decisions were taken in Washington DC and London that would commit US and British forces to war in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶ The necessity of war needs to be seen in the context of the scale of the attack suffered by the United States and the legitimate fear of future such attacks against the United States and Britain.¹⁴⁷ In addition, the Taliban refusal to surrender those responsible for 9/11, and the understandable political and public outrage in America at what had happened are the elements to confirm that war was inevitable.

Four airplanes¹⁴⁸ were hijacked by Al-Qaeda that day and promptly, CNN had broken the news, showing live footage of smoke billowing from a huge gaping hole into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre in New York.

"We have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the Towers of

¹⁴² T. Hegghammer, *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters – Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*, pag. 23.

¹⁴³ This declaration was published in the London-based al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper on 23 February 1998. See also: B. Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ USS *Cole* attack, attack by Muslim militants associated with the organization Al-Qaeda against a U.S. naval destroyer, the USS *Cole*, on October 12, 2000. Suicide bombers in a small boat steered their craft into the side of the USS *Cole*, which was preparing to refuel in the harbour in the Yemeni port of Aden; the blast ripped a 1,600-square-foot (150-square-metre) hole in its hull and left 17 sailors dead and 39 wounded. In 2004 a Yemeni court tried Saudi-born 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Nashīrī in absentia for the USS *Cole* attack and sentenced him to death; U.S. military prosecutors filed charges against him in 2008. The U.S. proceedings were complicated by an admission by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that waterboarding—an interrogation tactic that simulates drowning, banned by the CIA in 2006—was used during Nashīrī's imprisonment at Guantánamo Bay; it was unclear whether evidence obtained through such means would be admissible in court.

¹⁴⁵ The term "holy war" refers to any war fought by divine command or for a religious purpose. The concept of holy war is found in the Bible (*e.g.*, the Book of Joshua) and has played a role in many religions.

¹⁴⁶ T. Farrell, *Unwinnable – Britain's War in Afghanistan*, pag. 50.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁴⁸ All were domestic flights from the east coast to the west: United Airlines 175 along with American Airlines (AA) 11 departing from Boston; American Airlines 77 departing from Washington DC; and United Airlines 93 departing from Newark. By mid-morning, all four planes ceased to exist. AA 11 hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8.46 a.m., United 175 slammed into the South Tower at 9.03 a.m., and AA 77 hit the Pentagon at 9.37 a.m. United 93 crashed onto a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, just minutes after 10 a.m.

the World Trade Center”¹⁴⁹ it declared, with no debris on the ground, to reporters and witnesses at the scene the plane appeared to be buried inside the building.¹⁵⁰ Data show that, on 11 September, the terrorist killed 2,9777 people; 2,606 in New York, 125 in Pentagon, and 246 on the four flights. A decade later, the *New York Times* estimated the financial cost of these terrorist attacks to be \$55 billion in damage, and a further \$123 billion in lost business.¹⁵¹

At the moment of the strike, the American President George W. Bush was joining schoolchildren in a reading exercise when the White House Chief of Staff, Andy Card, leaned in and whispered, “*America in under attack.*”¹⁵² So, the President articulated a policy that equated those who harbour terrorists with terrorists themselves, and asserted that a friendly regime in Kabul was needed to enable U.S. forces to search for Al-Qaeda members there.¹⁵³

Subsequently, on September 14, 2001, the use of military force has been authorized in Congress¹⁵⁴ and in Senate without no objections in the House, stating that: “[t]he President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 or harboured such organizations or persons in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.”

The Administration also sought United Nations (U.N.) backing for military action. In fact, on September 12, 2001, the U.N. passed Security Council Resolution 1368, expressing the Council’s “readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the September 11 attacks.”¹⁵⁵

Indeed, when the Taliban refused the Bush Administration’s demand to extradite Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, it launched military operations against the Taliban to “*disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.*”¹⁵⁶

Combat operations in Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001, with the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom whose purpose was to build and maintain pressure inside the country, with the objective of the destruction of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and the government of the Taliban. While initial military operations consisted primarily of U.S. air strikes on Taliban and Al-Qaeda

¹⁴⁹ CNN – Breaking News – Terrorist Attack on United States, Aired September 11, 2001 – 08:48 ET.

¹⁵⁰ T. Farrell, *Unwinnable – Britain’s War in Afghanistan*, pag. 50.

¹⁵¹ *The New York Times* – 9/11: The Reckoning, 2001.

¹⁵² NBC News – “He told Bush ‘America in under Attack’”.

¹⁵³ T. Clayton, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*, pag. 7.

¹⁵⁴ S.J.Res. 23 (P.L. 107-40).

¹⁵⁵ This was widely interpreted as a U.N. authorization for military action in response to the attacks, but it did not explicitly authorize Operation Enduring Freedom or reference Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which allows for responses to threats to international peace and security.

¹⁵⁶ George W. Bush, Presidential Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001.

forces, facilitated by the cooperation between reported small numbers of U.S. special operations forces and Central Intelligence Agency operatives. These operations were led by an armed coalition known as the Northern Alliance¹⁵⁷ and initially supported by the international community and the Afghan people to establish a new regime and engage in reconstruction of the state.

In October 2001, about 1,300 Marines were deployed to pressure the Taliban in the southern province of Kandahar.

In truth, Britain supported the US invasion of Afghanistan to stop Al-Qaeda from launching further catastrophic attacks against Western cities. On one hand, British Royal Marines roaming eastern Afghanistan later sent more forces as part of an enlarged international effort to stabilise the country; on the other Northern Alliance force, despite promises that they would not enter Kabul, did so on November 12, 2001, to widespread popular approval,¹⁵⁸ advancing towards the city.

Even if this was the first war between U.S. and Al-Qaeda, it is interesting to highlight the fact that, for the first time in its history, NATO alliance invoked Article V of the Northern Atlantic Charter¹⁵⁹ to offer immediate assistance following the Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, by sending aircraft to patrol US airspace and initiating collective self-defence. In fact, its aim was to ensure that the country would not again become a haven for international terrorists to attack NATO member countries.

In the past, NATO was primarily a collective defence organization before the end of the Cold War, but since the end of it several forces pushed it towards taking a more active role in international crises. Although its organizational structure was not adapted to the new demands of conflict management¹⁶⁰, the role of NATO evolved from working under the aegis of UN, in the form of UN authorized missions, to going alone in war theatres to stop massive abuse of human rights and genocide. As their roles have evolved, NATO and UN have complemented each other's needs

¹⁵⁷ It is officially known as the United Islamic National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, and it was a military alliance groups that operated between late 1996 to 2001 after the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) took over Kabul. With the Taliban forced from control of the country, the Northern Alliance was dissolved: T. Withington, *The early-anti Taliban team*, Vol. 57, No. 6, pag. 13-15.

¹⁵⁸ David Rohde, "Taliban Troops Abandon Capital Without a Fight," New York Times, November 13, 2001.

¹⁵⁹ Article 5 is the cornerstone of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and states that an attack on one member of NATO is an attack on all its members. Despite its importance, NATO has only invoked Article 5 once in its history, in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. On September 12, 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history, committing its members to stand by the United States in its response to the attacks. In a four-paragraph resolution that passed unanimously, the organization reflected its understanding that the threats to global security had changed radically in the 52 years since the alliance was founded. NATO and Article 5 were established in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II when Communist movements supported by the Soviet Union posed a serious threat to democratically elected governments all over a devastated Europe. In April 1949, representatives from 12 nations—the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, Iceland, Italy and Portugal—gathered in Washington, D.C. to sign the North Atlantic Treaty.

¹⁶⁰ J. Sperling, M. Webber, *NATO, from Kosovo to Kabul* – International Affairs – pag. 492.

and demands¹⁶¹, and they worked together in Afghanistan. However, NATO's role in the country was, initially, not defined, but, later, it got involved formally after it was given the command of UN mandate of International Security Assistance (ISAF)¹⁶² in August 2003 for “*reconstruction and stabilization*’ efforts”¹⁶³ after proving its superior military power. Led primarily by the United States, with logistical support from Pakistan, NATO overturned the Taliban government on December 9, 2001, when Taliban fled Kandahar, leaving it under tribal law.¹⁶⁴ Following the collapse of the regime, in November 2001, the United Nations invited major Afghan factions, the Northern Alliance and other allies, but not the Taliban to an international conference in Bonn, Germany. On December 5, 2001, the factions signed the *Bonn Agreement* which authorized a peacekeeping force and called for a consultative assembly, also known with the name of *loya jirga*, to establish a Transitional Authority to administer the country until a new constitution could be drafted.¹⁶⁵

From 2003 to mid-2006, U.S. and international troops trained nascent Afghan forces and fought low levels of insurgent violence with focused combat operations mainly in the south and east.¹⁶⁶ By late 2005, U.S. and partner commanders considered the insurgency mostly defeated and NATO assumed lead responsibility for security in all of Afghanistan during 2005-2006.¹⁶⁷ However, during this year the violence against NATO troops and the Afghanistan government grown stronger, with

¹⁶¹ For example, NATO Treaty accepts the prime responsibility of the Security Council to maintain “peace and security by its article 7 (for this, the reference is: S. Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*, pag. 31. In Peacekeeping operations, also NATO's role had evolved into working for the UN, in more “robust” mission. In fact, Article 3 of NATO Treaty and Article 51 of the UN Charter both focus on “the right of self-defence” in case of aggression. However, the main Articles of cooperation between UN and NATO are the first two ones of the NATO Treaty: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm .

¹⁶² ISAF's initial mandate was to secure the Afghan capital of Kabul and its surrounding area against opposition forces to facilitate the formation of the Afghan Transitional Administration headed by Hamid Karzai. In 2003, NATO took command of the mission at the request of the UN and Afghan government, marking its first deployment outside Europe and North America. Shortly thereafter, the UN Security Council expanded ISAF's mission to provide and maintain security beyond the capital region. ISAF incrementally broadened its operations in four stages, and by 2006 took responsibility for the entire country; ISAF subsequently engaged in more intensive combat in southern and eastern Afghanistan. At its peak between 2010 and 2012, ISAF had 400 military bases throughout Afghanistan (compared to 300 for the ANSF) and roughly 130,000 troops. A total of 42 countries contributed troops to ISAF, including all 30 members of NATO. Personnel contributions varied greatly throughout the course of the mission: Initially, Canada was the largest contributor, though by 2010 the United States accounted for the majority of troops, followed by the United Kingdom, Turkey, Germany, France, and Italy; nations such as Georgia, Denmark, Norway, and Estonia were among the largest contributors per capita. The intensity of the combat faced by participating countries varied greatly, with the U.S. sustaining the most casualties overall, while British, Danish, Estonian, and Georgian forces suffered the most deaths for their size.

¹⁶³ Issue Paper, Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army war College – Colonel John C. Buss, United States Army.

¹⁶⁴ C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*, pag. 35.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*,.

¹⁶⁶ These included Operation Mountain Viper in August 2003; Operation Avalanche in December 2003; Operation Mountain Storm in March-July 2004; Operation Lightning Freedom in December 2004-February 2005; and Operation Pil in October 2005.

¹⁶⁷ C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*, pag. 9.

many parts of the country falling under Taliban control again. So, NATO-led operations during 2006-2008 cleared Taliban fighters from some areas but did not prevent subsequent re-infiltrating them, nor did pre-emptive combat and increased development work produce durable success. Considering the deterioration of the security situation, the United States and its partners decided to increase force levels, hence the Obama Administration, in declaring that the Afghanistan mission was a high priority announced a “comprehensive” strategy¹⁶⁸ on March 27, 2009, requiring the deployment of an additional 21,000 U.S. forces.¹⁶⁹

Despite the will of the Administration to convene a 60-day inter-agency “strategy review”, in August 2009, General McChrystal delivered a strategy assessment, warning of the potential “mission failure”¹⁷⁰ in the absence of a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. So, to provide the greatest chance for success, President Obama announced, on one hand, the sending of a “surge” to conduct intensified *counterinsurgency operations*, by providing 30,000 additional U.S. forces to “reverse the Taliban’s momentum”¹⁷¹ and strengthen the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF)¹⁷², on the other hand the transition to Afghan security leadership and a corresponding drawdown of U.S. forces.

In concert with the new strategy, 100,000 U.S. forces levels were present in the country, and other additional ones deployed to the south, while the transition to Afghan security leadership began on schedule in July 2011.

President Obama announced that the key accomplishment of the core U.S. mission was the killing of Osama bin Laden and to respond to public pressure in some European countries to more rapidly reduce or end military involvement in Afghanistan, he proclaimed the fall of U.S. force levels from 100,000 to 90,000 by the end of 2011, and the final drop to 68,000 by September 2012. On May 1, 2012, President Obama and President Hamid Karzai signed an Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between Afghanistan and the United States to provide the long-term framework for the relationship between Afghanistan and the United States of America after the

¹⁶⁸ “As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people...We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists. So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future...To achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy”, President Barack Obama, March 27, 2009.

¹⁶⁹ *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan* - The White House, March 27, 2009.

¹⁷⁰ C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*, pag. 10.

¹⁷¹ See the speech: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan> .

¹⁷² The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), also known as the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), were the military and internal security forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

drawdown of U.S. forces in the Afghanistan war.¹⁷³ The signing followed a long negotiation that focused on resolving Afghan insistence on control over detention centres and a halt to or control over night-time raids on insurgents by U.S. forces.¹⁷⁴ In addition, the agreement committed the two countries to negotiating a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) that would detail the terms of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵ Notably, the agreement does not set U.S. and partner force levels, but lays out the parameters and goals of the U.S. military mission and provides for U.S. access to Afghan bases. It also stipulates that “*the United States shall have the exclusive right to exercise jurisdiction over such [U.S.] persons in respect of any criminal or civil offenses committed in the territory of Afghanistan.*” The BSA does not commit the United States to defend Afghanistan from attack from another country, but states that “*the United States shall regard with grave concern any external aggression or threat*” thereof.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, international forces were reduced in 2014; indeed, President Obama clarified that the U.S. military contingent in the country would be 9,800 in 2015 and that the United States and its partners were preparing the end of the ISAF mission. This is perfectly proven by the fact that the NATO-led ISAF officially ended at the close of 2014, being replaced by Resolute Support Mission (RSM)¹⁷⁷, on January 1, 2015. The Status of Forces Agreement signed between the Afghan government and NATO in September 2014 and ratified by the Afghan parliament in November, recognized the legal framework for NATO’s presence and it defined RSM as “*a noncombat training, advising and assistance mission.*”¹⁷⁸

In fact, after 2015 Taliban gains led to several changes to the U.S. mission in the final two years of Obama Administration. For example, U.S. forces were not reduced, as originally announced and he authorized them to conduct preemptive combat. These decisions were taken by the American President after the Taliban has made gains in Helmand Province, and the Taliban’s week-long capture of Kunduz city in September 2015, which was the first seizure of a significant city since the Taliban regime fell in 2001.¹⁷⁹ It has captured parts of that city and encroached on population

¹⁷³ C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*, pag. 11.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁷⁵ For the text of this agreement, see <https://www.state.gov/>.

¹⁷⁶ A. Panda, *Afghan Chief Executive: US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement Here to Stay*, Diplomat, September 27, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Resolute Support Mission (RSM) is led by NATO, and NATO partners have been heavily engaged in Afghanistan since 2001. At its height in 2012, the number of NATO and non-NATO partner forces reached 130,000, around 100,000 of whom were American. As of June 2019, RSM is made up of around 17,100 troops from 39 countries, of whom 8,475 are American. This represents an increase of about 3,000 troops from NATO and other partner countries. At the NATO summit in July 2018, NATO leaders extended their financial commitment to Afghan forces to 2024 (previously 2020), a commitment NATO reaffirmed in June 2019 - Brussels Summit Declaration, issued July 11, 2018; “NATO Reaffirms Commitment to Support Afghan Forces,” Tolo News, June 4, 2019.

¹⁷⁸ See online: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/20150112-PMuench-Resolute_Support_Light.pdf.

¹⁷⁹ K. Katzman, C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, pag 31.

centres in several parts of southern and eastern Afghanistan since, although many such gains were quickly reversed by the Afghan National Defense Security Forces. Growing Taliban gains were further highlighted with their purported capture of Helmand's Sangin district¹⁸⁰ in March 2017, though some Afghan and U.S. officials disputed that narrative and described the actions as a preplanned, orderly withdrawal. In September 2016 the battlefield situations represented a *roughly a stalemate*.¹⁸¹

By most measures, the amount of territory controlled or contested by the Taliban has grown in recent years, and that trend may be accelerating.¹⁸² In other words, once the US and NATO withdrew from combat operations in 2014, the Taliban was able to re-establish a significant footprint and regain military initiative over Afghan government forces. From a position of weakness, US negotiated a ceasefire with the Taliban, with no guarantees that the insurgents would stick to their side of the agreement, not that the elected Kabul's government interests would be protected. In fact, in 2021 Taliban rapidly destroyed Afghan forces and the government collapsed.¹⁸³

This paragraph demonstrates that without making an inclusive political agreement with the Taliban, any other efforts will not lead to the stabilization of Afghanistan. Therefore, multilateral approaches through the UN could help to bring a power-sharing agreement with Taliban and other important actors and prevent spoilers from impeding the peace process. The lack of concentration of power in the central government could necessarily lead to a power-sharing agreement with a semi-federal system based on multiple autonomous regions in the hand of few powerful warlords and Taliban factions. However, there is no panacea for the current Afghanistan, and the U.S. as well as the international community must choose more realistic approaches than a continued pursuit of war which is only worsening the situation.¹⁸⁴

Finally, since no talks occurred under the Obama Administration, apart from the one centred on the issues of a prisoner exchange and the opening of a Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar¹⁸⁵, the

¹⁸⁰Sangin is important both strategically, as a link between Helmand and Qandahar, and symbolically, as one of the deadliest districts in all of Afghanistan- according to The New York Times, "more British troops and, later, American marines died in Sangin than in any of Afghanistan's roughly 400 districts" through 2013. See: T.Shah and R.Norland, *Taliban Take an Afghan District, Sangin, That Many Marines Died to Keep*, *New York Times*, March 23, 2017.

¹⁸¹ E. Mitchell, *Afghanistan War at a Stalemate, Top General Tells Lawmakers*, The Hill, December 4, 2018. (An assessment that was echoed by General Nicholson in February 2017 and again in November 2017).

¹⁸² K. Katzman, C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, pag 32.

¹⁸³ B. Barry, *Blood, Metal, and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 14.

¹⁸⁴ M. Ansari, T. Yamagata, T. Nguyen, *Afghanistan Conflict Assessment – Prospects for Peace*, pag 7.

¹⁸⁵ Multiple factors, including opposition from the Afghan government led by then-President Hamid Karzai, caused the collapse of talks in March 2012. Qatari and Pakistani mediation led to a 2013 agreement to allow the Taliban to open the Doha office, but because the Taliban opened that office in June 2013 with the trappings of an official embassy, in direct violation of the terms of the agreement, the Qatari government shuttered the office less than a month later. In June 2014, Qatar coordinated the release of U.S. prisoner Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for five high-ranking Taliban officials

question is: *what conditions would enable a negotiated settlement to the end of war in Afghanistan?*

1.3 Long-term negotiations: the US withdrawal

According to the previous paragraph, ten years ago the Taliban appeared to have been defeated.

In fact, the United States, supported by the British forces, invaded Afghanistan as payback for the 9/11 attack and had overthrown the Taliban regime. By mid-2002, US and British task forces were chasing the last remnants of the Taliban out of the country and hunting down Al-Qaeda terrorists.¹⁸⁶

Now, the main question to pose is: “*How did the Taliban return to Afghanistan, and why have they not been defeated?*” It is true that the Taliban have suffered, but they are far from defeated. So, it emerges an image of resilient insurgency that has adapted under immense military pressure to become more centralized and more professional.¹⁸⁷

To answer our question, it might be useful to examine the perspective of insurgency. According to Chris Kolenda¹⁸⁸, insurgencies tend to succeed if they develop durable internal and external support, and the host nation government loses legitimacy.

After 2001, some Taliban members had simply gone to ground in the province, but many others had fled to other areas of Afghanistan and across the border into Pakistan.¹⁸⁹ These came back, bringing with them large numbers of *foreign fighters*.¹⁹⁰

For the first six months, after the Taliban went to ground, communities organized themselves having responsibility for their own districts and the major warlords returned to power in a new guise, as allies of Karzai, who had been appointed the interim Afghan president by loya jirga (grand council). But, once back in power, these warlords returned to their bad old ways.¹⁹¹ In fact, they turned their attention to violently exploiting communities not in their patronage network making the situation even worse: extortion, stealing and civilian killings by these government people lead to the back of Taliban, welcomed into their districts by people fed up with the Afghan government. In

imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay—individuals who are now part of the Taliban team negotiating with the United States in Doha.

¹⁸⁶ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁸⁸ Chris Kolenda served as the Senior Advisor on Afghanistan and Pakistan to the US Department of Defense and has served four tours of duty in Afghanistan. In this Insight he argues that inadequate strategic empathy by the United States in Afghanistan undermined its own counter-insurgency goals. A greater US willingness to get inside the minds of allies and enemies alike might have helped to avoid major policy misjudgments and setbacks.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁹⁰ See note 138, paragraph 1.2.

¹⁹¹ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 847.

other words, that abusive governance was a major factor driving villagers towards the Taliban.¹⁹² Often harassed and targeted by pro-government warlords and their militias, the Taliban were able to present themselves as the *shari'a*, or *law and order*, party. And, as result, many former Taliban returned to the insurgency in self-defence.¹⁹³ Divisions between pro-and anti-government elements occurred; on one hand the tribal sections, favoured by the government, continued to feel entitled to control all government posts, excluding their local rivals, and pushing government and foreign troops for a more aggressive posture against the pro-Taliban communities. On the other hand, the Taliban 'resurgence' over 2004–2006 was aided by intertribal rivalry and local resistance to predatory rule. It becomes important to observe the strategic task¹⁹⁴ of these teams, able to prepare the ground for a latter escalation of the insurgency.

Secretly entered the district and talked to some villagers and elders with the aim to protect them from the government, in 2005 the Taliban returned in force and between 2004 and 2006 they slowly¹⁹⁵ built up local support in the district and became increasingly bold in their military activities.

In the summer of 2006, the British arrived as part of the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to southern Afghanistan to stop the Taliban advance, but they antagonized the local population. British forces used automatic weapons, artillery, and air strikes to repulse ground assaults by large numbers of Taliban who treated intense fire with the British and Afghan security forces. But indiscriminate use of fire and air power alienated locals, fed up with the fighting, with ISAF air strikes and with British troops invading the privacy of their homes.¹⁹⁶

Due to this framework, in late 2007 the British adopted a more population-centric approach to their counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. Increasing emphasis was placed on military restraint and building long-term relationships with communities, and in closer partnering with Afghan security forces. However, the British lacked the presence and tactical patience to develop ties in most communities, and still had to rely on artillery and air power to get out of trouble.¹⁹⁷ So, the local resistance remained also for the attempt by the British to eradicate opium production and this made matters even worse.¹⁹⁸ In contrast, Taliban were able to take advantage of this situation by

¹⁹² T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 848.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁹⁴ A. Giustozzi, *Koran*, pag. 101; see also Johnson, *The Afghan way of war*, pag. 272.

¹⁹⁵ In the beginning, [the Taliban] were afraid of the villagers, that is why they covered their faces not to be recognized. But when the villages began supporting the Taliban, they became more confident and powerful, and started to attack the district centre.

¹⁹⁶ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 851.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*,

¹⁹⁸ All of the insurgent groups in Afghanistan benefit, at least in part, from narcotics trafficking. However, the adverse effects are not limited to funding insurgents; the trafficking also undermines rule of law within government ranks. The

promising to protect landowners and farmers from poppy eradication programmes, and thereby win local support. Thus, far from helping to secure Afghanistan, the arrival of the British led to a violent intensification of the insurgency even against the NATO forces deploying south in Helmand and Kandahar thanks to many fighters to take on the British.¹⁹⁹

Certainly, as we have noted above, Taliban recruitment started before the British arrived, so in 2004-2005, but the British presence made it far easier to recruit local fighters.²⁰⁰ In fact, where local villages welcomed Taliban, because the insurgents encouraged the young men to join up to free their villages, after being appalled by the cruelty of the Americans and British.²⁰¹ Six men had joined the Taliban following the loss of close family as a result of ISAF military action, one in memory of a friend killed by the British, and one to get revenge for 'being beaten up badly' by British troops.²⁰² Overall, waging jihad on occupying foreigners is clearly a powerful strategic narrative for the Taliban, providing a crucial social resource for the purposes of motivating fighters and mobilizing resources.²⁰³

That is to say, the Taliban re-emerged in 2005 as a reasonably viable organization with a skeleton structure of committed cadres, functioned as a catalyst for many grievances that existed among the population. A variety of groups started flocking to the Taliban as the only channel through which to

trafficking generates an estimated \$70 million-\$100 million per year for insurgents—perhaps about 25% of the insurgents' budgets that is estimated by some U.N. officials at about \$400 million. In November 2017, the United Nations reported that the total area used for poppy cultivation in 2017 was 328,000 hectares, an increase of 63% from 2016 and 46% higher than the previous record in 2014; similarly, opium production increased by 87%.⁵⁷ Taliban drug production facilities are a major new focus of the Trump Administration's strategy in Afghanistan, and late 2017 has seen several high-profile strikes on Taliban narcotics laboratories and other related sites. The Obama Administration sought to reduce other sources of Taliban funding, including continued donations from wealthy residents of the Persian Gulf. On June 29, 2012, the Administration sanctioned (by designating them as terrorism supporting entities under Executive Order 13224) two money exchange networks (hawalas) in Afghanistan and Pakistan allegedly used by the Taliban to move its funds earned from narcotics and other sources. See: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Cultivation and Production*, November 2017. And: D. Lamothe, *The U.S. begins bombing Taliban drug labs as Trump's Afghanistan strategy takes hold*, Washington Post, November 20, 2017.

¹⁹⁹ A. Giustozzi, *Koran*, pag. 123; van Linschoten and Kuehn, *An enemy*, pag. 273.

²⁰⁰ This is against the view that most Taliban were mere mercenaries (the so-called 'ten-dollar-a-day Taliban'), or forcibly recruited. Indeed, most Taliban are volunteers who join for a variety of reasons. See: A. Giustozzi, *Koran*, pag. 42.

²⁰¹ As one Taliban commander recalled: 'When the Taliban came new to our district, they were not enough fighters, they told us to make groups of 10 to 15 and come to them, and they would give us weapons and supplies to fight against the local government and foreign fighters.' Forced recruitment is mentioned by a small minority of interviewees, mostly elders unsympathetic to the Taliban and a single Talib who alleges that the Taliban in Sangin 'punished strongly' local men who refused to join in 'the holy war against the occupational forces. However, most interviewees suggested that the Taliban relied on persuasion and social pressure. Five elders, from three different districts, stated emphatically that the Taliban did not recruit locals by force. As one recounted: 'The Taliban come and ask each house for their sons. Not forcing them, but telling them, asking them, "How Muslim are you? Why are you not doing jihad?"' In some cases Taliban recruiters made multiple visits to people's homes to pile on the pressure.

²⁰² T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency, 2004-2012*, pag. 853.

²⁰³ Citing John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, Lawrence Freedman notes, '[strategic] narratives go beyond rhetoric "scripted for manipulative ends"', but instead "provide a grounded expression of people's experiences, interests and values". Arquilla and Ronfeldt, eds, *Networks and netwars* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), cited in Freedman, *The transformation of strategic affairs*, Adelphi Paper no. 379 (London: Routledge for IISS, 2006), pag. 22.

express opposition.²⁰⁴

As we explored below, the Taliban have gradually adapted their force composition, structure and tactics in ways that are increasingly sensitive to local concerns. These changes have occurred in the context of growing Taliban appreciation of the need to wage a guerrilla war against the foreign forces.²⁰⁵ But, despite the shift in tactics to reduce Taliban battlefield casualties, they became far more lethal for civilians, not less. In fact, the proportion of civilians killed by Taliban action, as opposed to Afghan government or ISAF action, increased dramatically from 58 per cent in 2009 to 75 per cent in 2010, and continued to rise steadily to 77 per cent in 2011 and 2012. Taliban inflicted civilian deaths also rose in absolute numbers between 2009 and 2011, from well under to well over 2,000 a year.²⁰⁶

Up to 2011 the Taliban's tactical proficiency was mainly displayed in the east and south-east, as well as Kabul city, where occasionally Taliban units even outsmarted or outmanoeuvred NATO forces.²⁰⁷ The imperative grew ever stronger from 2009 to 2010 with the arrival of a US Marine expeditionary brigade to join the existing British task force. By 2010, this had doubled the number of ISAF troops to around 20,000 in Helmand, because the aim of the American General McChrystal²⁰⁸ was to inflict a devastating strategic defeat on the Taliban, to accelerate progress in the ISAF campaign.²⁰⁹ Moreover, the United States started killing and injuring the Afghans wantonly by entering their house in the name of capturing Taliban terrorists. The aerial bombing, drone attacks, and targeting a suspicious Taliban or terrorist hideout killed also innocent people, including women and children.²¹⁰

“The US is trying to show its muscle, score a victory, and scare everyone in the world. They don't care about the suffering of Afghans or how many people we will lose. And we don't like that. Because Afghans are now being made to suffer for these Arabs fanatics, but we all know who

²⁰⁴ A significant example is the mobilization of Hizb-i Islami groups into the Taliban following the badly handled demobilization of the 93rd Division of the old Afghan army in Nahr-e Seraj in 2005. When former Hizb fighters were not integrated into the local security forces as promised, they joined the Taliban.

²⁰⁵ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 855.

²⁰⁶ Data from Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, *Brookings Afghanistan Index*, 30 Sept. 2012, figs 1.23 and 1.24, pag. 15–16.

²⁰⁷ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 866.

²⁰⁸ Stanley Allen McChrystal (born August 14, 1954) is a retired United States Army general best known for his command of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in the mid-2000s. His last assignment was as Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Commander, United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A). He previously served as Director, Joint Staff from August 2008 to June 2009 and as Commander of JSOC from 2003 to 2008, where he was credited with the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, but also criticized for his alleged role in the cover-up of the Pat Tillman friendly fire incident. McChrystal was reportedly known for saying what other military leaders were thinking but were afraid to say; this was one of the reasons cited for his appointment to lead all forces in Afghanistan. He held the post from June 15, 2009, to June 23, 2010.

²⁰⁹ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war, inside the Helmand insurgency*, 2004-2012, pag. 866.

²¹⁰ A. Imtiaz, *The Return of Taliban in Afghanistan: a critical assessment*, pag. 6.

brought these Arabs to Afghanistan in the 1980s, armed them and gave them a base. It was the Americans and the CIA. And the Americans who did this all got medals and good careers, while all these years Afghans suffered from these Arabs and their allies. Now, when America is attacked, instead of punishing the Americans who did this, it punishes Afghans."²¹¹

In fact, the number of people directly killed as a result of the US occupation of Afghanistan since 2001 is 174,516, while the number of injuries also runs in thousands, and then "fully two-thirds of Afghans suffer from mental health problems."²¹² And last, but not least the loss of human lives and the destruction of the countryside created grounds for resistance, fusing the Taliban militancy with the anti-colonialism insurgency.

Under these circumstances, more credible answer to the US invasion of Afghanistan lies elsewhere.²¹³

Indeed, the 34th President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his farewell speech at the end of his presidency in 1961, warned the Americans about the "grave implications" of the military-industrial complex.²¹⁴ The Afghan war itself was illegal under international law, yet the military-industrial complex profited from it immensely. Similarly, Donald Trump concluded that the Afghan war was not only futile but also a drain to the US economy, "*particularly when so much work must be done at home if the United States wants to keep its global economic position intact.*"²¹⁵

Certainly, by looking at Bush, Obama, Trump Administration Policy, it is possible to understand the different military strategies adopted by U.S. during the Afghan war. On one side, the George W. Bush Administration argued that the U.S. departure from the region after the 1989 Soviet pull-out contributed to Afghanistan's descent into chaos. After the Taliban regime was deposed in 2001, the Administration and its international partners decided to build a relatively strong, democratic, Afghan central government. The effort, which many outside experts described as "nation-building," was supported by the United Nations.²¹⁶ While the Obama Administration's strategy review in late 2009 initially narrowed official U.S. goals to prevent terrorism haven in Afghanistan, but policy in some ways expanded the pre-existing nation-building effort. In fact, the latter wanted to avoid the risk that terrorist organizations can plan attacks against the U.S. homeland, partners, and interests in Afghanistan. To accomplish that goal, U.S. policy is to enable the Afghan government and security

²¹¹ A. Haq, "US bombs are boosting the Taliban". *The Guardian*, 2 November 2001.

²¹² Data of Brown University; see also: S. Jangala, *Taxes, taxmen and the Taliban*, My Voice, 16 May.

²¹³ A. Imtiaz, *The Return of Taliban in Afghanistan: a critical assessment*, pag. 8.

²¹⁴ Transcript of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address, 1961.

²¹⁵ See: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg38915/html/CHRG-116hhrg38915.htm> .

²¹⁶ K. Katzman, C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, pag. 12.

forces to defend the country against the insurgency and to govern effectively and transparently.²¹⁷ On the other side, in an August 2017 speech, President Trump articulated an intent to reorient Afghanistan policy around a conditions-based approach, forsaking timelines and public discussion of troop levels and other benchmarks. The strategy articulated by the President also appeared to emphasize pressure on Pakistan to deny safe haven to Afghan militants, as well as an explicit repudiation of past U.S. efforts to “nation-build” in Afghanistan and to build Western style institutions there.²¹⁸ It was in August 2009, that the American General McChrystal delivered a strategy assessment to recommend that “*the goal of the U.S. military should be to protect the population rather than to focus on searching out and combating Taliban concentrations*”²¹⁹ warning of the potential for “*mission failure*” in the absence of a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. Initial reports indicated that the Trump Administration was likely to approve Nicholson’s request while perhaps also indicating that more U.S. forces will not, in and of themselves, resolve the Afghanistan conflict.²²⁰ However, the review of U.S. strategy included plans for more troops²²¹

In a national address on August 21, 2017, President Trump announced a “new strategy” for Afghanistan to let U.S. forces to operate independently to Afghan forces and “*attack against this, local support for the insurgency has been worn down by the human cost of the war.*”²²² More than 340 American soldiers and Marines have been killed in Afghanistan,²²³ and this is because in the first five months of 2006 there was a 200 per cent increase in insurgent attacks compared to the first five months of 2005, as said above. Indeed, Taliban had at least 12,000 fighters controlling areas in Oruzgan, Helmand, Zabol and Kandahar.²²⁴ These are the first troubling indicators to confirm that large areas of the east and south of the country were falling under the control of the Taliban.²²⁵

²¹⁷ *Ibidem.*,

²¹⁸ *Ibidem.*,

²¹⁹ *The Washington Post* - Commander NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan. “Commander’s Initial Assessment.” August 30, 2009.

²²⁰ K. Katzman, C. Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, pag. 33.

²²¹ The Pentagon long reported the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan at the authorized level of 8,400, but in August 2017 it was reported that the actual figure, due to units rotating in and out of theater, is actually between 11,000 and 12,000 on any given day. See: G. Lubold and N. Youssef, *U.S. Has More Troops in Afghanistan Than Publicly Disclosed*, Wall Street Journal, August 22, 2017.

²²² This was demonstrated in a series of strikes against Taliban drug labs in Helmand province in late 2017. Those strikes, highlighted by U.S. and Afghan officials, have sought to combat what is widely viewed as one of the Taliban’s most important sources of revenue, namely the cultivation, production, and trafficking of narcotics. Operations have been carried out by U.S. B-52 and F-22 combat aircraft (the first use of the latter in combat in Afghanistan) alongside Afghan A-29s. General John Nicholson, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, has cited both new troops and expanded authorities in saying that, with the new strategy, “*we’ve set all the conditions to win.*” See: Department of Defense Press Briefing by General Nicholson via teleconference from Kabul, Afghanistan, November 20, 2017.

²²³ For current figures, see: <http://www.icasualties.org/> .

²²⁴ Center for International Issues Research, *Daily Arabic Media Report*, May 25, 2006.

²²⁵ Said Jawad, Afghanistan’s Ambassador to the United States, stated: “We have lost a lot of the ground we may have gained in the country, especially in the south...The fact that U.S. military resources have been diverted to the war in

To prevent higher levels of fatalities, in 2006 NATO requested more troops on the ground, but Taliban was conducting a brilliant defensive insurgency. In fact, the latter had numerous advantages, including comprehensive knowledge of the local culture, language, and tribal hierarchies of which U.S. forces were ignorant; their priority was still the so-called “kill/capture mission”, spending time on sweep operations.²²⁶ In other words, Taliban was able to send simple messages of intimidation²²⁷ to the local population to gain its support, while U.S. forces adopted a culturally obtuse behaviour, unnecessarily invasive and violent tactics, and a series of tragic incidents of “collateral damage” which are inevitable in wartime.²²⁸

A turning point eventually occurred in 2018 when the United States was eager to negotiate with the Taliban to bring 19-year war to an end and leave Afghanistan sooner or later. Hence, the *Doha peace process* started in July 2018 and concluded with an agreement between US and Taliban on 29 February 2020. The agreement was exceptional in many ways. Firstly, it was an agreement between the United States and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by them as a state and known as the “Taliban”.²²⁹ Secondly, China, Russia and Pakistan were part of this peace process and finally the incumbent Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani was not included in it, with the Taliban refusing to sit with them as they were referred to be “puppets”²³⁰ of the US government. This proved correct when late at night on 15 August 2021, the United States started withdrawing from Afghanistan without informing the Afghan government of Ghani, while the Taliban captured one city after another one without any resistance. Indeed, 300,000 strong Afghan armies, raised by the US, surrendered by the Taliban without fighting.²³¹ Moreover, the retake of Kabul by the Taliban officially occurred two weeks before the agreed deadline and, unprepared, Ashraf Ghani secretly fled to the country and took refuge in the United Arab Emirates. On its part, the United States, with the consent of the Taliban, took control of the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul and made a mess on it²³² when trying to help thousands of Afghans who wanted to flee the

Iraq is of course hurting Afghanistan.” See: Taliban-Al-Qaeda regroup in Afghanistan, defying U.S. strategy, Onlinenews.com, May 19, 2006.

²²⁶ For example, Operations Mountain Thrust, Medusa, Red Wings, and Pil.

‘The Americans may stay for five years, they may stay for ten, but eventually they will leave, and when they do, we will come back to this village and kill every family that has collaborated with the Americans or the Karzai government.’ Such a message is devastatingly effective in these areas, where transgenerational feuds and revenge are a fabric of the society. The insurgency has recently regained major footholds across the southern region of the country in areas ranging from Helmand to Ghazni.

²²⁸ T. H. Johnson and M. C. Mason, *Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan*, pag. 87.

²²⁹ 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, 29 February 2020.

²³⁰ I. Ahmed, *The Return of Taliban in Afghanistan: a critical assessment*, pag. 10.

²³¹ *Ibidem.*

²³² *Ibidem.*

country for economic or security reasons. Although, someone²³³ described this action as another strategy of the United States to capture global media attention and draw sympathy for the US military trying to help the Afghans desperate to flee and live a life in the West.

But, despite the *US-Taliban Peace Agreement*, the tensions were not over, in fact a suicide bomb attack was claimed by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), which killed 175 people and 13 American soldiers.²³⁴ The US reaction to this was equally painful and horrendous when a drone attack was launched against the ISKP, killing 10 Afghans from the same family within four members between the age of 2 and 4.²³⁵

The agreement was expected to bring an end to nearly two decades of American and NATO military presence in Afghanistan in return for the Taliban cutting ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups threatening the security of US and allied troops. However, another key element of the deal is for the Taliban to formally sit down with what is referred to as the “Afghan sides” not once mentioning the Afghan government to hammer out a sustainable end to the conflict.

In addition, despite a *joint declaration* issued by the Afghan and US governments about the “*positive relations, including economic cooperation for reconstruction*”²³⁶, the US has left enough wriggle room for itself about its future relationship with Afghanistan, whatever turn the country takes.

Finally, after the analysis made in this paragraph, it needs to be said that in retrospective, Britain probably should have quit while it was ahead. Following 9/11 attack, Britain supported the US invasion in Afghanistan to stop Al-Qaeda terrorists, and the leaders of the Taliban regime that have played host to them. In doing so, Britain has paid dearly for the attempting to secure Afghanistan.²³⁷ In fact, almost more than 2,000 British troops were wounded in action, while it spent £37 billion on the campaign and aid to the country.²³⁸ Meanwhile, the United States had over five times more fatalities than Britain; with 2,352 US service personnel dying in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014²³⁹ and at £686 billion, the financial cost was eighteen times higher for the United States than

²³³ *Ibidem.*

²³⁴ M. Gadzo, F. Najjar, “US says drone strike foiled another Kabul airport attack”, *Al Jazeera News*, 29 August 2021.

²³⁵ Sandi Sidhu, Nick Paton Walsh, Tim Lister, Oren Liebermann, Laura Smith-Spark and Saskya Vandoorne, “*Ten family members, including children, dead after US strike in Kabul*,” *CNN*, 31 August 2021. See also, Alex Horton, Dalton Bennet, Joyce Sohyun Lee, Meg Kelly and Elyse Samuels, “Examining a ‘righteous’ strike.

²³⁶ Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.

²³⁷ T. Farrell, *Unwinnable – Britain’s War in Afghanistan*, pag. 1.

²³⁸ *Channel 4 News: How Much has the Afghan Conflict Cost Britain?* August 17, 2021. But may be many billions more in hidden expenditure, including long-term medical care for veterans and the cost of recovering and retrofitting the British Army from Afghanistan, see: T. Farrell, *Unwinnable – Britain’s War in Afghanistan*, pag. 1.

²³⁹ *The Washington Post* - Democracy Dies in Darkness.

for Britain.²⁴⁰ However, the highest price has been paid by Afghans. Indeed, the United Nations estimated that 25,000 civilians have perished in this war.²⁴¹

So, the bleak conclusion²⁴² is that for the hindsight indicated above, all the blood, and money expended since 9/11, the United States, Britain and their allies should not have fought the Afghan War. For the US, UK and more widely in the West, the widespread perception of illegitimacy and intractability of the conflicts, the difficulty in achieving strategic success and the cost in blood and treasure resulted in a loss of confidence in the West in the utility of force. The political and military credibility and confidence of the US and its allies were damaged. These consequences live with us today.²⁴³

2. *Failure of strategic empathy in Afghanistan*

When the United States conducts or supports counterinsurgency operations, it does so in a unique strategic and operational environment. While this is true for all operations, this is of particular importance when the U.S. is countering an insurgency. Tactical actions often have strategic effects in a counterinsurgency. This makes it essential to understand both the strategic and operational context when countering an insurgency.²⁴⁴

Insurgency, in the most basic form, is a struggle for control and influence, generally from a position of relative weakness, outside existing state institutions. Insurgencies can exist apart from or before, during, or after a conventional conflict²⁴⁵ and it is, also, the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgencies tend to succeed if they develop durable internal and external support, and the host nation government loses legitimacy.

Any decision by the President to commit United States forces must be understood within the larger sphere of U.S. policy to act into best plan, prepare, conduct, and assess a counterinsurgency operation to protect national interests.

“Your strategy will be flawed if you fail to understand your adversaries or partners and are

²⁴⁰ This is a conservative estimate, only including direct military expenditure.

²⁴¹ *Human Development Reports 2021-2022*, September 8, 2022.

²⁴² B. Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust – How victory turned into defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 14.

²⁴³ *Ibidem.*,

²⁴⁴ FM 3-24 MCWP 3-33.5, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, May 2014, Headquarters, Department of the Army.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*,

unable to see yourself through the eyes of others."²⁴⁶

In many ways, the United States misjudged allies, enemies, and others, while a greater empathy – a willingness ability to get inside the minds of others – might have helped to avoid these misjudgements, which had adverse impact on the ground.²⁴⁷ In fact, *counterinsurgency* is comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes²⁴⁸, however, it is not a substitute for strategy.

Confirming the following, the U.S. can use a range of methods to aid a host nation or group in defeating an insurgency. The various combinations of these methods with different levels of resourcing provide the U.S. with a wide range of strategic options to defeat an insurgency.

The strategy to counter an insurgency is determined by the ends the U.S. wishes to achieve, the ways it wishes to achieve those ends, and the resources or means it uses to enable those ways.²⁴⁹

Moreover, the military role should be coordinated with the other instruments of national power that include diplomatic, informational, and economic parts. In addition, political leaders and commanders must have a dialogue to decide the optimal strategy to meet the security needs of the U.S and states or groups the U.S. supports.

Different capabilities provide different choices that offer different costs and risks.²⁵⁰ And one of the risks for U.S. leaders was the image they would give to other states in believing that they can host violent conspiracies against it and allow Al Qaeda to continue a safe existence in Afghanistan.

With this idea in mind, the United States followed the goal to enter in Afghanistan, managing a counterinsurgency and state-building in the country. In fact, the overthrow of the Taliban regime was a necessary response to the attacks of September 11, 2011.

Will regional powers take more aggressive actions to improve their positions, or will they behave more cautiously in the absence of superpower support? What will be the behaviour of the states in facing different threats as terrorism?

The U.S. decision to conduct a population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy and requisite troop surge remains a contentious issue, particularly in America's political and military institutions. The finalization of the decision, almost a year after the inauguration of President Obama, reflected a struggle to reconcile and match competing governmental policy objectives with a viable military strategy in Afghanistan. Ultimately, without ever really resolving this struggle, the

²⁴⁶ L. Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, OUP USA, 31 October 2013.

²⁴⁷ C. Kolenda, *Eyes Half Shut – Failures of Strategic Empathy in Afghanistan*, Center of Empathy in International Affairs.

²⁴⁸ FM 3-24 MCWP 3-33.5, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, May 2014, Headquarters, Department of the Army.

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁵⁰ J. M. Guéhenno, *United Nations, Peacekeeping Operations – Principles and Guidelines*, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, March 2008.

government tepidly gave General McChrystal a fraction of the troops and time he needed for the COIN strategy to succeed. This approach was based on two principal areas: “*change the operational culture to connect with the people*” and “*improve unity of effort and command.*”²⁵¹

The COIN approach focused on burrowing U.S. forces deep into the population of the host country in a way that reflected the capabilities typically demonstrated by U.S. special operations forces.

But, almost immediately, the General McChrystal’s COIN strategy ran into several obstacles, the first being that the White House support for the war was tepid at best; the troop surge debate only served to weaken this support further by eroding what remained of the trust between administration officials and the military, and there was a significant divergence of perspective between the military and the White House regarding the Afghanistan problem. Indeed, the United States failed to make distinction between the Taliban and Al-Qaida until 2009, so eight years into conflict, and it aggregated its enemies, treating both groups as terrorists and failed to seize early negotiating opportunities in 2001, 2002 and 2004, when representatives of the Taliban made overtures for peace talks. Later, the United States misunderstood how the Taliban were making major efforts to win the battle of legitimacy in rural areas, especially after 2009, combining intimidation with persuasion.²⁵²

To the administration, the problem was more political than military²⁵³, and it failed to appreciate what military leaders already knew, which was that Afghanistan was a completely failed state and that it would take several more years of outside occupation to produce the human capital necessary to achieve such broad policy objectives.

However, the President announced an additional 30,000 U.S. troops deployment to Afghanistan,²⁵⁴ but the commitment rang hollow, as it did not actively reinforce General McChrystal’s COIN strategy for a variety of reason, the principal of which being that 30,000 troops was not nearly close to the amount needed to secure Afghanistan. In FM 3-24²⁵⁵, the bare minimum

²⁵¹ Brand, *General McChrystal’s Strategy Assessment*, pag. 1-3.

²⁵² C. Kolenda, *Eyes Half Shut – Failures of Strategic Empathy in Afghanistan*, Center of Empathy in International Affairs.

²⁵³ Hence, the March 2009 *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan* that suggested “integrating reconcilable insurgents” among other policy objects such as development, counter-narcotics operations and securing legitimate elections.

²⁵⁴ “*As Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.*” See: Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward*, December 2009.

²⁵⁵ The Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, provided a much-needed course change for American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan by focusing the attention of commanders on factors that are not traditionally the concern of the American military. While many commanders had already recognized that conventional tactics were ill-matched to dealing with insurgencies and had adapted accordingly, others were still fighting the insurgents on an ad hoc and counterproductive manner in 2006. FM 3-24 frames insurgency as a contest between insurgents and governments over an undecided population, a contest whose outcome is principally determined by the relative capability of each side to

troop strength needed for population-centric COIN is “*twenty counter-insurgents per 1000 residents.*”²⁵⁶

Thus, when calculating the numbers as required per the COIN manual and the World Bank’s 2009 estimate of Afghanistan’s population of 27.71 million, an increase of 30,000 troops is dreadfully insufficient.²⁵⁷

At the height of the surge in 2011, the United States had approximately 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan and NATO had approximately 50,000 troops under its command.²⁵⁸ So, even if each Afghan National Security Force soldier was considered an equal to a coalition trooper²⁵⁹, the counterinsurgents would still fall approximately 25,000 to 75,000 troops short of the 554,000 to 600,000 troops required per FM 3-24.²⁶⁰

Moreover, the limited commitment to an 18-month troop increase before a drawdown was not nearly long enough to stabilize the country in addition to implementing the desired reforms. In this context, predatory actors filled the security vacuum and Afghans in several areas soon came to look back to the Taliban as a preferable alternative for providing it.

By contrast, the British action against the Taliban was to staunch the flow of drugs in Afghanistan, and in justifying the start of the military campaign it noted: “*we know that the Taliban regime are largely funded by the drugs trade and that 90 percent of the heroin on British streets originates in Afghanistan.*”²⁶¹ So, the military action taken by the British Army was not for a just cause alone, though this cause is just.²⁶² “*It is to protect our country, our people, our economy, our way of life. It is not a struggle remote from our everyday British concerns; it touches them intimately.*”²⁶³ Thus, in late 2007 the British adopted a more population-centric approach to their counter-insurgency operations. Increasing emphasis was placed on military restraint and building long term relationships with communities, and in closer partnering with Afghan security forces.

In fact, until recently, the British were considered to have an unusually high aptitude for

govern people. The undecided civilian population, the manual’s theory suggests, will support the side that they think can best provide services. Initially, the government’s poor track record at providing basic and essential services—public safety, infrastructure, even trash collection—fosters either active or passive support of the insurgents.

²⁵⁶ U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 2-24 (Washington, D.C, Department of the Army, 2006), pag. 1-67.

²⁵⁷ World Bank, Data: Population.

²⁵⁸ K. Boyea, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: An Assessment*, (Washington D.C, Georgetown University,2011), pag.48.

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem*,.

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*,.

²⁶¹ T. Farrell, *Unwinnable – Britain’s War in Afghanistan*, pag. 30.

²⁶² *Ibidem*,.

²⁶³ *House of Commons*, Monday October 8, 2001, Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair.

counterinsurgency.²⁶⁴ In contrast with other major armies of the world, the British Army has a record of relative success in this form of warfare. However, British attitudes sometimes displayed an unattractive tendency toward smugness and a sense of arch superiority, which was bound to rankle. In fact, The British Army has struggled with ongoing campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan because, for reasons largely having to do with insufficient resources, it has not applied its own principles of counterinsurgency.²⁶⁵

In addition, the pressure on what remained an undermanned force meant that the British lacked the presence and tactical patience to develop ties in most communities, and still had to rely on artillery and air power to get out of trouble.²⁶⁶ Finally, the root cause is that the British Government, in part as a reflection of public opinion, is lukewarm in its commitment to Afghanistan at the highest levels, and fears that operations in this country are undermining its domestic counter-radicalization program. The confluence of these factors have created a strategic void into which the Army has fallen.²⁶⁷

In conclusion, the experiment of counterinsurgency dramatically failed in a country of Afghanistan, in which transformation is unachievable and costs are high.²⁶⁸ Lack of empathy also derailed efforts towards reconciliation, as the United States misunderstood the reasons why the Taliban sought to engage in talks. No meaningful effort was made to build a consensus on reconciliation within the U.S. government and amongst allies and partners. Crucially, the United States failed to see itself and its actions through the eyes of others, often assuming the most favourable interpretation of its most problematic actions. In absence of this, U.S. strategy needs to be sensitive to its limitations and lack of understanding, and develop ways to identify, and then to prevent or mitigate, associated strategic risks.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ General Sir Ruper Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2006, pag 270.

²⁶⁵ J. Mackinlay, A. Al-Baddway, *Rethinking Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2008), pag. 13-14.

²⁶⁶ T. Farrell, A. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war: inside the Helmand insurgency, 2004-2012*, pag 851.

²⁶⁷ T. Farrell, *The Dynamics of British Military Transformation* - International Affairs, Vol. 84, No. 4 (2008), pag. 777.

²⁶⁸ The total cost of British military operations in Afghanistan since 2001 (up to and including financial year 2019-20) was £22.7 billion. Concerning US, President Biden on Tuesday 31st of August, at White House, said: "I refuse to send another generation of America's sons or daughters to fight a war that should have ended long ago... after more than \$2 trillion spent in Afghanistan. The cost that researchers at Brown University estimated would be over \$300 million a day for 20 years in Afghanistan." - *Doug Mills / The New York Times*

²⁶⁹ C. Kolenda, *Eyes Half Shut – Failures of Strategic Empathy in Afghanistan*, Center of Empathy in International Affairs.

2.1 The impact of the withdrawal: Afghanistan after the US withdrawal

On July 8, 2021, the American President Joe Biden announced that the United States will be withdrawing its military forces from Afghanistan by the end of August, after the US was in the war-torn country for 20 years. As it has been analysed in *paragraph 1.2*, the United States had initially entered Afghanistan because the Taliban-run government was hosting Al Qaeda, which utilized the country as a base from which to wage the September 11 terror attacks that slaughtered nearly 3,000 American citizens in a single morning.²⁷⁰

*“The vacuum that will be left by the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan will pose a political and military challenge for countries in the region surrounding Afghanistan and Pakistan. The possibility that the immediate internal struggle between the Taliban and the current government in Kabul will seek outside the borders of Afghanistan and would be reflected in regional and global terrorist activity, is a likely threat that demands preparations by neighbouring countries and beyond.”*²⁷¹ In fact, if on one hand the United States has vowed to respond harshly if it is attacked on its territory again, on the other hand, Afghanistan’s neighbours are looking towards the future with concern given the vacuum left by the withdrawal.²⁷² Furthermore, the narrative that will be disseminated by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda alike about the victory of the fundamentalistic Islamic resistance (*muqawama*) over a superpower could be a source of inspiration to other organizations in different regions, including in the Middle East. Israel and its allies in the West should prepare for the possibility that Afghanistan will return to being the base for global terrorism and model for emulation.²⁷³

The objectives of the United States in invading Afghanistan were achieved in short term: Al-Qaeda was removed and was forced into exile in Pakistan and Iran; the Taliban was forced out of its strongholds in the central cities and ceased ruling in Afghanistan; a new administration headed by Hamid Karzai was elected; and for the first-time free elections for the legislative assembly were held. However, when in 2003 the United States shifted the attention on Iraq to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein, it lost a significant degree of the practical and the moral support of the local population in Afghanistan and some of its allies. In effect, the US allowed the Taliban and Al-Qaeda to recover and re-establish themselves in their country and, consequently, the organization regained control of extensive areas of it. It has been estimated that the Taliban ruled over 13 million residents

²⁷⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report – Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.

²⁷¹ Y. Schweitzer, O. Eran, INSS Report, *The US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Portends a Vacuum and Uncertain Future*, pag.1.

²⁷² *Ibidem.*,

²⁷³ *Ibidem.*,

in 212 of the country's districts, while the government of President Ashraf Ghani ruled about 10 million residents in about 70 districts and in the capital, Kabul.²⁷⁴

Critics to the withdrawal decision claim that withdrawing all the forces from Afghanistan and forfeiting an intelligence and military presence in the country could lead to the Taliban taking over the state and the re-establishment of a radical fundamentalist government in the country. It would return to being a base for terrorist organizations and the United States would lose the ability to respond effectively if it is again attacked on its soil by these forces, which is an objective defined by President Biden.²⁷⁵ Moreover, the Administration will be tested as to its willingness to assist the existing regime in Afghanistan to maintain its stability and the rights of citizens, and of women in particular, by granting humanitarian and political aid, and in extreme situations by the operations of military forces conducted from outside Afghanistan to defend against another terrorist strike.²⁷⁶

In other words, the conflict in Afghanistan will not end with the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO coalition forces, because it will have profound implications on governance, Afghan security forces, terrorism, regional dynamics, great power competition, human rights, humanitarian issues, and development. The withdrawal of foreign troops and other sources of assistance will weaken the Afghan government and undermine capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in countering Taliban influence. The continuing risk of corruption in foreign funding to Afghanistan will damage government capacity, resulting in a loss of potential influence and legitimacy.²⁷⁷ A weakened Afghan government will embolden the Taliban and increase the risk of state collapse. Thus, the new ground after the withdrawal of foreign troops would give the Taliban a slight military advantage over the ANDSF²⁷⁸; in fact, the Taliban started to control the territory more than at any other time since 2001.²⁷⁹ In addition, if it is true that the presence of U.S. and NATO coalition forces has prevented the Taliban from gaining control of Afghanistan's largest cities, Kabul and Kandahar, it is also true that after the withdrawal these cities have been more likely to fall under the Taliban.

Another crucial aspect is that human rights have drastically improved since the Taliban's ousting in 2001. Afghanistan's 2004 constitution incorporates democratic ideals and recognizes a wide

²⁷⁴ *BBC News*, Ashraf Ghani: Ex-Afghan president describes moment he fled the Taliban.

²⁷⁵ President Biden's speech, August 31, 2021; *The White House: Remarks by President Biden on the end of the War in Afghanistan*, August 31, 2021.

²⁷⁶ Y. Schweitzer, O. Eran, INSS Report, *The US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Portends a Vacuum and Uncertain Future*, pag.4.

²⁷⁷ J. Dobbins; J. Campbell; S. Mann; L. Miller, *Consequences of a Precipitous U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag.4.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*

²⁷⁹ F. Bezhan, *The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan?* - Radio Free Europe. 31 May 2020.

range of universal civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights under international law.²⁸⁰ A Taliban takeover will likely erode hard-fought gains in human right, specifically those of women and girls, minority groups, and free speech, that have allowed Afghans to enjoy greater freedoms and quality of life.²⁸¹

During the 1990s, the Taliban imposed severe restrictions on Afghan women's access to healthcare, education, and jobs.²⁸² Women were forbidden from working outside of the home, attending school, and leaving their homes without a male chaperone. Laws were brutally enforced by the "religious police" through public beatings, arrests, and executions.²⁸³ Members of the Taliban regime perpetrated crimes of murder, rape, kidnapping, and forced marriage on a regular basis.²⁸⁴ The Taliban have expressed their commitment to "*upholding and guaranteeing all rights of women afforded to them by Islamic law*".²⁸⁵ But, once the Taliban regained the power in Afghanistan in 2022, women and girls have been faced increased gender-based discrimination and violence, in addition to religious minorities that have been increasingly targeted by groups like Islamic State.²⁸⁶

"*We will support freedom of speech within the framework of Islamic principles and national interests*"²⁸⁷ despite past and post-withdrawal experiences of targeted attacks and intimidation of journalists, media workers and activists used to silence critics and undermine prospects of an open society in Afghanistan.²⁸⁸

Moreover, the international withdrawal has been followed by a reduction in foreign assistance, further deteriorating an already dire humanitarian situation and undermining development progress. Indeed, Afghanistan has second largest refugee population in the world²⁸⁹, and four million people are internally displaced.²⁹⁰ What concerning nowadays, over half the population live below the poverty line,²⁹¹ meanwhile mounting violence has escalated Afghanistan's brain drain as the country's young and educated seek safer futures abroad. In fact, more than 120,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan²⁹², including qualified professionals in the social, economic, and

²⁸⁰ S. Hermatullah, *The Implementation of Constitutional Human Rights in Afghanistan* - Human Rights Brief, pag. 48.

²⁸¹ C. Brenner, M. Wallin, *Preparing for the Consequences of Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 10.

²⁸² J. R. Allen, V. Felbab-Brown, *The fate of women's rights in Afghanistan*, pag. 10.

²⁸³ Physicians For Human Rights, *The Taliban's War on Women: A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan*, August 1998.

²⁸⁴ S. Wiley, *Fighting Back Against the Taliban: The Case for Restoring Afghan Men and Women's Right to Self-Determination* - *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 7 no. 2, February 2001, pag. 34.

²⁸⁵ *Taliban aid crackdown spreads fear over treatment of women*, France 24. 3 Apr. 2021.

²⁸⁶ C. Brenner, M. Wallin, *Preparing for the Consequences of Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, pag. 11.

²⁸⁷ C. B. Lombardi, A. F. March, *Afghan Taliban Views on Legitimate Islamic Governance: Certainties, Ambiguities, and areas of compromise*, No 183, February 2022, pag.7.

²⁸⁸ "*Taliban take aim at freedom of expression with brutal assassinations, intimidation.*" *Salaam Times*. 6 Apr. 2021.

²⁸⁹ UNHCR, *Afghanistan*.

²⁹⁰ *Afghanistan's four million Internally Displaced People - a glance into their lives of poverty and displacement during the pandemic* - Amnesty International. 19 Aug. 2020, (it will be better discussed in Chapter 2).

²⁹¹ OCHA, *Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Planned Response 2021*, 17 Jan 2021.

²⁹² *The Economic Times – News: Afghanistan brain drain complicates Taliban rule: experts*, September 21, 2001.

political sectors. This scenario will affect organizational development and the Taliban's ability to rule. People are in dire need of basic humanitarian services. According to the World Food Programme, 14 million Afghans²⁹³ are suffering from severe hunger. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees reports that 500,000 people²⁹⁴ have been displaced in Afghanistan, and health and food security are the foremost concern. According to UNICEF, 10 million children across the country require humanitarian assistance²⁹⁵ to survive. Even before the Taliban takeover in May 2021, 11 million people were experiencing acute food insecurity, and food shortages have only gotten worse in the months since.²⁹⁶

So, the inefficiency of centralized institutions to utilize humanitarian and development funding to develop and enrich human capital, and extend resources and knowledge beyond the provincial capitals, has, along with other factors, resulted in a full-blown human security crisis in Afghanistan.

In other words, this paragraph wants to put the attention to the fact that the situation in the country is still highly uncertain and changing rapidly. The security situation is extremely dangerous, and it may become increasingly volatile at short notice, indeed with the withdrawal of all US military forces from Hamid Karzai International Airport on 31 August 2022, became impossible to help individuals on the ground.²⁹⁷ Thus, the country now faces a humanitarian, identity, and human rights crisis.

But a hidden presence of U.S. forces is still felt in Afghanistan, since Aircraft worth \$923.3 million, a total of 9,524 air-to-ground munitions, valued at \$6.54 million, over 40,000 of the total 96,000 military vehicles the US gave to Afghan forces, and more than 300,000 of the total 427,300 weapons the US gave to Afghan forces remained in the country after the withdrawal.²⁹⁸

In conclusion, US troop withdrawal, whether timely or precipitant will render consequences for international engagement in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan, through a limited, well-designed agreement, will neither automatically end corruption nor the patron-client system. Different scenarios will impose different levels of difficulty that needs different approaches from the international community to also safeguard the gains that have been achieved over the years.²⁹⁹

²⁹³ Security Council Report, September 2021, Monthly Forecast.

²⁹⁴ *Indeed,*

²⁹⁵ Report of UNICEF.

²⁹⁶ *IPC, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.*

²⁹⁷ See: <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/> .

²⁹⁸ CNN, *First on CNN: US left behind \$7 billion of military equipment in Afghanistan after 2021 withdrawal*, Pentagon report says.

²⁹⁹ I. G. Jonegard, *The implications of a US withdrawal from Afghanistan – studies in peace support operations*, pag. 4.

2.2 Afghanistan's future: engagement or isolation? From the new 'caretaker' government to the current security context

On August 31, 2021, the US complemented its twenty-year war on terror in Afghanistan. Soon after, the Taliban and its allies established full control over Afghanistan. As the days pass, observers, both within and outside the country, are wondering what the future holds for a Taliban-led Afghanistan.³⁰⁰

This last paragraph argues that the Taliban of 2021 are different from the Taliban of 1996, at least in terms of their media messaging, propaganda, and political manoeuvring.

However, even with this evolution, the situation for gender and media rights presents a grim future; explained previously. In conclusion, it aims to propose a possible working relationship with a Taliban regime and focusing on the long-term well-being of the Afghan population, looking at the current security context in the country.

Observers, both within and outside Afghanistan, are wondering how the country will fare under the newly announced caretaker setup, with the international community still contemplating whether to engage with or isolate the Taliban. Indeed, the Al Jazeera report³⁰¹ informed “*the Taliban said it is planning an inclusive caretaker government in Afghanistan after the group toppled the Western-backed administration in a stunning sweep earlier this month.*” Moreover, Taliban source said the caretaker government will include leaders from all ethnicities and tribal backgrounds in the country. They, however, did not mention the duration of the caretaker government.³⁰² The Taliban had initially indicated that it sought to form an “inclusive” government. In their own words, “inclusive” signified the inclusion of all representatives (ethnic³⁰³ and religious) groups in the country, without going into further details. However, the list of cabinet members and senior officials was notable for the presence of Taliban and Haqqani hard-line and loyalists, along with the exclusion of women from any top positions.

With the announcement of the Taliban's formal set-up, the process of regional official and diplomatic engagement with the Taliban has also started. China has offered USD 31 million in aid and Pakistan, organised a ministerial-level meeting attended by Foreign Ministers of China, Iran,

³⁰⁰ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, *Afghanistan's future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation?* pag. 2.

³⁰¹ *Al Jazeera*: “*Taliban planning 'inclusive caretaker government' in Afghanistan*, August 27, 2021.

³⁰² *Indeed.*

³⁰³ Major ethnic groups of Afghanistan include Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashai, Nuristani, Gujjar, Arab, Brahui, Qizilbash, Pamiri, Kyrgyz and Sadat, among others.

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on Afghanistan. On the domestic level, the situation, when it comes to basic human rights, particularly media and gender rights, still presents a grim picture.³⁰⁴

However, the Taliban of 2021 are politically aware and active; the group's political office in Doha, Qatar, established in 2013, has provided them with the exposure and the opportunity to engage in the art of negotiation and diplomacy. That is why the Taliban have engaged regional partners such as Russia and China and have recently claimed that China was their principal and "closest partner."³⁰⁵ On the other hand, the Taliban's mention of China and Russia can also be seen as a pressure tactic to get the sanctions on it lifted from the US, as both Beijing and Moscow have indicated their willingness to diplomatically engage the Taliban. Several US sanctions on the Taliban leadership were imposed two decades ago³⁰⁶, which meant that the Taliban have since operated outside the global financial system. There remains a larger possibility of such sanctions staying in place so that the US could monitor the developing political situation in the country and negotiate the evacuation of US citizens still trapped in Kabul, along with the Afghans who hold US and western visas.³⁰⁷

"*Are the Taliban of 2021, really different from the Taliban of 1996?*" Yes and No. Yes, because the group is now tech-and politics-savvy, and seeks to build regional ties and alliances and, in the process, also seeks political recognition and economic concessions. In this regard, the global community may hold some advantage in pressuring the Taliban to afford universal human and gender rights to Afghan citizens in return for some form of recognition and economic concessions. And no; because a group that boasts of nearly 5000 ready-to-detonate suicide bombers³⁰⁸ and that has fought arguably the sole global superpower (USA) for two decades to get where it is will, in the long run, go back to its "basics". Those basics are rooted in a hyper-masculine patriarchal worldview that hesitates in, and opposes, providing full personal and professional rights to women.

However, before the announcement of the caretaker setup, there were major rifts between the Taliban and its ally Haqqani Network's leadership³⁰⁹ on who will take key positions in the cabinet.

³⁰⁴ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, *Afghanistan's future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation?* pag. 3.

³⁰⁵ "China will be our main partner and represents a great opportunity for us because it is ready to invest in our country and support reconstruction efforts," Zabihullah Mujahid said in an interview published by Italian newspaper La Repubblica.

Also, China, for geopolitical reasons, also wants to protect its investments in Afghanistan, especially those in extractive resources, and has, therefore, indicated its willingness to engage with the Taliban.

³⁰⁶ When the Taliban seized Kabul, wide-ranging sanctions dating back to their first rule followed them. To deny them access to funds, the Biden administration then froze more than \$7 billion in Afghan government reserves held in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

³⁰⁷ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, *Afghanistan's future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation?* pag. 7.

³⁰⁸ *Indeed.*

³⁰⁹ The Haqqani Network, founded in the 1970s by Jalaluddin Haqqani, was heavily supported by the CIA during the Mujahideen war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is believed to be in his 40s, is

The Haqqani Network, who had taken over most of the central security apparatus in Kabul, wanted to lead the new government and wished for the power centre to stay in Kabul. With the Taliban's announcement of the caretaker setup, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar³¹⁰ had been shuttling between Kabul and Kandahar to negotiate the dynamics of the new government. Now that a caretaker setup is already in place, the international community will focus its sights on how this setup proceeds and performs in terms of the provision of equal opportunity and rights to Afghan citizens. In addition, with the Taliban's formal takeover of Afghanistan and announcement of the caretaker setup, the country will run on a Shura (council) governance model, while the domestic and political reform, at the moments, remains very low.

In 2021, unlike the 1990s, the global community cannot formulate policies for Afghanistan using a binary securitisation lens, where Afghanistan and Afghan people suffer because of the past crimes and future policies of the Taliban. Instead, any future policy direction should keep in perspective the costs common Afghan people, who chose to stay in the country, will pay for any foreseeable sanctions on the country.

In doing so, both in the short and long term, some levels of interaction will need to take place with the Taliban leaders. As a result, policymakers, donor agencies and leaders in the western bloc will need to decide whether a paradigm shift on Afghanistan is required³¹¹; whether terrorists of the past are seen as such or they are seen as major stakeholders, worth negotiating with, in the present and future. So far, the policy position from the US on sanctions has not changed. In fact, the White House has rejected the possibility of easing sanctions on Taliban leaders³¹² and the US Department of Defence considers Sirajuddin Haqqani a legitimate US target. In response, the Taliban's spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid released a statement calling the US stance a violation of the Doha Agreement and a "*meddling in internal affairs of Afghanistan.*"³¹³

This, as a first impression, represents a major diplomatic barrier that the international community

his son and succeeded him following his death in 2018.

³¹⁰ Abdul Ghani Baradar is an Afghan political and religious leader who is currently the acting first deputy prime minister alongside Abdul Salam Hanafi and Abdul Kabir, of Afghanistan. He is also a co-founder of the Taliban. He is known by the honorific Mullah. Originally Mullah Omar's top deputy, since 2019 he has been the Taliban's fourth-in-command, as the third of Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada's three deputies. He held senior positions in the Taliban during their rule from 1996 to 2001. After the Taliban government fell to the US-led invasion in 2001, he rose to lead the organization's Quetta Shura in Pakistan, becoming the de facto leader of the Taliban. He was imprisoned by Pakistan in 2010, possibly because he had been discussing a peace deal with the Afghan government secretly, without the involvement of Pakistan. He was released in 2018 at the request of the United States and was subsequently appointed a deputy leader of the Taliban and head of their political office in Qatar. On 15 September 2021, Baradar was listed on Time magazine as one of the "100 Most Influential People In 2021."

³¹¹ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, Afghanistan's future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation? pag. 12.

³¹² "*The U.S. and its allies are recalibrating what level of cooperation to have with the organization that now controls Afghanistan*". Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the Taliban "a ruthless group," but added, "*In war, you do what you must*", The New York Times.

³¹³ Interview with Taliban's Zabihullah Mujahid.

will encounter, especially while dealing with “officials” like Haqqani. That is why, as a matter of urgency, the international community needs to work with the Taliban representatives, in some capacity, to negotiate the evacuation of Afghans whose lives are under threat, and foreign nationals. To overcome this challenge, the international community must work with the Taliban to get Afghan airports up and running. International airlines, who have signed third party leasing and insurance agreements, do not feel safe to fly into, or over, Afghanistan. These fears also mean that aid supplies for Afghans, especially food and medicines, will take longer to reach Afghanistan. Therefore, the operationalisation of Afghan airports, both for evacuation and provision of aid, is important.³¹⁴ In a scenario where the international community, especially the western bloc, refuses to negotiate or deal with the Taliban, there remains a strong possibility that Russia, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar, and Iran, will jump in to fill the gaps. That is why the situation in Afghanistan today remains markedly different from 1996 as the six states have indicated their willingness to deal with the Taliban regime.

Moreover, since the Taliban’s takeover, messaging from the western bloc is mixed.

Where the bloc has so far refused to recognise a future Taliban government, initial statements also indicate that some sort of a working relationship with the group may be established. For instance, the British Foreign Secretary, during a press talk in Pakistan, said, “*we do not recognise the Taliban as a government, but we do see the importance of engaging and having a direct line of communication with them.*”³¹⁵ Similarly, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, during a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Slovenia said “*in order to support the Afghan population, we will have to engage with the new government in Afghanistan.*”³¹⁶ German Chancellor Angela Merkel has also said her country wanted to talk to the Taliban about flying its remaining local workers out of Afghanistan.³¹⁷ In other words, completely suspending diplomatic ties with the Taliban regime will more or less cause a repeat of the 1990s, when the Taliban justified their harsh policies within the country citing international isolation.

Considering the current and future issues that Afghanistan faces, the western bloc needs a clear

³¹⁴ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, *Afghanistan’s future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation?* pag. 13.

³¹⁵ UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Friday 3 September 2021 said it is important to engage with the Taliban government in Afghanistan for a range of reasons, including the safe passage of British citizens, but dismissed talks of recognising it officially as “premature”.

³¹⁶ Afghanistan: Press statement by High Representative Joseph Borrell at the informal meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers.

³¹⁷ Germany wants talks with the Taliban on flying its remaining local workers out of Afghanistan, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Sunday. “We need to talk to the Taliban about how we can continue to get people who worked for Germany out of the country and to safety,” Merkel said during a visit to the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia. On Friday, EU foreign ministers agreed an outreach plan with the Taliban but that does not mean the bloc is about to recognize them as the legitimate Afghan government.

policy direction instead of sending mixed messages. Whether the bloc recognises a Taliban government or whether it still considers it a non-state (violent) actor, the messaging needs to be clear and precise. Mixed messaging will only create confusion and hurdles in formulating long-term policies on Afghanistan.³¹⁸

The international community can use diplomatic engagement to hold the Taliban accountable for their promises on these important issues and persist with economic sanctions if the group refuses to comply. Finally, recognition, in any form, of the Taliban regime cannot be based on automatic reactions to other countries, especially China, Russia, Qatar and Pakistan, recognising the regime. Demands of the global financial systems and inter-connectedness require the Taliban regime to engage with the rest of the world, particularly the western bloc. This engagement, from the international community, should be premised and made conditional on the provision of basic human rights and inclusive government in Afghanistan.³¹⁹

As discussed above, the Taliban have so far smartly disseminated their messages and propaganda on social media. For policymakers in the western bloc, countering the Taliban's social media messaging presents a major challenge. And, to get a true picture of the situation on the ground, analysis of social media posts in Dari, Pashto and, to some extent, Urdu languages becomes important.

For what concerns the current security context in Afghanistan, the international community can, in a controlled and limited manner, work with the Taliban to sustain a peaceful and secure country that is not a threat to regional and global security. In fact, the protection of human security is still discussed since people lost their sense of participation because they do not see themselves represented in the ruling structure. Protracted conflict and continued instability, combined with the recent political upheaval and humanitarian and economic crises, have caused fear and frustration among a large segment of the population. A perceived, or in this case real, loss of power and freedom impedes people from utilizing humanitarian and development programs to effectively build their human capital and agency, resulting in a loss of security. The harsh restrictions imposed by the Taliban since the group took over Kabul have already caused fear, grievance, and a loss of motivation among the educated class, youth, and women.

The possibility of working with a Taliban regime to not allow Afghanistan's soil to be used for terrorism remains crucial. Moreover, the international community can work with the Taliban regime to maintain checks over, and counter terrorist groups.

Diplomatic boycotts and isolation, resulting in various socio-economic crises, for the Taliban

³¹⁸ F. Yousaf, M. Jabarhail, *Afghanistan's future under the Taliban regime: engagement or isolation?* pag. 13.

³¹⁹ *Ibidem.*,

regime in Afghanistan, like their first regime, presents the risk of the country becoming an active haven again. As discussed above, the Taliban's desire and need for some form of recognition and relaxation of economic sanctions can be made conditional on the group ensuring no terrorist activity (recruitment and operations) takes place within Afghanistan's territory.³²⁰

In conclusion, this discussion on the developing situation in Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover of the country aimed at providing initial impressions on what the country may look like under a hard-line/radical regime. With the Taliban formally taking control of Afghanistan, individual freedoms are also under threat. Even with violence and conflict marring the Afghan society and economy in the past two decades, Afghans had learnt to enjoy some of these individual freedoms in media, education, and work-life.

³²⁰ *Ibidem.*,

Chapter II

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: what is the difference?

1. The refugee's policy: comparison between US and Europe

In the preceding years, the notion of international protection evolved to the point of consolidating the idea that the individual, and therefore the refugee, should be considered as a bearer of human rights. It became necessary to implement an international normative framework, including the 1951 Geneva Convention and its associated 1967 Protocol³²¹ to find a solution to the normative gap concerning the issue of refugee protection.³²²

Although the concept and evolution of the 1951 Geneva Convention will be analysed in the following section, it can certainly be stated that it represents the desire to establish a code of refugee rights covering all basic aspects of life, assimilating the status of refugees to that of citizens of the country of asylum. In fact, the purpose is to achieve important protections in such areas as health and social care, social security, legal protection, the right to education and employment and the broader range of civil, economic, and social rights.

Refugees are accorded the same rights acquired by foreigners legally residing in the country of asylum and attempts are made to deal in the best possible way with the typical problems of a refugee simply because he is a refugee; as well as a foreigner without ties some to a particular country.

Refugee policy is traditionally understood through the lenses of humanitarianism, international law,

national security, and, less often, foreign policy. It also be considered a foreign policy tool. States can deliberately offer asylum to citizens to undermine rival States or can resettle displaced people

³²¹ The 1967 Protocol, supplementary to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, removed the temporal limitation to events that occurred prior to January 1, 1951, contained in the definition of refugee in the 1951 UN 1951. The Protocol entered into force on October 4, 1967, and is a legal instrument, although it is integrally related to the 1951 Convention. By acceding to it, the signatory states pledge to apply Articles 2 to 34 of the Convention to all those who meet the refugee definition, without any temporal or geographical limitation. Accession to the Protocol alone is sufficient to make applicable to the state's signatories to most of the Convention's provisions. Most states, however, have preferred to ratify both it and the Protocol, thus reinforcing, the authority of the two instruments as cornerstones of international refugee law. As of December 31, 1999, 134 states had acceded to the Protocol. As of the same date, the only states that had signed the Convention but not the Protocol were Madagascar, Monaco, Namibia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. In contrast, the only states that had acceded to the Protocol but not the Convention was. Cape Verde, Swaziland, the United States and Venezuela.

³²² Benvenuti P., *Flussi migrazione e fruizione dei diritti fondamentali*, pag. 7.

when military interventions go awry.³²³

This section aims to focus on what motivates refugee policy: for example, *why do States set different policies for refugees protected under the same rules of international law? Why do States treat refugees differently when they come from similar political, economic, or security situations?*³²⁴

Thus, the purpose is to analyse the European and American behaviour on the matter of this crisis, with a specific focus on the Afghan state, where this subject could be connected to the return of the Taliban regime.

Though the world has seen many crises and millions of refugees seeking safety over the past decade, events in Afghanistan have produced a particularly disastrous mix of tragedies: economic collapse, starvation and suffering on a massive scale, a return of enormous political and social repression, and an uncontrolled coronavirus pandemic.³²⁵ Many Afghans are at threat from the Taliban government and from terrorist groups. All now face collapsing incomes, the cessation of the most basic services including healthcare and electricity, food insecurity, and a rising level of starvation.³²⁶

All these factors have driven many Afghans to leave when routes became available. By the end of 2020, Afghans already made-up ten percent of the global refugee population and had driven considerable internal displacement. By mid-September 2021, a staggering three and a half million people were displaced within Afghanistan: 675,000 by the Taliban advance alone.³²⁷ In other words, voters in Britain or the United States, concerned about immigration, can see how the departure has dropped people into horror: some women, at the front, passed their infants to the foreign soldiers, and watching them carried out of sight.

*“There is a plane waiting for them on the runway, chartered by a foreign foundation. They have managed to get a US senator on the phone, who is telling them to shout to the soldiers that they have a right to come through. No path will take them through the crowd, and the large plane will take off, half empty and without them.”*³²⁸

The aim of United States was to assure a more transparent, rules-based system designed to

³²³ N. R. Micinski, *Refugee Policy as Foreign Policy: Iraqi and Afghan Refugees Resettlements to the United States*, pag. 1.

³²⁴ M.S. Teitelbaum, *Immigration, Refugees, and Foreign Policy*, International Organization, 38(3), 1984, 429–450; M.S. Teitelbaum & M. Weiner, *Threatened Peoples, Threatened Borders: World Migration and U.S. Policy*, New York.

³²⁵ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition – Atlantic Council*, pag. 5.

³²⁶ *Indeed*.

³²⁷ S. Glinski, *Another Drought Looms. Is Afghanistan Better Prepared?* New Humanitarian, June 2, 2021. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020, UNHCR, June 18, 2021.

³²⁸ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition – Atlantic Council*, pag. 9.

prioritize citizens, and direct military and embassy personnel, but, unfortunately, most Afghans did not meet the government criteria and they were obliged to turn back to the ground.³²⁹

The social and mass media played a key role in sharing the horror at the airport gate, showing the nineteen-year-old Afghan grabbing onto the side of a US plane as it took off, and the aftermath of the bomb attack on the evacuation line. This scenario is subjected to different views abroad: some people are bitterly opposed to the war and view the collapse as unavoidable; others feel something deeply valuable has been betrayed. Some feel that we should support humanitarian aid and development in the Taliban- ruled Afghanistan, others that we should leave it well alone.

Some argue for open borders and believe that any attempt to exclude refugees with fences and walls and patrols is immoral. Finally,³³⁰, a larger number opposed large-scale Afghan immigration, fearing that Afghans would be a cost to the welfare state or impose a burden of non-native speakers on struggling schools, or that they would be involved in crime, or even terrorism.

However, from August 15th to August 31st, 2021, NATO countries operated an international air corridor out of Kabul airport and 114,000 people were successfully evacuated on this route. The largest number were evacuated by the United States, but there were also major airlifts conducted by NATO allies.³³¹

Their best remaining hope is resettlement in Europe, the Americas, or Australia.³³²

Indeed, the concept of resettlement became an important aspect of each state's foreign policy because it is about the selection and transfer of refugees to a state that has agreed to admit them and provide them with permanent residence status. Countries in favour of this approach have regular refugee resettlement programs, targeted as refugees in third countries, and agree to consider a certain number of submissions by UNHCR³³³ each year. Twenty-seven countries ran resettlement programs with UNHCR in 2019, of whom the largest were the United States, Canada, and United

³²⁹ The Gurkha guards who have operated the British embassy gate, for example, make it to the perimeter, through all the checkpoints but are turned away on the grounds that they do not have the correct signatures. They were technically employed as private subcontractors, not direct employees, and do not qualify for any existing scheme, although they have protected the embassy for ten years. The same goes for the Afghan interior minister who led the security campaign against the Taliban, who are searching for him.

³³⁰ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition – Atlantic Council*, pag. 10.

³³¹ S. Gorman, *Last of San Diego-Area Students Stranded in Afghanistan Make It Out*, Reuters, November 3, 2021, and D. Milliken, *Last UK Military Flight Leaves Afghanistan After Evacuating 15,000 People*, Reuters, August 30, 2021.

³³² This is because after August 31, Afghans were restricted to leaving the country, either by crossing a land border or by boarding irregular civilian flights from the airport. Both routes are difficult since neighbouring countries have largely closed their land borders to Afghans, and it is not possible to board a civilian flight without a valid visa and passport. Most Afghans who were not able to leave before August 30 therefore remain trapped in the country. A. Siddique, *No Reason To Stay: Taliban Repression, Economic Collapse Accelerate Exodus from Afghanistan*, Gandhara, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Reporting on Afghanistan, December 2, 2021.

³³³ The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.

Kingdom.³³⁴

Refugees who take the resettlement route must have registered as a refugee with the UNHCR and undergone the Refugee Status Determination process,³³⁵ based on the 1951 Refugee Convention for refugee definition. Background checks are conducted on applicants and biometrics are taken.³³⁶

If the individual agrees to be resettled and if they are identified as being at a prominent level of risk and vulnerability by UNHCR or other organizations, they are suggested by those organizations to one of the suitable countries that run resettlement programs.³³⁷

Finally, this proposal focuses initially on screening and selecting vulnerable Afghans in Afghanistan itself or in neighbouring countries and then transporting them directly to receiving states.

Following the objective of this first section, the focus will be now on the behaviour adopted by Europe and United States on the theme of refugees and resettlement. In fact, the United States remains a signatory of the 1967 Refugee Protocol, but the law at that time restricted refugee admissions. The Refugee Act³³⁸, garnering unanimous support in the Senate, was passed by Congress in 1980 and signed into law by President Jimmy Carter. It raised the annual ceiling for refugees and created a process for reviewing and adjusting the refugee ceiling to meet emergencies and required annual consultation between Congress and the president.³³⁹ However, the act altered the definition of refugee, into “*person with a well-founded fear of persecution*”³⁴⁰; a standard established by United Nations conventions and protocols, and funded a new Office of US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and an Office of Refugee Resettlement and built on already existing public-private partnerships that helped refugees settle and adjust to life in their new country.³⁴¹ Nevertheless, the political pressure over many decades has resulted in a lowering of the

³³⁴ Resettlement Data Finder, UNHCR.

³³⁵ Refugee Status Determination, or RSD, is the legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional, or national law.

³³⁶ *In-Country Refugee Processing: In Brief*, Congressional Research Service, May 7, 2015.

³³⁷ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition* – Atlantic Council, pag. 12.

³³⁸ President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Refugee Act of 1980. The statute became the basis for successful resettlement of more than 3 million refugees from distant countries to the United States—a significant humanitarian achievement, and one from which our economy, culture and even cuisine have benefited. Resettlement has also helped resolve or ameliorate foreign policy crises. Moreover, the act reshaped and clarified the U.S. framework for political asylum.

³³⁹ States Parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol: and Refugee Act of 1980, Refugee Act of 1980, Pub. L. 96-212, 94 Stat. 102 (1980).

³⁴⁰ *It will be analysed on paragraph 1.2 of subchapter II.*

³⁴¹ Refugee Act of 1980, National Archives Foundation.

maximum resettlement limit. The 1980 maximum resettlement limit was 231,700,³⁴² while under the Obama administration, the limit had fallen to 80,000 a year³⁴³ and under Trump administration, the annual presidential determination of maximum resettlements fell to 30,000 in 2019 and then 18,000 in 2020.³⁴⁴ Therefore, only 11,814 refugees were resettled in the United States in the 2020 fiscal year. Unfortunately, global resettlement spaces went down by 50 percent between 2016 and 2019. In the period, the number of people who received protection worldwide, following a refugee status determination process, dropped from 900,000 to 530,000. The UNHCR has experienced the lowest number of refugee resettlements in almost twenty years; out of 1.44 million refugees in urgent need of resettlement globally only 22,770 were resettled through the agency.³⁴⁵

Keeping the attention on the Afghan ground, the United States has resettled more Afghan refugees since August 2021 than any other state.³⁴⁶

³⁴² States Parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol; Refugee Act of 1980, Pub. L. 96-212, 94 Stat. 102 (1980); J. Ollis, *An Examination of the Global Refugee Crisis: How Have We Hurt? How Can We Help? With Special Emphasis on Enhancing Resilience in the Somali Population Resettled in Columbus, Ohio*, (Doctor of Ministry diss., Portland Seminary, George Fox University, February 2020), pag. 12-14.

³⁴³ Pew Research Center: “U.S. on Track to Reach Obama administration’s goal of resettling 110,000 refugees this year”, 2021.

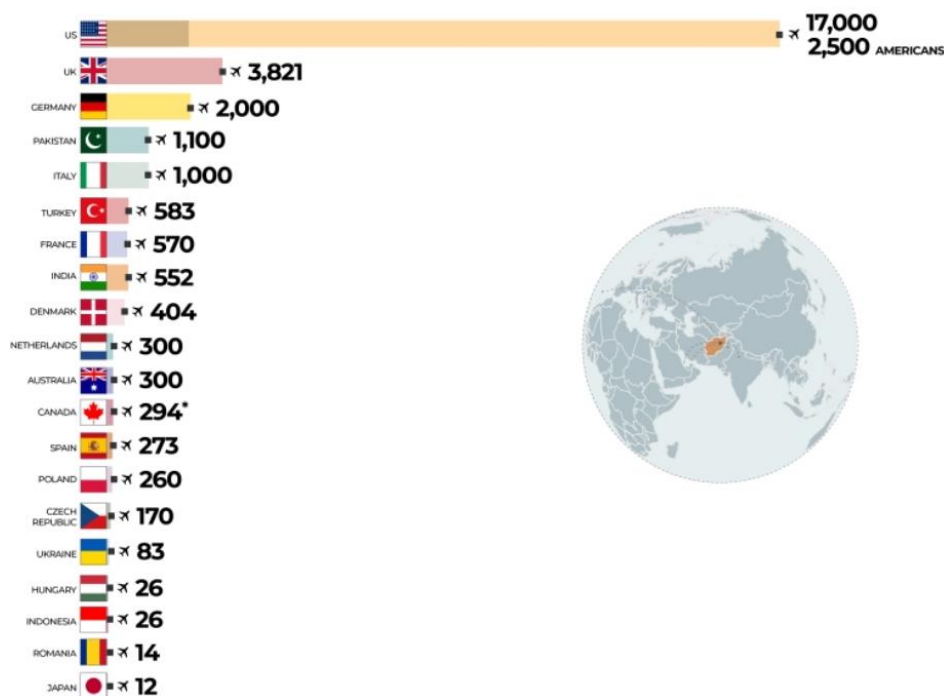
³⁴⁴ Moreover, the Trump administration also developed a reputation for increasingly strict and often inhumane measures against asylum seekers. Syrian refugees were banned from settling in the United States indefinitely and all refugee arrivals were stopped for 120 days after a ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, which was referred to as a ban on “Muslim” immigration by the American Civil Liberties Union: Timeline on the Muslim Ban, February 10, 2020.

³⁴⁵ *The International Rescue Committee*, Written Statement for the Record, Submitted to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship Hearing on the Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program, February 27, 2020.

³⁴⁶ Department of Homeland Security Operation Allies Welcome Afghan Evacuee Report, Fiscal Year 2022 Report to Congress, 2 (December 2021). This group included US citizens and Afghans entitled to SIVs. Also included were many who had managed to fight their way into the airport and were evacuated without any clear process to determine their eligibility. It is estimated that approximately 250,000 Afghans eligible for US visas remain trapped inside Afghanistan: L. Leatherby and L. Buchanan, *at least 250,000 Afghans Who Worked with U.S. Haven’t Been Evacuated, Estimates Say*, New York Times, August 25, 2021.

Evacuees from Kabul airport

A week after the Taliban takeover, at least 28,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan, but tens of thousands more are still waiting.



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Moreover, at the time of the fall of Kabul, there were two formal visa routes available to Afghans seeking to enter the United States. *Special immigrant visas* (SIVs) could be obtained by Afghans who had worked with US troops which applied to an estimated 50,000 people. Others are assessed in line with three priority levels for refugee resettlement: the priority level (P1) is for individual cases in which resettlement was urgently needed, P2 is for groups of humanitarian concern, and P3 for family members of already-resettled refugees. In early August, P2 entitlement was offered to Afghans who had worked directly for the US government or as direct contractors for US government-funded programs.³⁴⁸ This extended entitlement to an estimated additional 200,000 Afghans, but many other vulnerable Afghans, such as female judges or senior members of the former Afghan government, appeared to have struggled to qualify for any of these schemes.³⁴⁹

By early September 24,000 of the evacuees had already arrived in the United States, and by mid-September, the number of Afghan refugees in the United States increased to 37,000 people.³⁵⁰

Finally, the US government appears to be proceeding to assist most of these individuals to enter

³⁴⁷ *Infographic: How many people evacuated from Afghanistan so far?* Al Jazeera, Reuters, AFP, Local Media – August 22, 2021, GMT: 13:20.

³⁴⁸ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition*, pag 23.

³⁴⁹ T. Hesson, *Explainer: Who Are the Afghan Refugees Coming to the U.S. and What Happens When They Arrive?* pag 10.

³⁵⁰ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugee Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition*, pag 24.

the United States under the humanitarian parole process, which is faster than the regular refugee resettlement process.³⁵¹ Currently, the White House has proposed easing green card applications for Afghan refugees, as part of a larger request to Congress for \$6.4 billion in funding for the Afghan refugee resettlement process, but this is not yet in place.³⁵² Despite the fact that resettlement agencies are now overwhelmed by the surge of Afghan refugee requests, President Biden announced that the refugee resettlement limit would be increased from 62,500 to 125,000 for that year, in line with a campaign pledge.³⁵³ In other words, US resettlement policy, should be analysed as a foreign policy, taking into account strategic interests, geopolitical alliances, and regional dynamics.³⁵⁴

For what Europe concerns, the numbers of refugees who entered the European Union reached an all-time high in 2015 and 2016 and have remained elevated ever since. Currently, Europe is dealing with one of the largest refugees' crises since World War II. In fact, in 2015 EU member states received over 1.3 million applications for international protection,³⁵⁵ affecting other European countries because many of them have been reluctant to take the refugees in and provide them with shelter, safety, employment, education, and permanent residence. In fact, governments, the news industry, and public opinion in Europe have been increasingly preoccupied with refugees seeking access to it. Several studies reveal an increase in negative attitudes toward refugees in EU countries³⁵⁶ while such attitudes were relatively favourable at the start of the crisis, but then they grew more negative with increased numbers, demands for increased resources to assist the refugees, and increased perceived threats to the destination countries' way of life and economic prosperity.³⁵⁷ The literature on surveys of attitudes toward refugees tends to demonstrate that individual-level variables are the most important factors explaining negative or positive reception of refugees.³⁵⁸ The political attitude toward refugees in these countries is mostly characterized by concerns for solidarity and responsibility and can be summarized by German chancellor Angela Merkel's words:

³⁵¹ M. Hackman, *Afghan Refugees in the U.S.: How They're Vetted, Where They're Going and How to Help*, Wall Street Journal, September 15, 2021; J. Donati, *Majority of Interpreters, Other U.S. Visa Applicants Were Left Behind in Afghanistan*, Wall Street Journal, September 1, 2021 and *The Evacuation of Afghan Refugees Is Over. Now What?*; Department of Homeland Security Operation.

³⁵² M. Hackman and S. Hughes, *Biden Administration Seeks New Law to Ease Afghan Refugees' Path to Green Cards*, Wall Street Journal, September 8, 2021.

³⁵³ J. Donati and M. Hackman, *Afghan Refugees Can Be Sponsored*, Wall Street Journal.

³⁵⁴ N. R. Micinski, *Refugee Policy as Foreign Policy: Iraqi and Afghan Refugees Resettlements to the United States*, pag. 3.

³⁵⁵ Eurostat 2018.

³⁵⁶ D. De Coninck, K. Matthijs, M. Debrael, L. d'Haenens, *Unpacking attitudes on immigrants and refugees: A four-country comparison*, pag. 17.

³⁵⁷ L. d'Haenens, W. Joris and F. Heinderyckx, *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, pag. 12.

³⁵⁸ D. De Coninck et al, *Migrant categorizations and European public opinion: Diverging attitudes towards immigrants and refugees*, pag. 22.

“*Wir schaffen das!*” (We can do this!). Despite taking in and retaining few refugees, Portugal might be described as even more liberal, as its government has actively tried to attract more refugees.

This political attitude is in strong contrast with that of the Italian, Hungarian, Austrian, and Greek governments, for instance, who have attempted to cut down the numbers of asylum seekers flocking to their countries through measures such as the creation of hundreds of kilometres of fences on the EU’s external frontiers, between Greece and Turkey or Hungary and Serbia, making it more difficult for asylum seekers to reach a safe haven and strengthening the notion of a Fortress Europe.³⁵⁹ In other words, the refugee crisis has strongly divided the European member states, leading to a political crisis.³⁶⁰

However, the interesting aspect is that some members had deployed their troops to Afghanistan to evacuate large numbers of people from Kabul in the last two weeks of August. Indeed, Germany evacuated 5,347 (including 4,100 Afghans); Italy, 5,011 (including 4,890 Afghan nationals); France, more than 3,000 (including 2,600 Afghans); the Netherlands, 2,500; and Spain, 1,898 Afghans. Sweden, Belgium, Poland, and Denmark each evacuated between 900 and 1,400 people.

Based on the above tallies and the smaller numbers of people evacuated by other EU member states, 22,000 Afghans were evacuated to the European Union.³⁶¹

In December 2021, fifteen EU member states agreed to take in 40,000 Afghans for resettlement, with Germany taking 25,000, the Netherlands accepting 3,159, and Spain and France each committing to take 2,500.³⁶² The extraordinary range of countries willing to host Afghans temporarily or permanently after the fall of Kabul illustrates the breadth of global concern about this plight and the willingness of politicians to make public gestures of support.³⁶³

Recipient countries also proved far more resilient and adaptable in processing Afghan refugees; indeed, President Biden’s election has ushered in a more moderate US position on refugees and asylum, including lifting the annual refugee resettlement ceiling from 17,000 to 125,000. The new German coalition has committed to resettlement of 25,000 Afghans. The UK, Canada, and Australia have announced that they are willing to take more Afghans, in addition to those already evacuated

³⁵⁹ L. D’Haenens, W. Joris and F. Heinderyckx, *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, pag. 23.

³⁶⁰ This is related to the election victories of nationalist and populist parties, who used the refugee crisis to their advantage. In Germany, for instance, the far-right AFD (Alternative für Deutschland) grew rapidly on the strength of its anti-refugee rhetoric, and so did the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, forcing governments to alter their liberal course and move to the right, which in practice mostly meant limiting the numbers of refugees being admitted.

³⁶¹ *Factbox: Evacuations from Afghanistan by Country*, Reuters, August 30, 2021; P. Shankar, *EU, fearful of refugee crisis, delays response on Afghan asylum*, Al Jazeera, October 15, 2021.

³⁶² Agence France-Presse, *EU Countries Agree to Take in 40,000 Afghan Refugees*, Al Jazeera, December 9, 2021.

³⁶³ D. Raab, *Afghanistan debate in the House of Commons – Statement on the situation of Afghanistan*, August 18th, 2021, Foreign Secretary’s closing statement.

from their homeland.³⁶⁴ The international refugee coalition continues, therefore, to be dominated by Europe and North America. Moreover, the Afghan crisis presents a rare opportunity for key states leadership, especially for the United States and its allies to demonstrate that they are serious about the international cooperation, particularly among democracies. For Australia and Britain, it would be a chance to demonstrate that orderly resettlement can be a central and humane ingredient in a broader refugee policy, and to demonstrate their commitment to liberal humanitarian values.

For many EU states, it would be a chance to demonstrate European values after the 2015 refugee crisis.³⁶⁵

Finally, the aim of the international coalition should be to provide a rapid, predictable, and consistent response to refugee resettlement. Members of this coalition should at least include the twenty-seven countries that are already actively resettling refugees processed by UNHCR.³⁶⁶ It should begin by addressing the Afghan crisis, but then use this to build a broader resettlement strategy for vulnerable people at risk of persecution in other states that could be applied to other crises in the future.

The Taliban government, at least at a central level, is currently willing to allow persecuted groups and political opponents to leave, meanwhile there are many factions within the Taliban system that seek to detain members of the former government. In addition, there are terrorists who are already targeting some of the vulnerable groups.³⁶⁷ In other words, there are a few current obstacles to processing Afghans inside Afghanistan; only a minority of potential refugees will ever be able to leave the country in which they live, and currently, international actors have frozen or cut funding to Afghanistan. Furthermore, some countries, including the United States, only consider asylum seekers to be refugees once they have left their country of origin, meaning that the legal definition of refugee would need to be amended for them to receive refugee status without leaving their country of origin.

These are serious issues, but a humane and practical international response to the Afghan refugee crisis would allow us to revive the values, which formed the multilateral system in the wake of the horrors of World War II. It is also a chance to save and transform, now and in the future, the lives of hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable people on earth.

There are not simple solutions because this subject is a complex matter, and it cannot be met

³⁶⁴ P. Taylor, *Has Europe reached Peak Polulism?* – Politico, Semptember 5 th , 2019; J.Dickson, *German Leaders Offer*

Mixed Messaging on Afghan Refugees Following Taliban Takeover – Globe and Mail, Semptember 2 2021.

³⁶⁵ R. Stewart, *The Afghan Refugees Crisis: How to Resurrect the Global Refugee Resettlement Coalition*, pag. 31.

³⁶⁶ *Resettlement Data Finder*.

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*,

with coldly 'rational' decisions. The actors in this complex interplay are not only the people on the move, governments, and NGOs, but also often ruthless refugee smugglers. Therefore, solutions will need to be creative and multifaceted.³⁶⁸

1.1 The Geneva Convention

The Geneva Convention of 1951 represents the first document that, on an international scale, addressed the issue of refugees related to the attribution of refugee status and the rights and obligations that arise from that legal status.³⁶⁹

Divided into 7 chapters with a total of 46 articles, a 6-paragraph Preamble on the need to "*revise and codify previous international agreements relating to the status of refugees and to extend the application of these instruments and the protection they afford by means of a new agreement*" supplemented by a *Final Act* and divided into 4 parts with recommendations to States parties, the 1951 Geneva Convention was able to adapt to changing situations.

However, challenges persist that undermine its implementation in contemporary reality. One of the first is what is called '*the challenge of enforceability*'; posed by Hathaway and that is the actual enforcement of international refugee law because, although it is the UNCHR that enjoys the role of overseer of the Convention, it is also true that there is an absence of formal mechanisms that adequately respond to cases of violation. Despite this, the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees represents a fixed point from which not to retreat.

Three phases can be distinguished that led to the drafting of the Convention of 1951: the legal phase (1920-1935), which had the task of systematising the matter at international level providing refugees with passport-like certification; the so-called social phase (1922-1935) through which international agreements focus on socio-political aspects, and finally the phase defined as individualistic because it does not recognise the refugee as part of a group, a victim of discrimination, but as an individual person fleeing from situations of injustice and incompatibility with their own state.³⁷⁰ In other words, The 1951 Geneva Convention was born out of the need to protect the refugee and to create a legal framework of security for him or her in which to obtain

³⁶⁸ L. D'Haenens, W. Joris, F. Heinderyckx, *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe – Media representation, Public Opinion, and Refugee's Experiences*, pag. 9.

³⁶⁹ Prior to the 1951 Convention, there were a series of international agreements made under the watchful eye of the League of Nations which, also because of war conflicts of particular importance and severity, prepared ad hoc regulations for the protection of refugees; victims of such conflicts. We speak of the 1921 agreement concerning the Russian refugees, those of 1924, 1926 and 1928 in favour of Armenian, Assyrian, Assyro Caldesian, Ruthenian, Montenegrin refugees, Jews, and Turks, as well as those adopted under the supervision of the League of Nations in 1933 aimed at refugees from Spain and of 1938 for all those fleeing Germany and Austria because of the Nazis.

³⁷⁰ Hathaway J., *The Law of Refugee Status*, Butterworths, Toronto, 1991. Pag.4: "*refugee status is a means of facilitating international travel for those who aspire to personal freedom.*"

asylum, especially in a troubled and difficult post-war period.³⁷¹ In fact, the first years after the Second World War were characterised by the exodus of millions of displaced persons and refugees forced to flee for political reasons or to avoid being pawns of the sovereignty of the victorious states.

Indeed, the geopolitical, legal, and social consequences caused by dictatorships and wars led to the convening of the International Conference Convention of 28 July 1951 that concluded with the opening of the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Over a period of three weeks, a group of delegates at the United Nations European Office arrived at the drafting of a bill of rights that was to become the instrument for identifying the prerequisites for granting refugee status through the inclusion clauses (the criteria a person must fulfil); cessation clauses (circumstances in which a refugee ceases to be a refugee); and exclusion clauses (situations in which a person is excluded from the application of the Convention). The elaboration also provided for the forms of legal protection, assistance, and social rights that states parties to the document are obliged to guarantee.³⁷² It came into being, therefore, to give a more stable legal status to all those foreigners or stateless persons, displaced persons or fugitives who feared to return home after the political, ethnic, and territorial upheavals following the Second World War and prior to the Cold War.

The year 1951 marked an important turning point in the issue of protection and assistance provided and granted to refugees: firstly, there was the adoption of the Geneva Convention on the Status of universal status of refugees, and secondly the creation of a supranational creation of a supranational body with the purpose of monitoring the application of this Convention by all States parties and to guarantee protection and international assistance to refugees, as well as the UNHCR.

Although it is still the most important legal instrument for the protection of refugees at the universal level, the 1951 Geneva Convention has some provisions that restrict its scope and raise some doubts about its adaptability.

Two limitations placed on the Geneva Convention are recognized in Article 1. The first limitation is

temporal since the definition of refugee is referred only to those who have suffered persecution: “*because of events before January 1, 1951*”³⁷³; Indeed, the Geneva Convention is adopted in a particular historical period, namely between the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War with the aim of giving protection at the international level to all those involved in the dramatic events of

³⁷¹ S. Masiello, *Punti di fuga: prospettive sociologiche sul diritto di asilo e i rifugiati in Italia*, pag. 14.

³⁷² A. Basu, R. Chaudhury, *Understanding the Relevance of the 1951 Convention*, New Delhi: ORF and Global Policy Journal, 2022.

³⁷³ Article 1, paragraph A, subsection 2.

those years. It can be evinced, therefore, that it does not propose itself as an instrument for the protection of refugees on a global scale world, nor does it offer a valid definition of persecution that can be extended to other historical periods.

The second, is a geographical limitation with reference to the phrase “*may be considered events prior to January 1, 1951, only those events that occurred before January 1, 1951, in Europe*”³⁷⁴; This, leaves it up to the states to decide whether to join the Convention, unlike the first. Consequently, the New York Protocol was adopted on January 31, 1967, by the UN General Assembly to remedy the above restrictions. Unfortunately, only the temporal one was partially overcome, unlike the geographical one for which one must wait for the major change in the international scenario that affected the whole of Europe; that is, the one that took place immediately after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In fact, the geographic limitation was resolved only at the end of 1989 with Decree Law 416 of December 30, 1990, later converted into the law that is more commonly known as the *Martelli Law*.³⁷⁵

Because of the changes it made, the Geneva Convention acquired a refugee protection function *vis-à-vis* all those situations and events that prompt individuals to seek international protection. The Convention thus retained its title as the first international agreement containing a general definition of those considered refugees; a definition characterized by a global uniformity that makes it possible to apply the term refugee to each of the countries of the world.

1.2 The notion of ‘refugee’

‘Refugee’ is one of the most important statuses a foreigner can enjoy; its prerequisite is a well-founded fear of individual persecution of the foreigner in his own country. The recognition of this status corresponds to a set of rights and duties granted to the person by each state where the Convention signed in Geneva on 28 July 1951 is in force. It provides for the notion of refugee, the rights and duties that derive from the recognition of the legal status, as well as the obligations assumed by the contracting states. Its norms, authoritative but not binding, respond to the need to define individuals deserving of guardianship and protection. They are identified by Article 1(A)(2) of the Geneva Convention, according to which a person is considered a refugee if “*as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951, having reason to fear being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or because of his political views, is*

³⁷⁴ Article 1, paragraph B, subsection 1.

³⁷⁵ Petrovic N., *Rifugiati, profughi, sfollati. Breve storia del diritto di asilo in Italia dalla Costituzione ad oggi*. Pag. 22-23- 24-25. Franco Angeli editore, Milano 2011.

outside the country of which he is a national and is unable or unwilling to nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling, owing to this fear, to avail himself of the protection of this country, or who, not having citizenship and being outside the country in which he was habitually resident as a result of such events he cannot or does not wish to return to it because of the fear referred to above”.

It should be stressed that the recognition of status is not constitutive, but merely declaratory, since an individual becomes a refugee when he or she meets the conditions set out in the article. The basic requirements³⁷⁶ of this definition are that the person is outside the country of his or her nationality, or in which he or she used to reside, has a well-founded fear of persecution³⁷⁷; on grounds of race; religion; nationality membership of a particular social group; political opinion.

The 1951 Geneva Convention has been supplemented with some more objective considerations presented, respectively, by the Convention of the Organisation of African Unity of 1969 which defined a refugee as *"any person who is forced to leave his or her country of origin by reason of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or serious disturbance of the law and order, in whole or in part, in the country of origin or nationality"* and the Cartagena Declaration of 1984 which added an even more objective consideration to the definition of a refugee found in the 1951 Geneva Convention: *"Refugees are persons who flee from their countries because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflict, massive human rights violations or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order"*.

In conclusion, we can argue that although the Geneva Convention represented an important turning point in the international field thanks to the clarifications on the refugee figure, it is unclear on the issue of its protection as binding on the exercise of the sovereignty of individual states. In fact, the Geneva Convention limits itself to establishing the treatment and level of protection of the refugee by the state that has decided to receive him or her on its territory, even though it is not bound to the reception itself.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees HCR/IP/4/Eng/REV.1 Reedited, Geneva, January 1992, UNHCR 1979.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*,

³⁷⁸ A. Basu, R. Chaudhury, Revisiting the 1951 Refugee Convention: Exploring Global Perspectives, Global Policy, GP-ORF Series, New Delhi: ORF and Global Policy Journal, 2022.

1.3 The categories excluded by the definition of 'refugee'

As previously confirmed, the 1951 Geneva Convention defines the term *refugee* who flees his or her country of origin, having a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group nationality, or political opinion and who, because of this, seeks international protection in a different State.³⁷⁹ One of the key aspects of the Geneva Convention is the element of well-founded fear, which is based on a subjective factor arising from the asylum seeker's state of mind to seek international protection and takes into account his personal circumstances, personality and the events that marked him. Furthermore, to assess the well-founded fear of persecution, it is necessary to verify the trustworthiness of the subject, which must generally be demonstrated by his or her personal experience. The second factor is the objective one, which is given, instead, by external elements; that is, elements that create in the individual the fear of being persecuted even by the situation in his or her own country. In other words, for the purposes of assessment of the objective element of a well-founded fear of persecution, facts are necessary that concerning the country of origin at the time the application for international protection is made international protection, the statements of the person concerned, and the documentation provided.³⁸⁰

These reasons lead the individual to apply for international protection for which refugees are fleeing can be attributed directly or indirectly to the country of origin because, if they are fleeing because of events not caused by the state itself or its agents, the application for international protection cannot be recognised, let alone applied for. As a result, this Convention identifies two categories of persons excluded from the concept of refugee: economic migrants and environmental migrants. Regarding the latter, it is argued that: *"by including in its operative provisions the requirement that a refugee fear prosecution, the Convention limits its humanitarian scope and does not afford universal protection to asylum seekers. No matter how devastating may be epidemic, natural disaster or famine, a person fleeing them is not a refugee within the terms of the Convention. And by incorporating the five Convention reasons the Convention plainly contemplates that there will even be persons fearing persecution who will not be able to gain asylum as refugees."*³⁸¹

The above states that environmental migrants are excluded from the international protection offered by the 1951 Geneva Convention because they cannot return to their homelands because they

³⁷⁹ Art. 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

³⁸⁰ Article 8(3) of Legislative Decree 25/2008, according to which *'each application shall be examined in the light of accurate and up-to-date information on the general situation prevailing in the applicant's country of origin'*.

³⁸¹ High Court of Australia, Minister for Immigration & Ethnic Affairs, 24 February 1997.

come from countries subject to climate, or environmental, change. Environmental migrants are therefore forced to expatriate, they can apply for international protection, but it is certain that this will be denied to them because it is not expressly provided for in Geneva Convention. Only recently has the issue of environmental migrants touched the heart of the international community and above all the United Nations, through a historic ruling³⁸², demonstrated its interest in clarifying a fundamental point in international law and climate refugees. The events of 2013, when Ioane Teiota, a man originally from the island of Kiribati, sought protection from the New Zealand government as he was forced to leave his country due to rising sea levels brought on by global warming, represent an important turning point that must be given attention to be understood. Teiota relocated to New Zealand with his entire family to receive protection from the Tribunal; but, in 2015, the Tribunal decided to send him back to his place of origin. The man's application for refugee status might be a ground-breaking development in international law, but the appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee was also rejected.³⁸³

This choice was made considering the Committee's forecast that, within ten years or so, the Republic of Kiribati will take steps to preserve the entire nation and facilitate population relocation where feasible with the help of the international community.

Only a few years later, the United Nations Climate Change Conference convened with the finding of an actual sea level rise for countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean, recognising the not future, but imminent damage that the Republic of Kiribati had been fighting against for some time, and a violation of the inhabitants' right to life since they were not allowed access to sources of drinking water due to seawater seepage.³⁸⁴ In other words, the ruling recognises the extreme risk posed by the possibility that water could flood an entire country and that this could translate into an outright violation of the right to life. Teiota did not become the world's first climate refugee, but nevertheless, the Committee's decision recognised the existence of climate refugees and the fact that their lives are in danger; a debate still open among academics and policy makers. The sentence confirms the fact that if there is an immediate threat to life because of climate change, and if the

³⁸² Decision CCPR/C/127/D/2728/2016.

³⁸³ Para. 2.8 of the judgment *"after further examination, the Tribunal concluded that the author did not objectively face a real risk of being persecuted if returned to Kiribati. There was no evidence that he faced a real possibility of suffering serious bodily harm because of violence related to housing/land/property disputes in the future. He would be able to find land to provide housing for himself and his family. Furthermore, there was no evidence to support his claim that he was unable to grow food or obtain potable water. There was no evidence that he did not have access to drinking water, or that the environmental conditions he faced or would face on his return were so dangerous that his life would be endangered. For these reasons, he was not a 'refugee' as defined by the Refugee Convention."*

³⁸⁴ Para. 8.6: *"since the information the author has submitted to the national authorities and in his communication, the Committee considers that the author has sufficiently demonstrated, for the purposes of admissibility, that due to the due to the impact of climate change and associated sea-level rise on the habitability of the Republic of Kiribati and on the security situation in the islands, he has faced the decision of the State party to remove him to the Republic of Kiribati a real risk of compromising his right to life."*

individual crosses the border of another country to seek international protection, he or she should not be rejected because, otherwise, the State of destination could run the risk of compromising the life and liberty of the individual.³⁸⁵

Although the UN ruling represents an important first step in international law today, it does not open the door to waves of climate refugees. It is not binding, but nevertheless warns governments around the world that climate change will have an increasing impact, even if the recognition of environmental refugees and their application for protection are still subject to refusal.

Another case for which it is impossible to recognise international protection is the category of economic migrants; that is, individuals who are not forced to expatriate for political reasons or because of natural disasters but do so voluntarily in order to find better living conditions.³⁸⁶ Following this definition, one cannot speak of a refugee at all because in this sense, the economic migrant has the possibility of choosing the country of destination and therefore, since he or she does not meet the criteria for refugee status, does not benefit from international protection.

These are situations where the environmental conditions of a given country, or an individual's desire to improve his or her standard of living, are not sufficient for the international protection offered by the Geneva Convention to be recognized and applied, since neither nor environmental migrants are among those categories of persons who, being able to meet the criteria of *Article 1, section A, paragraph 2*, are considered *refugees*.

1.4 The five objective reasons for persecution

Before mentioning and analysing the five objective grounds of persecution, it is important to clarify that there is no universally accepted definition of persecution, as the 1951 Geneva Convention does not define the term, but Article 1, Section A, paragraph 2, and Article 33 inherent to the *principle of non-refoulement*. This leads to the conclusion that a threat to an individual's right to life or personal liberty on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion may always qualify as persecution.³⁸⁷ These just mentioned represent the five objective grounds for persecution.

Regarding persecution on the grounds of race, one must first rely on the definition given by the

³⁸⁵ Para 9.3: "*the obligation not to extradite, expel or otherwise transfer under Article 6 of the Covenant may be broader than the principle of non-refoulement under international refugee law, as it may also require the protection of aliens who are not entitled to refugee status. Therefore, parties of states must allow all asylum seekers who claim a real risk of violation of their right to life in the State of origin access to refugee or other group or individualised status determination procedures which could offer them protection against refoulement.*"

³⁸⁶ F. Castelli, *Drivers on Migration: why do people move?* – Journal of Travel Medicine, Vol. 25, Issue 1, 2008.

³⁸⁷ UNHCR, *Handbook*, par. 51-65.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of racial discrimination, which defines discrimination based on race as “*any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.*”³⁸⁸

In the context of international refugee law, race must be understood in the broadest sense, referring to any type of ethnic group to which the term is referred to in common everyday language.³⁸⁹ Persecution on the grounds of race, however, is considered obsolete, little present in practice and only rarely invoked because it is absorbed mainly by the objective grounds of religion and public opinion. In fact, unlike racial ones, religious reasons occupy an important space in the practice; today, freedom of religion is one of the fundamental rights and persecution can be invoked when disturbing anyone who is professing or wishes to profess their religion either privately or publicly in communities.³⁹⁰ Persecution is not considered to be when an attempt is made to set limits and/or prevent incentives to violence, ritual murders or the commission of crimes.³⁹¹ Persecution on religious grounds also involves forced conversion, coercion to practise or conform to religious beliefs, and discriminatory acts.³⁹² Another important note is about the so-called *conscientious objectors*; people who, because of their religion, are forced to refuse military service because it is against their beliefs. In this case, it is necessary to prove that you run the risk of being persecuted if you want to be recognised as an asylum seeker. But according to the UNHCR, even general laws concerning military service can also constitute grounds for persecution, especially when this discriminatory manner, or when they impose disproportionate punishments, or when they impose the performance of military service on certain persons (or conversely, when these do not include other categories of individuals).³⁹³

Coinciding with the concept of race³⁹⁴ when referring to belonging to a particular ethnic or linguistic group is the term *nationality* and the *UNHCR Handbook* specifies that it should not only be understood as citizenship, but also as belonging to an ethnic or linguistic group.

About nationality, the act of persecution can be invoked when such persons claim to be at risk of abuse because they have been denied citizenship in their own country, or when within a state previously made up of sovereign territories, there are human rights violations related to anyone who

³⁸⁸ Art. 1(1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965.

³⁸⁹ UNCHR, *Handbook*, par. 68.

³⁹⁰ *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, Proclaimed by General Assembly - Resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981.

³⁹¹ UNHRC, *Guidelines on International Protection* par. 15.

³⁹² *Guidelines on International Protection: Religion-Based Refugees Claims under Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.*

³⁹³ V. Chetail, *Are Refugee Rights Human Rights? An Unorthodox Questioning of the Relations between Refugee Law and Human Rights Law*, Oxford University Press, 30 January 2014.

³⁹⁴ Occasionally, membership of an ethnic or linguistic group may overlap with the concept of race. See *UNHCR Handbook*, par. 74.

defines their nationality by remaining loyal to their former state of nationality.³⁹⁵

In relation to the criterion of belonging to a particular social group, the Handbook remains particularly various and, without any doubt, is the one that has left the most room for

interpretations in the spirit of the Geneva Convention. Thanks to it, persecution on the grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and family feud, among others, has been brought within the refugee definition.

It is necessary to understand what is meant by “*a particular social group*”³⁹⁶, first excluding the fact that this can be the object of persecution merely because it is defined as such, even though persecution appears to be the key element to define the visibility of the social group. There are two prevailing legal orientations to define the term 'particular social group': the first uses the criterion of the "protected characteristics"; those that are innate (such as gender or caste), immutable (such as having belonged to an association or a professional class) or inalienable (such as sexual orientation or gender identity).³⁹⁷ This approach leads to identifying a social group through the sharing of a common innate characteristic, a common history or status unchangeable or a characteristic that is fundamental to a person's consciousness, dignity and identity.³⁹⁸ The second criteria used to identify the social group is that of 'social perception', whereby the members of the group share a characteristic that makes it recognisable or distinguishes it from the rest of society, identifying its diversity.³⁹⁹ Often these two approaches converge because groups that share a particular feature are also considered different from the rest of society, creating the risk of gaps in protection. Nevertheless, their alternative use for the purposes of interpreting the inclusion clause in Article 1(A) 2 of the Geneva Convention⁴⁰⁰, could represent a solution, while still maintaining the aim of guaranteeing a form of protection to anyone who runs the risk of irreparable harm in the country of origin. To define the particular social group, the presence of a common element in the group is required, its size being irrelevant⁴⁰¹ because, for example, for the purposes of gender or sex-based

³⁹⁵ E. J. Criddle, E. Fox-Decent, *The Right to Refuge*, Oxford University Press, 18 August 2016.

³⁹⁶ UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection: '*Membership of a particular social group*' in the context of Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (HCR/GIP/02/02, 7 May 2002).

³⁹⁷ C. Danisi, M. Dustin, N. Ferreira, N. Held, *Queering Asylum in Europe – Legal and Social Experiences of Seeking International Protection on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, pag 100.

³⁹⁸ Orientation used in US jurisprudence.

³⁹⁹ UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection: '*Membership of a particular social group*' in the context of Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (HCR/GIP/02/02, 7 May 2002).

⁴⁰⁰ Art. 1 (A) 2: “*owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it*”.

⁴⁰¹ *Summary Conclusions - Membership, Global Consultations on International Protection International*, San Remo Round Table of Experts, 6-8 September 2001, No 4.

forms of persecution, women in a particular country can be considered as a social group.⁴⁰²

Finally, the Geneva Convention also protects freedom of political thought, defining public opinion as the freedom to hold an opinion, thought or conviction on a matter concerning potential persecutors, state and non-state agents and their policies or methods.⁴⁰³ It is possible to assess the existence of the persecution ground related to political opinion

political opinion even when the applicant has committed an act without it being manifestation of a political idea, when the same is in fact judged to be contrary to the ideology, methods or methods or activities of the actor of persecution.⁴⁰⁴

1.5 The reasonable alternative flight and the protection in a place different from the country of origin

For an asylum seeker to qualify as a refugee, it must be established that he/she cannot or will not invoke the protection of the country of origin.⁴⁰⁵ Some countries, however, refer to the possibility of the so-called *internal flight alternative*.⁴⁰⁶ It is used as an additional element in determining refugee status. This concept is not explicitly mentioned among the criteria that are required to be fulfilled to be granted refugee status, as mentioned in Art, section A, paragraph 2, but notwithstanding, the internal flight alternative or relocation can be considered as an aspect of the refugee status determination process⁴⁰⁷, related to the possibility of obtaining protection elsewhere in the country of origin.

The concept of internal flight or relocation alternative refers to a specific area of the country where there is no well-founded fear of persecution and where, given the precise circumstances, the individual can be expected to settle and lead a normal life.⁴⁰⁸

The decision-making authority will have to carry out two types of assessment of the application for international protection international protection having as its object *the criterion of internal flight or relocation alternative*: the first takes into account the importance of the requirement and therefore examines whether there is a place where one can live in safety, accessible and reachable without any danger and above all whether there is the possibility to move legally within one's home

⁴⁰² *Summary Conclusions – Gender Related Persecution*, No. 5.

⁴⁰³ Art. 10(1)(e) of Directive 2004/83/EC, transposed by Art. 8(1)(e) of Legislative Decree 251/2007.

⁴⁰⁴ UNHCR, *Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, April 2009.

⁴⁰⁵ Article 10(A)2 of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

⁴⁰⁶ Introduction to the UNCHR Handbook Guidelines of International Protection: *"Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative"* see Art.1 (A) 2 of the 1951 Geneva Convention and/or the 1967 New York Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Refugee Status. Art.8 of the Qualification Directive; no requirement for transposition into national law.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, Handbook UNCHR, par. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ For issues relating to the burden of proof in establishing these issues, see, *infra*, Section III.A.

state.

If these requirements are not fulfilled, the relevance of the above-mentioned requirement is lost.

It will also assess who the agent of persecution is, both from the moment of leaving the country of origin and from a future perspective. The second, on the other hand, is carried out to affirm the existence of internal flight and it will be the deciding body that will ask whether, from an objective and subjective point of view, it should be reasonably expected that the applicant, given his circumstances, could have moved to a different part of the country without fear of persecution. This is therefore a hypothetical assessment that could also lead to a denial of international protection, using as evaluation criteria certain elements, such as age, gender, health, the existence of particular vulnerabilities, religion, family and personal ties, ethnicity⁴⁰⁹, but also the possibility that he or she may have suffered psychological trauma, the safety of the area identified as an alternative means of escape, the possibility or not of survival and therefore access to basic necessities and economic sustenance present in that area.⁴¹⁰

The assessment criteria prompt a detailed examination of the characteristics of what could be an internal flight zone or internal relocation to provide greater support to the asylum seeker.

In fact, an area where there are insurmountable obstacles that could endanger the individual's life, such as fast-moving war fronts or minefields, will never be considered an internal flight or internal relocation zone. Should the individual have to cross the original air of persecution to reach the 'new' zone, it will never be recognised as an internal flight zone or internal relocation.⁴¹¹

In conclusion, we can state that the question of whether the asylum seeker has an internal flight or internal relocation alternative can, as mentioned above, arise as part of the refugee status determination and its applicability depends on full consideration of all the circumstances of the case and the reasonableness of relocation to another area of the country of origin.⁴¹²

However, in the Afghan case there are still many doubts and questions without reports about what has been said so far. On the one hand, it is accepted that people cannot safely return to their home areas if they are Taliban controlled, on the other refusal letters drafted even as the Taliban began to take cities with ease continue to insist that Kabul is a safe and reasonable internal flight alternative. This viewpoint is clearly now unsustainable. Moreover, the Home Office has not updated its country policy and information note on the security situation since June 2020 and the

⁴⁰⁹ UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection: "*Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative*" within the Context of Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, July, 23, 2003.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibidem*, par. from 6 to 21.

⁴¹¹ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection: "Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative"*, par. 10.

⁴¹² *Summary Conclusions* par. 38.

country guidance is now unrepresentative of the situation on the ground.

What will happen to the thousands of Afghans without documentation and the hundreds of thousands that will now depart Afghanistan? The following paragraph aims to explain the current situation in Afghanistan, analysing the economic roots of the humanitarian crisis to confirm that it is no longer a secure country to live in.

2. *Afghanistan: economic roots of the humanitarian crisis*

*“Afghanistan’s humanitarian crisis is in essence an economic crisis. Afghans see food in the market but lack the cash to buy it. Health workers are ready to save lives but have no salaries or supplies. Billions have been pledged for aid but remain unspent because banks cannot transfer or access funds.”*⁴¹³

US government actions since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, including suspending recognition of Afghanistan’s Central Bank, have cut off the country’s economy from the world and severely curtailed the payment of vital assistance and salaries of millions of teachers, health workers, and other essential workers. These measures, which US officials said, were taken to sever the Taliban’s access to foreign assets, are now directly impairing Afghans’ basic human rights to a livelihood, food, health care, and life itself.⁴¹⁴

Moreover, acute malnutrition is spiking across the country and 95 percent of households have been experiencing insufficient food consumption and food insecurity.⁴¹⁵ At least 55 percent of the population is “*expected to be in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity*” through March 2022, according to the United Nations.⁴¹⁶ Four million people have abandoned their homes in search of food in Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and elsewhere; 7.5 million people inside the country are threatened by famine or severe hunger.⁴¹⁷

“Unaddressed, the current humanitarian crisis could lead to more deaths than twenty years of

⁴¹³ J. Sifton, *Averting Afghanistan’s Economic and Food Crises* – Foreign Policy in Focus – October 21st, 2021.

⁴¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Economic Crisis Underlies Mass Hunger – Governments, Taliban Need to Reach Urgent Agreement on Banking Issue*, August 4th, 2022.

⁴¹⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World – Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 2021.

⁴¹⁶ UN Report written by K.C. Srivatsan, *Nearly 55% of Afghan population expected to face food insecurity from Nov 2021 to Mar 2022*, published on November 7th, 2021.

⁴¹⁷ U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, and the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, *Afghanistan’s Humanitarian Crisis: Is Enough Aid Reaching Afghanistan?* U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 2002.

war.”⁴¹⁸ In support of that, humanitarian organizations have repeatedly issued warnings about the sheer scale of the crisis and how much worse it can get. Indeed, the 82 percent of Afghan families had lost wages since August 2021⁴¹⁹ and almost one in five were sending children to engage in labour, while 7.5 percent stated they were resorted to begging or requesting money or food from charity.⁴²⁰

All Afghans are facing these dangerous hardships, but women, children and the disabled, considered the society’s most vulnerable groups, face greater obstacles in obtaining food, health care, and financial resources. In February 2022, 100 percent of female-headed households are struggling with insufficient food consumption and 85 percent are taking ‘drastic measures’ to obtain food.⁴²¹

In other words, particular concern must be paid to the special nutritional, health, and shelter needs of women and children who will make up the bulk of the refugees. Moreover, the Taliban regime’s legacy of repression towards women makes the issue of women’s right particularly important in Afghanistan. Just as the Taliban’s treatment of women was used as a rallying cry to generate support for the war to unseat the fundamentalist regime, the situation of women and girls is now used widely in mainstream discourse as the principal gauge of the progress of the state-building enterprise.⁴²² Accordingly, it is essential that a security sector reform process target these groups. While President Bush pledged \$320 million⁴²³, the United Nations has said that \$584 million⁴²⁴ will be needed to protect and assist 7.5 million Afghans from now, onwards.

Therefore, a strong U.S. humanitarian response is crucial to provide help to Afghan people to establish a legitimate government and to rebuild the country. At this point, it is important to recall the attempt of President Biden in calling £1 billion long-term economic reconstruction program⁴²⁵ for the region with the aim to restore women rights destroyed by Taliban and to provide secular schools for girls, including the creation of full-scale hospitals and clinics.⁴²⁶

Conversely, the imposition of western conceptions of women’s right in a country resistant to foreign interference would precipitate in a violent backlash. Sadiqa Basiri of the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN), a grass roots Afghan NGO dedicated to the empowerment of Afghan women,

⁴¹⁸ J. Hurley, *Economy in Free Fall: The Afghanistan Crisis*, March 17th, 2022.

⁴¹⁹ *IRC Report*, Kabul, Afghanistan, May 12, 2022.

⁴²⁰ Al-Jazeera, *Afghanistan: Visualising the impact of 20 years of war*, and *UN Report: Operational Situation Report*, 22 April, 2020.

⁴²¹ Amnesty International, *Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls Under Taliban Rule*, pag. 5.

⁴²² M. Sedra, *Confronting Afghanistan’s Security Dilemma – Reforming the Security Sector*, pag. 15.

⁴²³ “*Bush Announces \$320 million for Afghanistan*”, The New York Times, Washington, October 4th, 2001.

⁴²⁴ “*Secretary-General Kofi Annan today launched an appeal for \$584 million aims to provide assistance to some 7.5 million Afghans – both living in their country and seeking shelter in neighbouring States – who are rejected to require outside aid to survive.*” United Nations, 27 September 2001.

⁴²⁵ “*Joe Biden’s \$7 Billion Betrayal of Afghanistan*”, The Washington Post, February 14, 2022.

⁴²⁶ M. Sedra, *Confronting Afghanistan’s Security Dilemma – Reforming the Security Sector*, pag. 50.

affirmed that “*there is no quick fix for the status of women*”, and she also stressed the importance of including the establishment of targeted employment programs for women, the inclusion of more women in the constitutional process, the expansion of educational opportunities for women, the introduction of legal provision guaranteeing women a set number of seats in the government, the expansion of ISAF outside Kabul, and the fulfilment of international aid and pledges.

Since the Taliban have done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people, rather they have shown no desire to provide even the most rudimentary health, education or other social services, the United States, and the European Union, significantly augment their political, military, and economic support to Afghanistan. Indeed, at the January 2002 Tokyo donors conference, US \$5.2 billion was pledged for the reconstruction of the state.⁴²⁷

Afghanistan today is a country in crisis, a crisis that predates the events of September 11 by many years. Three million people have driven from the country and are living as refugees. Another 70,000 are internally displaced. Many thousands more are unable to move due to illness, hunger, injury, or disability. Major drought and the effects of decades of war represent the root causes of Afghans’ loss of access to food, water, shelter, and health care, but economic shocks have been the primary causes of the deteriorating situation. More than four out of five Afghan households have experienced significant decreases or elimination in income.⁴²⁸ At the same time, the country’s overall economy and banking system has been completely incapacitated by decisions by the US and other governments to cut off Afghanistan’s Central Bank, officially the Da Afghanistan Bank, from the international banking system. This has led to a massive liquidity crisis and nationwide shortages of banknotes in both US dollars and the Afghan currency, afghanis.⁴²⁹

Moreover, Afghanistan’s Central Bank, short on banknotes in both US and Afghan currency, has severely restricted transfers of banknotes to private banks and imposed limits on withdrawals of afghanis, while also prohibiting many types of electronic transactions in US dollars. Indeed, private Afghan banks cannot cover withdrawals by depositors, including humanitarian aid organizations, and, when funds are transmitted electronically into banks to pay for humanitarian operations, banks’ lack of physical cash means that funds cannot be withdrawn. Banks are also facing difficulties settling incoming dollar transactions via correspondent accounts at private banks outside the country, most likely due to foreign banks’ fears that they may be violating UN and US sanctions on

⁴²⁷ BBC News: “*Billions pledged in Afghan Aid*”, Monday, 21 January 2002

⁴²⁸ Select Poverty Indicators: Afghanistan – 49,4% (Proportion of Population Living below the National Poverty Line, 2022); 11,7% (Unemployment Rate, by Sex, Total, 2020); 35,4% (Proportion of Employed Population below \$1.90 PPP a Day [Age 15+], Total, 2021); 58 per 1,000 live births (Under-5 Mortality Rate, 2020).

⁴²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis*, March 1, 2022.

the Taliban.⁴³⁰

The combination of factors and decision taken by governments and international institutions, and on a larger level, by the US and the Taliban's failure to reach an agreement to avert the humanitarian impacts of the change in governance in August 2021, it is helpful for us to understand why did the Afghan economy collapse. For instance, Afghanistan's economy before August 2021 was 75 percent dependent on foreign assistance. After the Taliban took control of the country on August 15, 2021, donor governments, led by the US, instructed the World Bank to cut off about \$2 billion in outside international assistance the bank had previously been dispersing through the Afghanistan Reconstructive Trust Fund (ARTF) to pay salaries of millions of teachers, health workers, and other essential workers, and through projects funded by the International Development Association (IDA).⁴³¹ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) was also cut, and, as a direct result, an enormous number of Afghan households immediately lost their primary sources of income.⁴³²

The cuts of World Bank-programs had major impacts on both household and macroeconomic levels, and, even if humanitarian groups are able in the future to increase food and cash distribution, it cannot make up for the impact of these cuts. Moreover, the US, other governments, and the World Bank Group also revoked the credentials of the Afghan Central Bank to interact with the international banking system and international financial institutions (World Bank, IMF, ADB, and others), and many countries' domestic banking systems.

However, in September, December 2021, and February 2022, the US Treasury issued multiple licenses and guidance documents⁴³³ authorizing banks and other entities subject to US law to engage in a range of humanitarian activities and transactions with Afghan government entities necessary or incidental to humanitarian operations or legitimate commercial activities, such as remittances. The UK and several EU governments have issued similar licenses or guidance documents. A US Treasury license and new guidance issued February 25, 2022, technically

⁴³⁰ When the Taliban seized Kabul, wide-ranging sanctions dating back to their first rule followed them. To deny them access to funds, the Biden administration then froze more than \$7 billion in Afghan government reserves held in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

⁴³¹ Data from World Bank, last updated: April 13, 2022.

⁴³² According to a World Food Program survey released in February, four out of five households reported no income or significantly reduced incomes in January 2022: *"In the grip of Hunger: only 5 percent of Afghan families have enough to eat."*

⁴³³ Department of the Treasury, *General License 14 – Authorizing Humanitarian Activities in Afghanistan* (September 24, 2021); *General License 15 - Transactions Related to the Exportation or Reexportation of Agricultural Commodities, Medicine, Medical Devices, Replacement Parts and Components, or Software Updates in Afghanistan* (September 24, 2021); *General License 16 - Authorizing Non-commercial, Personal Remittances to Afghanistan* (December 10, 2021); *General License 17 - Authorizing Official Business of the United States Government* (December 22, 2021); *General License 18 - Authorizing Official Activities of Certain International Organizations and Other International Entities* (December 22, 2021); *General License 19 - Authorizing Certain Transactions in Support of Nongovernmental Organizations' Activities in Afghanistan* (December 22, 2021); *General License 20 - Authorizing Transactions Involving Afghanistan or Governing Institutions in Afghanistan* (February 25, 2022).

authorizes transactions with the Central Bank.⁴³⁴ Finally, many humanitarian agencies operating in Afghanistan through February have been utilizing informal and unregulated money transfer systems, or money exchangers, to move funds into Afghanistan, pay salaries, and obtain cash. These systems, however, impose enormous transactional cost - sometimes over 10 percent - and in any case cannot be scaled up to manage the scope of humanitarian operations that groups are hoping to undertake, which involve hundreds of millions of dollars in cash assistance.

Subsequently, on February 11, 2022, the administration of US President Joe Biden decided to block some of the mentioned reserves⁴³⁵, but did not explain the action publicly in adequate detail.

As a result, several media accounts misleadingly reported⁴³⁶ that the US was dividing Afghanistan's \$7 billion foreign currency reserves in half, with half—\$3.5 billion—set aside in a trust fund for the benefit of the 'Afghan people,' while the other half were being given to the families of victims of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US. This was not accurate. In fact, US law does not allow plaintiffs to obtain a country's central bank assets as damages for a judgment unless the government for which it is a central bank is a "terrorist," "terrorist organization," or a designated "state sponsor of terrorism."⁴³⁷ The state of Afghanistan is not designated as any of these entities. Moreover, the \$3.5 billion that the administration set aside formally belongs to the Afghan Central Bank and technically can be withdrawn at any time and used by the bank for transactions or activities for the "benefit of the Afghan people," providing an accredited official of the bank was recognized by the US as authorized to do so. According to the US Federal Reserve Act, cited by the February 11 license,⁴³⁸ this representative must be someone certified by a person who the US State Department has recognized as an "accredited representative... to the Government of the United States" of "the foreign state."

The US has not recognized any such representative or a bank official credentialed by such a person, so essentially the bank remains cut off from its access to the reserves.

Given the gravity of the crisis in Afghanistan, the existing availability of funds in World Bank

⁴³⁴ Department of the Treasury, *General License 19 - Authorizing Certain Transactions in Support of Nongovernmental Organizations' Activities in Afghanistan* (December 22, 2021); *General License 20 - Authorizing Transactions Involving Afghanistan or Governing Institutions in Afghanistan* (February 25, 2022).

⁴³⁵ See note 432.

⁴³⁶ For instance: VOA news "Biden Keeping Half of Afghanistan's \$7B in Assets for 9/11 victims", February 12, 2022, 5.25 AM; CNN Politics "Biden unfreezes Afghan funds for in-country relief and 9/11 legal fight", February 12, 2022; Al Jazeera "Biden signs order to secure Afghan funds for aid, 9/11 families", February 11, 2022; Atlantic Council "Experts react: Biden Administration decision to split frozen Afghan funds", February 16, 2022.

⁴³⁷ International Court of Justice, *Jurisdictional Immunities of the State (Germany v. Italy; Greece intervening)* (Feb. 3, 2012); Afghanistan Bank Act; Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act of 1976 Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002 U.S. Dep't of State, *State Sponsors of Terrorism: Case 1:03-cv-09848-GBD-SN, Document 617*.

⁴³⁸ "Executive Order to Preserve Certain Afghanistan Central Bank Assets for the People of Afghanistan", February 11, 2022 – Statements and Release.

managed trust funds, and the existence of the \$3.5 billion that is not blocked but remains technically available for withdrawal and restoring the central bank's credentials remain the primary issues that, if resolved, could address many of the economic issues facing the country. In addition, humanitarian assistance programs can help mitigate the severe impacts of Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and bring genuine relief to many people, but they are far from sufficient to overcome its scale and breadth.⁴³⁹

The World Bank is set to release hundreds of millions of dollars more to help support the education and health sectors. Nevertheless, even if billions of dollars more are made available for humanitarian assistance, without a functioning banking system, UN-led humanitarian activities have become exceedingly difficult. In fact, the US Treasury's permissions do not address many other legitimate transactions, or the status of the Central Bank, or its credentials, which is needed for Afghanistan's economy to stabilize.

The framework for the real situation in the Afghan state is still unclear. Therefore, Governments, the UN, the World Bank, and the Taliban should work to reach an agreement to allow the Afghanistan Central Bank access to the international banking system and provide it with its requisite credentials.⁴⁴⁰ They also should work to urgently reach an agreement on a mechanism to restore wage support for essential workers and numerous food-for-work and other food insecurity programs that were providing purchasing power to millions of families across Afghanistan, including extremely poor and female-headed households.

In the absence of any agreements, the UN should continue to use whatever means are at its disposal to continue shipments of currency to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes.

On the other hand, the US, along with other governments, should immediately undertake sanctions policy reviews, adjust current measures accordingly, and issue new licenses and guidance to facilitate liquidity and availability of paper currency to address the humanitarian crisis.

Finally, the Taliban should end violations of human rights, including abusive policies targeting women and girls that have deepened the gendered impact of the humanitarian crisis.

From their side, donors, the UN, and other international institutions should press the Taliban to stop violating rights and should promote the establishment of robust mechanisms to monitor human rights, such as through the mandate renewal of the *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan* (UNAMA) and the establishment of a UN special rapporteur on Afghanistan.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis*, March 1, 2022.

⁴⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, *What should be done to address Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis?* August, 4, 2022.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

2.1 Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan



“There are some worrying trends in internal displacement in Afghanistan.

Displacement is becoming more protracted for many. For example, people currently displaced by conflict have not been able to return home after the end of local conflicts as quickly as they have in the past, and there is a risk that these IDP populations are becoming permanently displaced. Growing insecurity is coinciding with drought and rising food and fuel prices in certain areas, and the combined effects are likely to be compounded during the winter months. This combination may result in more movement toward cities, placing greater demands on urban service providers and swelling the number of urban poor.”⁴⁴³

Internally displaced persons (IDP) are forced to flee their homes but unlike refugees, they remain within their country’s borders. This migration may result from armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed,

⁴⁴² UNHCR, *Afghanistan situation – Responding to urgent needs. Most likely scenario*: an emergency response that prioritizes the immediate needs of up to 500,000 new internally displaced people; *Worst-case scenario*: an emergency response to new refugee movements into Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In both scenarios, UNHCR will continue its area- and community-based conflict-sensitive humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan and in the host countries.

⁴⁴³ Ewen Macleod, UNHCR Country Representative for Afghanistan, at a seminar on “*Displacement and Security in Afghanistan*” hosted by the Brookings Institution at the University of Bern on June 23, 2008.

⁴⁴⁴ *Policy on UNHCR’S Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement*, UNHCR, available on the *Policy and Guideline* page of the UNHCR-net.

most internally displaced persons live in low-income countries experiencing a war, and their psychosocial health has not been well addressed.⁴⁴⁵

For decades, Afghan households and/or individual household members have used mobility both as an ‘ex-post’ coping mechanism for conflict and natural disaster, as well as to manage ‘ex-ante’ risks associated with the rural economy.⁴⁴⁶

Primarily, more than 25 years of conflict and political instability resulted in large-scale forced migration movements both from and within Afghanistan. In fact, the armed conflict triggered by the Communist coup in April 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979 led to the largest coerced movement of people in recent times.⁴⁴⁷ In the early 1990s, at the peak of the conflict, an estimated 7.5 million people were displaced. Hence, 3.2 million registered as refugees in Pakistan; 2.35 reported by the Iranian government; and an estimated 2 million displaced within Afghanistan’s borders.⁴⁴⁸

The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and government focus in Iran and Pakistan on repatriation of Afghan refugees led to a first return of about 1.5 million refugees to Afghanistan. However, civil war among Mujaheddin factions (1992-1994), the subsequent emergence of the Taliban as a national force, and three successive years of drought prompted a second phase of internal displacement and forced migration movements to neighbouring countries.⁴⁴⁹

The collapse of the Taliban in December 2001 and appointment of a new Government triggered massive repatriation movements from neighbouring countries. At the same time, the resumption of conflict between pro-government forces and insurgents has led to new instances of internal displacement in several parts of the country.

Nevertheless, the security conditions in Afghanistan led people to leave their communities of origin. The situation is further complicated by the fact that IDPs, once arrived at their destination in urban areas, tend to set up home in informal settlements thereby blending with the mass of urban poor and competing with them for access to assistance, shelter, land, water and sanitation, food, and livelihood opportunities.⁴⁵⁰

According to UNHCR, in 2001, there were approximately 1.2 million internally displaced

⁴⁴⁵ S. B. Thapa, E. Hauff, *Psychological distress among displaced persons during an armed conflict in Nepal*, Soc. Psychiatry Epidemiol (2005) 40: 672-679.

⁴⁴⁶ The World Bank, UNHCR, *Research Study on IDPs in urban settings – Afghanistan*, pag 6.

⁴⁴⁷ K. B. Harpviken, *Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan*, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2009.

⁴⁴⁸ M. Knowles, *Afghanistan: Trend and prospects for refugee repatriation*, Washington DC: Refugee Policy Group.

⁴⁴⁹ "Many villagers were also forced out of their homes and herded into Kabul. The total number of internal displaced Afghans stood in the region of 1.2 million by mid-1997". See UNHCR, (1997), "The State of the world's refugees: A humanitarian agenda", Oxford University Press: London.

⁴⁵⁰ K. Koser, *The Migration-Displacement Nexus in Afghanistan*, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 2009.

Afghans throughout the country and over 5 million refugees living abroad, in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. Many of these refugees and IDPs returned spontaneously to their place of origin following the fall of the Taliban.⁴⁵¹

Between June 2009 and March 2011, the number of conflict-induced IDPs was estimated at 212,744 persons; 50 percent of the IDPs are in identifiable urban and semi-urban locations and live in groups; 30 percent are in accessible rural and dispersed areas, and 20 percent in formal camps and camp-like settlements.⁴⁵² Finally, since June 2021 the number of people internally displaced by conflict in Afghanistan has risen by 73% including at least 230,000 over the last two months.⁴⁵³

Currently, based on figures collected by the national IDP task force, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates there to be 948,000 IDPs in Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁴

The official numbers of IDPs are based on a database maintained by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with figures collected through the national IDP task force.⁴⁵⁵

On the one hand, many maintain that these numbers are underestimates as, according to IDMC, the official figure “*does not include all conflict-related IDPs living in urban and semi-urban areas who are often mixed with economic migrants and the urban poor*”⁴⁵⁶ and further, much low-level displacement tends not to be reported. Indeed, a recent study showed that there is a strong correlation between the number of families moving together and the likelihood of IDPs receiving assistance, indicating that smaller-scale movements are less likely to be noticed by the aid community.⁴⁵⁷

While the situation of IDPs is far from uniform, there is a diversity of opinion as to who qualifies as an IDP. There is, nevertheless, little doubt that many IDPs are among the most vulnerable people in Afghanistan. As noted by numerous studies, IDPs tend to have high levels of indebtedness, food insecurity, illiteracy and unemployment, and large numbers do not have secure land tenure.⁴⁵⁸ Consequently, according to a report by the World Bank and UNHCR, “*IDPs have a much higher*

⁴⁵¹ UNHCR, *National Profile of IDPs in Afghanistan*, December 2008.

⁴⁵² UNHCR, *Internally Displaced Persons – IDPs leaflet*, prepared by UNHCR BO Kabul, October 2010.

⁴⁵³ Data of International Rescue Committee (IRC), New York, August 23, 2021.

⁴⁵⁴ IDMC, *Afghanistan IDP Figures Analysis*.

⁴⁵⁵ UNHCR’s database built on and replaced an earlier National Profile of Internal Displacement, released in Dec. 2008, which has itself been criticised for having “*defined the parameters of the IDP situation in definitive and sometimes arbitrary ways and with little analysis of the question of when displacement ends and the criteria used to make such determinations*”; S. Schmeidl, A. Mundt & N. Miszak, *Beyond the Blanket: Towards More Effective Protection for Internally Displaced Persons in Southern Afghanistan*, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and The Liaison Office, May 2010.

⁴⁵⁶ IDMC, *Afghanistan IDP Figures Analysis*.

⁴⁵⁷ DACAAR & S. Hall, *Consulting, Agency and Choice among the Displaced*.

⁴⁵⁸ Amnesty International, *Fleeing War Finding Misery: The Plight of the Internally Displaced in Afghanistan*, London, Amnesty International, 2012; Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), IDMC & S. Hall Consulting, *Challenges of IDP Protection: Research Study on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan*, NRC, Nov. 2012; International Organization for Migration (IOM) & S. Hall Consulting, *Evaluating IOM’s Return and Reintegration Activities for Returnees and Other Displaced Populations*, Geneva, IOM, 2014.

level of deprivation than the urban poor” in Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁹ For various reasons however, the Afghan Government has traditionally been somewhat unwilling to address the IDP issue in Afghanistan or even to admit that it exists. This resulted for a time in what Amnesty International referred to as ‘callous indifference’⁴⁶⁰ leading to “*a de facto policy of denial*” whereby authorities tended to reclassify IDPs as economic migrants, downplay numbers, and on occasion obstruct assistance to them.

With numbers growing too large to ignore and increasingly negative publicity surrounding the situation of IDPs the Government agreed to develop a national IDP policy. With the support of UNHCR and following a round of national consultations the policy was officially adopted in February 2014, and it reproduces the definition of IDPs included in the *Guiding Principles*.

While the policy details a number of responsibilities of line ministries and regional governors towards IDPs, it does not provide a specific legal status to IDPs, nor does it provide for a general registration (registration is the primary responsibility of the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees, assisted by the humanitarian community, provincial IDP Task Forces).⁴⁶¹

Despite the achievement in producing the policy, however, it is still not particularly well known, hence President Ghani made the situation of IDPs a central aspect of his election campaign.

Indeed, it became a priority in 2015, but while there was a sharp increase in the number of people displaced within Afghanistan, funding for internal displacement, at least through UNHCR channels, has been significantly decreasing. This is in the context of high competition for scarce funding from unprecedented crises at the global level, combined with the internal prioritisation, in line with the organisation’s defined mandate, of the needs of refugees (both current and returning) over its other ‘populations of concern’ such as IDPs. UNHCR is also currently in negotiations with OCHA to progressively handover the overall coordination of IDPs in the country.⁴⁶²

Nevertheless, ending internal displacement remains a stated priority of the Government and discussions on rolling-out the IDP policy are ongoing. It is assumed that in part how the strategy is operationalised will depend, to an extent at least, on how the IDP label is understood in the Afghan context. Traditionally, the IDP Task Force has been the final arbiter of who qualifies as an IDP, in practice some NGOs have interpreted this, to mean that any returnees not in their place of origin must automatically be IDPs.

The international expert who helped coordinate the drafting of the national IDP policy has

⁴⁵⁹ UNHCR & World Bank, *Afghanistan – Research Study on IDPs in Urban Locations*, Geneva, UNHCR & World Bank, 2011.

⁴⁶⁰ Amnesty International, *Fleeing War Finding Misery*.

⁴⁶¹ M. Willner-Reid, *IDPs in Afghanistan: A Confused National Glossary*, pag. 89.

⁴⁶² Telephone interview, 18 Sep. 2015, UNHCR.

written that *“the issue of who is an IDP was, and is, highly controversial”* in Afghanistan.⁴⁶³ In other words, while it is easy for Afghans to accept a definition of IDPs that encompasses displacement resulting from conflict or sudden-onset disaster, forced movement arising from slow-onset disaster, such as drought, is less likely to be seen in displacement terms due to the inevitable blurring of the lines with economic migrants. But even focusing specifically on conflict-induced displacement, the official definition does not make clear whether it needs to have been the sole driver of movement or merely one among several contributory factors.⁴⁶⁴

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the term IDP does, in certain circumstances, lead to a privileging of conflict-induced displacement over other types of displacement, namely economic. As one NGO aid-worker confirmed: *“Displacement is always prioritized over vulnerability. If people are not displaced NGOs will not care about them.”*⁴⁶⁵

On one hand, the utility of the IDP label in the context of targeting assistance, and the necessity of determining the specific reasons for movement, seem in Afghanistan to be closely correlated to institutional mandates. Those organisations specifically mandated to address displacement put greater importance on distinguishing between, for instance, displaced people, economic migrants, and host communities. This divide transcends NGOs, UN agencies and donors; depending on how their mandates are articulated rather than their position in the aid system.

On the other hand, there is a third approach with the aim to equating the term IDP more closely to that of *“poor and vulnerable migrant,”* or more particularly *“camp dweller.”*⁴⁶⁶ Hence, this approach avoids the pitfall of prioritising displacement over vulnerability, as it would apply equally to all persons living in camps.

The above debate concerns a second subject of much discussion and a remaining open question in Afghanistan (and indeed globally): when displacement ends. In contrast to the Guiding Principles, Afghanistan’s IDP policy does include a specific reference to this point.

It states that displacement ends *“when a durable solution has been found.”* In particular: (i) *Upon voluntary and safe return to his/her former place of residence, with a place to live with security of tenure, access to basic services and livelihood on a par with others who were not displaced; or (ii) When a displaced person has voluntarily decided to permanently settle either elsewhere in the country or at the place of displacement and has been able to do so, with a place to*

⁴⁶³ L. Wiseberg, *An IDP Policy for Afghanistan: From Draft to Reality*, *Forced Migration Review*, 46, 2014, pag. 10–11.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Interview*, Herat, 20 Nov. 2014, NGO.

⁴⁶⁶ For instance, in the view of one interviewee, previously working for the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees, *“if they can pay rent then leave them, but if they go to camps then they are IDPs and need to be supported”* (interview, Kabul, 15 Nov. 2014, Government); or, as it was put by another interviewee working for an NGO in Herat, the term *“IDP only refers to those living in camps. If you rent a house you’re not an IDP”* (Interview, Herat, 19 Nov. 2014, NGO).

*live with security of tenure, access to basic services and livelihood on a par with others who were not displaced.*⁴⁶⁷

While guidance on some of these issues has been developed, notably in the IASC Guidelines on Durable Solutions for IDPs noted that these guidelines were not adapted to the Afghan context⁴⁶⁸, in which even stable communities tend to be living below the poverty level and face huge challenges including a lack access to services. UNHCR itself recognises many of these limitations and has been hesitant to invest the IDP term with greater significance than it already holds.

Nevertheless, a frequent criticism of UNHCR's IDP database by some in the aid community is that UNHCR lacks a reliable system for judging when displacement has ended and removing these cases from the database. Moreover, even though a presidential decree established a Special Land Disputes Court in 2002 in order "*to specifically deal with private persons who are returnees or internally displaced and who seek to retrieve private properties of which they have been unwillingly deprived during the period since 1978*"⁴⁶⁹; it has been unsuccessful.⁴⁷⁰

Lack of infrastructure and especially lack of security are the main reasons of why many IDPs will not be able to go to their areas of origin in Afghanistan. Indeed, "*large parts of the south, south-west, south-east, east, and central regions of Afghanistan are now classified by UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) as 'extreme risk, hostile environments.'*"⁴⁷¹

The rule of law is also weak, especially in rural areas; 74 percent of respondents identified corruption as a major problem in Afghanistan⁴⁷² and the police are identified as a source of fear, rather than community protection.⁴⁷³ In other words, the source of problems lie less with the displaced populations themselves than with inadequate assistance and protection.

With the situation analysed above in mind, funding durable solutions for Afghanistan's IDPs is essential for national and regional security.

The international community, especially the US, should support UNHCR to fulfil its humanitarian agenda rather than pushing a continued repatriation agenda.⁴⁷⁴ While, for its part, the government of Afghanistan has an obligation to protect and assist internally displaced persons, as

⁴⁶⁷ The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, 21.

⁴⁶⁸ Telephone interview, 18 Sep. 2015, UNHCR.

⁴⁶⁹ World Bank, *Will formal documents of title and the courts resolve all land disputes?* Kabul Urban Policy Notes Series No.5, 2005.

⁴⁷⁰ L. A. Wily, *Looking for Peace on the Pastures: Rural Land Relations in Afghanistan*, Synthesis Paper, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, December 2004.

⁴⁷¹ UNAMA, 2009, 11.

⁴⁷² The Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People*, Kabul: The Asia Foundation, 2008.

⁴⁷³ ICG, *Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy*, Asia Briefing 85, 18 December 2008.

⁴⁷⁴ H. Amr, E. Ferris, K. Koser, S. Schmeidl, *Displacement in the Muslim World: A Focus on Afghanistan and Iraq*, pag. 10.

advised by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Ideally, a comprehensive national law or policy on IDP is required. However, the Afghan government has difficulties to even protect its own population; thus, the international community may need to provide targeted assistance in returnee and IDP protection. In this sense, a useful starting point might be to acknowledge the complexity of the situation rather than looking for ‘quick fixes.’ This does not however necessarily resolve the protracted situation of Afghan IDPs, as displacement is simply put on hold and the achievement of a more durable solution is deferred. Finally, as mentioned above, UNHCR and other international actors lack access to most displaced populations, and creative monitoring strategies need to be explored, by empowering returnees, IDPs or local Afghan communities to assist in the process.

This could also lead to displaced population becoming part of the process of finding durable solutions, rather than having everything decided for them.

In conclusion, displacement in and from Afghanistan are bewilderingly complex: one of the world’s largest and most enduring protracted refugee situations coincides with the largest repatriation in recent history.

Many returning refugees have effectively become internally displaced persons in Afghanistan, forming one of an increasing number of different IDP categories in the country. To this point the international community, with the U.S. at its lead, should begin to see the Afghan refugee problem as an opportunity to deal with regional peace and stability in a non-military way.⁴⁷⁵ By stepping up

⁴⁷⁵ “Afghanistan has been a centre of a struggle between major powers since the 19th century, but on February 29, 2020, the peace process agreement has been signed between the United States and the Taliban. In addition, the continuing peace process via intra-Afghan peace talks with regional states has fortified hopes for peace in Afghanistan through cooperative measures among major regional and international powers”, S. Naz, Z. N. Jaspal, *Afghanistan: The Possible Arena for Major Powers Inevitable Cooperation – A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January – June 2021, pag. 95-106. Pakistan, Iran, China, Central Asian Republics, and Russia all want Afghanistan to be stable because unstable Afghanistan will be a sanctuary for transnational terrorist organizations that intensify terrorism and drug trafficking in the neighbouring countries. Indeed, stable Afghanistan promotes stability in three regions, and its instability can lead to instability in three regions. In other words, “each state’s security in the region is interconnected with other states’ security, leading to extreme security interdependence in the country”, as mentioned by B. Buzan, *People, States, and Fear – An Agenda for International Security studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, pag. 7. Cooperation between states is important to avoid the risk of a new great game in Afghanistan. Hence, this stability can only come through a rational approach among different powers and with a negotiated interest package globally, regionally, and locally to realize who should get what kind of share (S. Naz, Z. N. Jaspal, *Afghanistan: The Possible Arena for Major Powers Inevitable Cooperation*, pag. 4). Stakeholders such as the United States, Russia, Pakistan, China, Iran, and India have their own strategies to achieve their national interests and goals in Afghanistan, but they cannot achieve their security and economic interests without cooperation. For instance, Russia has cooperated to ease international sanctions against Taliban leaders, which have shown themselves to be collaborative and have strengthened dialogue. The NATO-Russia Council also worked through counter-narcotics personnel from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey for the Central Asia Drug Enforcement Program through mobile training teams. Such cooperation will help reduce the remaining differences in Afghanistan through consensus and consistency in the emerging global system, as Afghanistan’s situation has broad prospects for regional states and the international community. Moreover, the Eurasian Economic Union can contribute to this joint effort by opening their attractive and promising Afghanistan markets. In addition, to eradicate terrorism, the United States, India, and Afghanistan must cooperate with Pakistan. At the same

its humanitarian agenda not only can it assist Pakistan, but also reach out to its arch-enemy Iran.

It might be possible that all the alternatives are grim, and another cycle of unwanted population movements is likely to occur, creating an entire new generation of refugees who may finally have had enough and rule out future return altogether. This is likely to be an unintended consequence the international community is not able to afford.⁴⁷⁶

2.2 Collateral coverage media images of Afghan refugees

This section begins by looking at how the terrorist attacks on The World Trade Centre on 11 September had the result of stimulating renewed media interest in Afghan refugees.

It considers the factors that have instigated media response by examining some general issues arising from the media coverage of disasters.

Based on the Afghan case study, I propose three main constituent factors contributing to the likelihood of effective media coverage of a refugee crisis. Firstly, to attract Western press coverage it is necessary for the crisis to be of such a magnitude that it cannot be ignored.

Secondly, the story will gain airtime if the nature of the crisis is such that it produces dramatic imagery; pictures with impact. Finally, if the style of the media coverage is sufficiently innovative it will stimulate interest in the viewers.

The media coverage of the Afghan refugee crisis was ‘collateral’ to the World Trade Centre attacks

of September 11, 2001, but it was not accidental, nor was it intentional.

The refugees were caught, as it were, on the sidelines of the World Trade Centre story. It was a humanitarian crisis that had existed for years yet attracted only minimal coverage.

However, post 11 September, the refugees became important players in a sub-plot of the lead

time, U.S. and India can help Pakistan build a bridge with the Northern Alliance, while Pakistan can help India reconcile with the Taliban. Thus, sustainable Afghanistan requires the signing of multilateral agreements on regional peace agreements and other issues, such as India and Pakistan's signing for the fight against drugs. This cooperation can be established through cultural exchanges, people-to-people contacts, increased trade, and good diplomatic ties (T. N. Ahmad *Integrationist and Cooperative Patterns in Europe and Asia*, Jean Monnet Project Papers). The major powers and the neighbouring states of Afghanistan need to work together to restore peace in the country; none of them can be excluded from the active Afghan-led peace process in the region, because excluding a single actor can lead to a zero-sum game current Afghan scenario. If such cooperation among major powers is achieved for Afghanistan, this cooperative structure will facilitate cooperation among the major powers in other global affairs in the evolving global order (T. Zimmerman, *The New Silk Roads: China, The U.S., And The Future Of Central Asia*, centre On International Cooperation New York University, October 2015).

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibidem*,.

world story that traced the US reaction to World Trade Centre attacks.⁴⁷⁷

The events that followed rendered their plight impossible to ignore. This is not to say that before 11 September the media had disregarded the crisis, but during an interim period: after the dust had settled and before the onset of military action, media attention turned to Afghan refugees. Accordingly, over the past 15 years we have experienced an increased emphasis on the significance of the visual image in the news media.⁴⁷⁸

This trend was particularly noticeable in the coverage of the World Trade Center. Despite the tragic nature of the disaster, it produced an extensive range of visual imagery.⁴⁷⁹ The extraordinary drama⁴⁸⁰ on 11 September was followed over the next few days by pictures of heroism: “we are used to Hollywood disaster movies, but this has been far worse, for real. You never thought you’d see a plane slam into a building or keep seeing the image played from so many different angles.”⁴⁸¹

In addition, “on September 11, the attacks happened so quickly and when virtually everything was witnessed live on television around the world. In Somalia and Rwanda, the question of whether we would see the suffering millions hung on the decisions of news editors - to send TV crews or not. The deaths in Africa took place in the shadows, behind the convenient sanctity of national borders; in America they happened under the full and penetrating gaze of the TV cameras.”⁴⁸²

In other words, it could be argued that the World Trade Centre received greater media attention because it occurred in the world’s media capital. Subsequently, the attention grew more when the decision was made to drop all forms of adverts, focusing only on pictures and this led to a great success to the two main terrestrial channels (*BBC and ITV*) with an audience share of 16 million over 70% of all UK television viewers.⁴⁸³ Hence, the power of the visual images was the overriding factor.

On their side, editorial budgets had to be expanded to cope with a demand for news that called for UK reporters to be posted to the United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel, and a variety of European countries. Foreign news is expensive, and this is set against a background where recent years have witnessed an overall decline in foreign stories on television.⁴⁸⁴ However, it has been reported that covering the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks cost BBC News £1 million a

⁴⁷⁷ T. Wright, *Collateral coverage: media images of Afghan refugees during 2001 emergency*, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, August 2002.

⁴⁷⁸ S. D. Reese, J. K. Lee, *Understanding the Context of New Media*, pag.750.

⁴⁷⁹ B. Carter, F. Barringer, *In Patriotic Time, Dissent is Muted*. The New York Times. New York, 2001.

⁴⁸⁰ T. Wright, *Collateral coverage: media images of Afghan refugees during 2001 emergency*, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, August 2002.

⁴⁸¹ T. McDonald, *Independent Television News* (ITN), presenter.

⁴⁸² G. Alagiah, *Shaking the Foundations – The Day that Shook the World*, London, BBC.

⁴⁸³ *Data of Office of Communication – The Communications Market*, August 2005, Quarterly Update.

⁴⁸⁴ J. Stone, *Loosing Perspective: Global Affairs on British Terrestrial Television*, 1989.

week. In November 2001, Greg Dyke the BBC's Director General, set aside an extra £10 million to cover the war,⁴⁸⁵ while ITN (UK's Independent Television News) was spending an extra \$200,000 a week. For the independents, the financial burden was made all the heavier by a general reduction in advertising revenue before 11 September in addition to further cutbacks by advertisers after that date. As for the US media, for the period 11 September to the end of October 2001, the networks had overspent by \$100 million.⁴⁸⁶

In viewing the Afghan crisis, 'TV codes' are evident. For example, during the BBC's interview,⁴⁸⁷ the technique used in the program consisted in cutting shots to convey the idea of an emerging humanitarian crisis. The 'non-specific' imagery comprising a variety of 'TV codes' is usually referred to as a compilation sequence. "*A picture may begin with a sequence of dramatized action*

designed to hook audience interest"; would-be scriptwriters are advised to "*follow it with a compilation sequence which introduces the film's topic and emphasizes its scope go to a second compilation sequence which establishes the broad outlines of a particular local move on to a continuity sequence which pinpoints a bit of dramatic action in that local and so on.*"⁴⁸⁸

This is the reason of why the above compilation sequence is also known as a newsreel sequence. Accordingly, individual shots are edited together bearing no relation to the following action.

Indeed, one of the problems in running this imagery during studio interviews is that the connection between sound and image is unplanned, so it introduces a random factor as to the meaning of the images that become associated with an ad hoc voice-over commentary.⁴⁸⁹

If, as media theorists suggest, the viewer makes the mental connection between sound and image.

Hence, the 'third meaning' created in the mind of the viewer becomes subject to what the interviewee just happens to say. In addition, the use of this formulaic imagery to represent extraordinary events has the result of reducing humanitarian and environmental disasters to a

kind of 'visual wallpaper'.⁴⁹⁰ The images just happen to be there, possibly to provide some relief from 'talking heads', but with no specific intention.

The television news technique of talking over the visuals is becoming increasingly common with

⁴⁸⁵ R. Ottosen, *The War in Afghanistan and peace journalism in practice – Media, War & Conflict*, Oslo University College, Norway, December 9, 2010.

⁴⁸⁶ Data provided by A. Tyndall of the Tyndall Report.

⁴⁸⁷ *BBC Breakfast Television* interviewed Clare Short; the UK's International Development.

⁴⁸⁸ D. V. Swain, and J. R. Swain, *Film scriptwriting: a practical manual*, Boston; London, Focal, 1988.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*,

⁴⁹⁰ F. Kurasawa, *How Does Humanitarian Visuality Work? A Conceptual Toolkit for a Sociology of Iconic Suffering*, pag. 4.

also, the adoption of several stereotypical refugee images. These, on one hand, can provide a shorthand frame of reference to indicate a particular group, on the other hand, they can limit understanding to a fixed set of concepts. This situation commonly exploited in fiction film.⁴⁹¹ In other words, the ‘wallpaper’ refugee images attempt to provide a general representation that does not allow the viewer to get close enough to the individual behind them.

*“A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion.”*⁴⁹² Accordingly, this narrative pattern seems to have been applied to the World Trade Centre attack; in fact, the focus shifted to the Afghan refugees. This shows how a refugee crisis is framed within the Western concerns; however, it is this style of news reporting structure that serves refugees poorly. Indeed, in contrast to other minority groups, refugees (especially when on the move or recently displaced) are unable to provide a media-skilled authentic voice to put forward their case.

Granted in the news reports, refugees are ‘interviewed’, or are invited to make statements to camera, but in these vox pop interviews, they can speak about their own personal experience, but are unable to provide a refugee voice that commands a view on the overall picture or the broader political situation. They must rely upon the media skills of members of the aid agencies, which places the refugees in a child-like state, seemingly unable to stand up for themselves.⁴⁹³ In other words, from the refugees’ point of view, it is not only a matter of attracting media coverage to your crisis, but also hoping the style of reporting makes people sit up and listen. In fact, in returning to the broadcast media, the *Channel 4 documentaries, Exodus and Refugee Tales*, possessed the most striking features that they enabled refugees to speak for themselves, without the mediation of a third-party and showed both the causes and effects of forced migration.⁴⁹⁴

Elsewhere alternative strategies have been adopted for the portrayal of refugees. For instance, Norwegian artist Andrea Lange’s *Refugee Talks*, filmed in an Oslo reception centre, Middle Eastern

⁴⁹¹ S. De Souza, Screenwriter of films *Die Hard I & II*: “Arab terrorists, okay, the movie proceeds, whereas if you have worked out a story simply about a murder or love triangle or revenge, well you’ve got to know something about the people and invest some time in knowing what makes them tick. This is easy. They’ve got a turban, we don’t need to know what’s going on under that turban, just proceed with the story.”

⁴⁹² P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 1984.

⁴⁹³ K. Beckers, *What Vox Pops Say and How That Matters: Effects of Vox Pops in Television News on Perceived Public Opinion and Personal Opinion*, pag. 4.

⁴⁹⁴ T. Wright, *Refugees on Screen* - RSC Working Paper No. 5, Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2000.

refugees were asked to sing to the camera,⁴⁹⁵ while others showed refugees in an observational documentary style with little contextualization. For example, *Euronews* satellite television channel

provided a 24-hour news-stream in six languages with the aim to offer a constant stream of pictures and interviews accompanied by anonymous voice-overs and translations when appropriate. However, in fairness to the news reporters, these programs enjoyed the benefit of documentary format that enables a far more comprehensive account of a refugee crisis, not limited to the severe time constraints of news. The three-minute news slot operates more like an advertisement for the crisis and primarily is concerned with grabbing the audience's attention and getting a simple point across in the given time frame.⁴⁹⁶ Another approach that stands out of is *Newsround*, *BBC 1's children's news*. As it is produced for children (and is often about children) the coverage of Afghan refugee children achieves an innovative reporting style.⁴⁹⁷

In conclusion, many of the issues discussed are symptomatic of the ways the media presents the world to its viewing public and, in the coverage of refugees, these issues become particularly inflated.⁴⁹⁸

Moreover, as already mentioned above, the television news format does not serve refugees well.

Their voices remain at the end of a chain of 'framings': contextualized by the anchor-person, reporter, NGO representative, and perhaps translator.

As for the future coverage of the Afghan refugee crisis, the media have a central role to play in the efforts to rebuild the country and to achieve political stability. For Afghanistan, the tasks involved include: disarmament, establishing peace and security; providing food, healthcare, education for the population; reviving the economy; repairing the infrastructure; establishing an independent judiciary; creating a new political environment; and so on.⁴⁹⁹

Nonetheless, the need remains to maintain the interest of the western world. Finally, an additional positive coverage of the country may help win back members of the Afghan diaspora

⁴⁹⁵ A. Lange, *Refugee Talks* – 1998, Audio & video installation. *Refugee Talks* consists of nine sequences, each featuring one or several persons performing a song. The protagonists are all refugees from different countries who lived in the same reception center in Oslo during the winter of 1998. Each of them chose a song that was relevant to their own lives, and to the film they appear in. The work is shot at various locations within the reception center: in the common rooms or the family rooms.

⁴⁹⁶ N. Fourberg, S. Tas, L. Wiewiorra, I. Godlovitch, A. De Streel, H. Jacquemin, J. Hill, M. Nunu, C. Bourguignon, F. Jacques, M. Ledger, M. Lognoul, *Online Advertising, the impact of targeted advertising on advertisers, market access and consumer choice*, June 2021.

⁴⁹⁷ *BBC*: "Afghanistan: What's it like for Afghan kids in the UK?" – Last update: October 19, 2021.

⁴⁹⁸ T. Wright, *Fact and Fiction in the world of digital image capture and manipulation. Converging Traditions for the Digital Moving Image*, 2002.

⁴⁹⁹ T. Wright, *Collateral coverage: media images of Afghan refugees during 2001 emergency*, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, August 2002.

whose professional skills are needed to aid the process of rebuilding.

Chapter III

The role of mass media in war

1.1 Media coverage of the Afghan conflict

*“In war time truth is so precious that it should always be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies.”*⁵⁰⁰

If truth is the first casualty of war reporting, then the Afghan conflict has been the best example of a

fragmented and inconsistent presentation in the Soviet and mainstream Western news media.⁵⁰¹ It avoided detail, complexity, and ambiguity and subjected to political, diplomatic, and ideological pressures.

In line with Washington’s unfounded optimism, mainstream American reporting on the Afghan conflict raised hopes that the Kabul regime would fall soon after the Soviet withdrawal. However, its failed collapse surprised both specialists and the public who started to ask themselves: *“has the media failed in its reporting on a regional conflict? What have been the major trends in Soviet and Western media reporting on Afghanistan?”*

This section aims to offer a description of the perspective on the coverage of the Afghan conflict made by the international magazines and channels, to understand the role the media had in sharing information and images of a country victim of violence. The purpose is to underline some of the similarities and the dissimilarities between them, including some of the oddities of reporting from Afghanistan by offering a broad overview of the nature and scope of Western coverage of the Afghan conflict. Subsequently, the focus will be on the analysis of Soviet coverage of the conflict during the pre-Gorbachev years, particularly, by elaborating the issues that the Soviet media dwelled upon in terms of the regional and international aspects of the Afghan conflict. Finally, the change under Gorbachev’s openness and ‘New Political Thinking’, will be discussed to provide a perspective on the recent changes in Soviet reporting on the Afghan conflict.

The lack of control, command, and communication system led to a lacuna⁵⁰² that profoundly affected

⁵⁰⁰ A. Cave-Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies*, New Yorks, Harper & Rowe, 1975, pag. 10.

⁵⁰¹ A. T. Sheikh, *Soviet and Western Media Coverage of the Afghan conflict*, pag. 2.

⁵⁰² J. Haynes, *Keeping cool about Kabul: The Washington Post and the New York Times cover the communist seizure of Afghanistan*, World Affairs, Vol. 145, No. 4, spring 1983, pag. 369-384.

reporting from inside Afghanistan. This flaw led to glaring distortions of the actual circumstances in

Afghanistan. The Mujahedeen frequently exaggerated their battle claims; shortly after the Soviet incursion, they started to allege they oversaw more than 90% of the countryside, and that the Afghan Army had been reduced due to desertions and defections from over 40,000 troops down from 90,000. However, by the time their news was reported, it was more significant, but since it was frequently out of date it no longer newsworthy in Peshawar.

When viewed through the lens of Western journalism, this information did not always be eligible for publication in foreign newspapers. Thus, a numerous Western journalists covered the Afghan conflict as well. For example, between July 1983 and March 1988 the Associated Press (AP), one of the largest news agencies in the world, wired 443 stories from Islamabad, compared with only 19 news stories from Kabul.⁵⁰³

During the same period, it filed 439 stories on Afghanistan from Moscow, and 1160 from Washington.⁵⁰⁴ In addition, there were no live broadcasts from Afghanistan and few dramatic headlines in the newspapers since reporters found that getting close to action in the state was arduous and dangerous. Accordingly, the danger intensified after 1984, when Vitaly Smirnov, the Soviet envoy to Pakistan, threatened to “*kill any journalists found ‘illegally’ within Afghanistan.*”⁵⁰⁵ As a result, most of the correspondents relied partially or entirely on intelligence about what was happening within Afghanistan from Mujahedeen and diplomatic sources in Peshawar and Islamabad. However, the stories reported by the above group often lacked both authenticity and newness, and most editors were unwilling to assign their journalists to Afghanistan. For instance, the BBC had only one man to cover both Pakistan and Afghanistan, in what was considered a ‘dangerous beat.’⁵⁰⁶

Despite the alarm given by the Soviet ambassador, and dissatisfied with such media reporting, scores of journalists clandestinely travelled inside Afghanistan, particularly after the 1980 expulsion of all Western journalists from there⁵⁰⁷ and the subsequent Soviet/Afghan refusals to grant visas to those who wanted to report from Kabul. This practice cost at least eleven journalists their lives⁵⁰⁸, and several journalists captured by the Soviet/Afghan forces were sentenced for espionage and

⁵⁰³ A. T. Sheikh, *Not the Whole Truth: Soviet and Media Coverage of the Afghan Conflict*, pag. 10.

⁵⁰⁴ In addition, the United Press International (UPI), during the same period, carried 555 news items on Afghanistan, of which 73 were wired from Kabul, 92 from Islamabad, 62 from Moscow, and 91 from Washington.

⁵⁰⁵ The New York Times: “France accuses Soviet on Afghanistan reporting” October 16 th, 1984.

⁵⁰⁶ J. Gearing, *Western media coverage of the war in Afghanistan*, *Free Afghanistan*, London, No. 3, spring 1986, pag. 11- 13.

⁵⁰⁷ The Washington Post: *Soviet Units, Afghan Army Reportedly Clash in Kabul*, January 18 th , 1980.

⁵⁰⁸ R. Yusufzai, *11 foreign journalists killed in Afghan War*, *The Muslim*, November 22, 1988.

given varying terms of imprisonment.⁵⁰⁹ In other words, there were restrictions on the reporting from Afghanistan. In addition, with a very limited amount of true and reliable information, and to make their reports different from one another, they reportedly ‘engineered’ the figures of Soviet/Afghan casualties, material losses, of the Mujahedeen’s performance. Hence, these reporters often had little or no access to the Soviet/Afghan diplomats in the region, frequently basing their stories on ‘informed diplomatic sources’, or the ‘news reaching from Afghanistan.’

In Washington, media fascination with unveiling Afghan covert operations was the single most important source of media leaks. To these should be added deliberate leaks by conservative adherents of the Reagan Doctrine, who, believing that the Reagan Administration’s support for the Mujahedeen was inadequate, wished to embarrass it into doing as much, if not more, than it was claiming in its rhetoric.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, leaks by members of congressional committees and autobiographical accounts by the former decision makers who wrote for their own respective considerations, added more to the exposure in the United States of the CIA’s Afghan covert operation.

The Mujahedeen’s bravery, intense conviction for freedom, love for Islam and their tribal beliefs, and the accompanying disdain for Soviet communism were the themes that were repeatedly emphasized. They were also frequently paired with Soviet expansionism and brutalities in Afghanistan. The popular themes of anti-communism in the context of East-West rivalry supported sensationalism and romanticization of the Mujahedeen’s bravery. This is how the lack of more in-depth inquiries of the appropriateness of American strategy toward Afghanistan has been caused by superficial Western reporting. All things considered, however, the sources of Western media coverage have been numerous and diverse, in contrast to Soviet coverage of the Afghan conflict, even if the quality was inconsistent and lacking in depth. In fact, for what concerns Soviet media coverage, the official policy covered the conflict in broad ideological formulations. In other words, there was no trustworthy reporting on the conflict’s other facets. As a result, Soviet media publicists did not publish estimates of the number of Soviet forces, their casualties, defections, or issues brought on by their continued presence in a hostile environment. In fact, during the Brezhnev era, Soviet media and government statements referred to the Afghan conflict as the ‘situation encircling Afghanistan,’ never denying that there was a significant struggle in Afghanistan, much less that Soviet forces were involved. Recently, some Soviet publicists have admitted that the censorship

⁵⁰⁹ The most famous cases in this regard have been that of the French journalist Jacques Abouchar, who was imprisoned for 18 years in 1984 and Alain Guillo who was charged in 1987, both were later released under international pressure.

⁵¹⁰ Michael Pillsbury (Assistant Undersecretary for Policy Planning in the Department of Defence), for example, was fired from office by Admiral Poindexter, National Security Advisor in the Reagan Administration, for leaking information to press to bring pressure to bear on the White House to improve the quality of weaponry for the Afghan rebels. See, E. Abel, *Leaking: Who Does It? Who Benefits? At What Cost?* New York: Priority Publications, 1987.

authorities forbade the use of the phrase 'war.' When a radio announcer referred to the takeover as a 'Soviet invasion,' the state control over the media was so strict that he was dismissed.

Soviet media coverage of the conflict has gone through several stages since 1979. It initially did little to cover the conflict and served primarily as brokers of foreign and military policy as opposed to distributors of home news.⁵¹¹ Later, it was claimed that Soviet troops were acting at the behest of the Afghan rebels to carry out non-combat, humanitarian duties. The media didn't start acknowledging that Soviet soldiers were dying in Afghanistan until the middle of 1984.

Prior to the autumn of 1986, most of the reporting on combat operations praised the bravery and selflessness of 'internationalist' soldiers who were valiantly doing their military duties. When reported, details of real combat were at best hazy. Additionally, stories of troops giving their life to save the lives of their colleagues continued to be published,⁵¹² and media accounts that commonly extolled Soviet soldiers frequently portrayed Russian patriotism as opposed to Soviet patriotism. Overall, there are two distinct perspectives from which to examine Soviet media coverage of the time.

On an ideological level, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan's (PDPA) reforms, particularly the agrarian reforms, and the historical significance of the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan received most attention in the Soviet media. The Saur (April) revolution of 1978, according to this document, was rapidly consolidating. It made little mention of the factional strife within the PDPA and provided scant mention of the Mujahedeen's military efforts. To promote the idea that Afghanistan was the USSR's strategic frontier, complete with the Basmachi insurgents, Soviet media stories occasionally drew comparisons. These studies made it clear that they were studying the past to derive lessons for the future.⁵¹³ Moreover, the articles that were published during that time consistently portrayed the Soviet army in historical, Russian terms and the Soviet soldiers as obediently carrying out their responsibilities.⁵¹⁴ They occasionally built roads, hospitals, schools, and residential complexes, as well as restored mosques and planted trees.⁵¹⁵ On the other hand, the emphasis on the regional nature of the battle in the political context was mostly on Pakistani backing and the American and Chinese military aid that the insurgents received. The Soviet media attempted to downplay the scope of both the Afghan resistance and the

⁵¹¹ J. D.H. Downing, *Trouble in the backyard: Soviet media reporting on the Afghanistan conflict*, Journal of Communications, 8 (Spring 1988), pag. 5-32.

⁵¹² *Sovetskaya kirgiziya*, 23 June 1987.

⁵¹³ R. Masov, *Basmachestvo—Uroki istorii, Kommun ist tadzhikistana*, 13 January 1982.

⁵¹⁴ See, for example, *Literatwnayagazeta*, 19 March 1980, and, *Sotsialisticheskayaindustriya*, 28 February 1980.

⁵¹⁵ In a rare photograph showing the Afghans demonstrating in support of the PDP A government published in the Defence Ministry's daily newspaper, *Krasnaya zvezda* (15 April 1979), the banners were photographed from the back so that the print on them could not be read. It was perhaps a backhanded suggestion that support for the Kabul government was narrow and limited.

military contribution of the Soviet Union. According to a report in Pravda from February 1980, for instance, Boris Ponomarev, the Communist Party's then-head of the International Department, asserted that Afghan authorities and the general populace "display a friendly attitude toward the Soviet servicemen" and that "no clashes are taking place between Afghans and our soldiers, as all kinds of 'voices' unscrupulously and long-windedly claim."⁵¹⁶

The US military and the Pakistani military were demonized in media accounts. Moscow, as reported in the Soviet media, had a multi-layered strategy designed to both bloc Islamabad's emerging special relationship with the United States and persuade it to abandon its position on Afghanistan. One way to look at it is that the Soviet media cautioned Islamabad that it was "*still not too late for Pakistan to quit meddling in Afghanistan's affairs*" and that Pakistan "*should not become a party to Washington's intentions because these were loaded with numerous perils, above all for Pakistan.*"⁵¹⁷ On another level, the Soviet media attacked the Sino-American 'shared policy' of "pulling Pakistan into the anti-Afghan conspiracy" and therefore "making Pakistan into a type of explosive keg"⁵¹⁸ depicting Islamabad as rather innocent. It was stated that Pakistan had been "caught in the ugly game" in this way.⁵¹⁹

It appears that the Soviet goal was to deter Islamabad from joining the "front-line states" and to deter China and the United States from aiding Islamabad. It appears clear that this policy was designed to operate on many levels simultaneously.

In highlighting the differences among China, the United States, and Pakistan, the Soviet media consistently attacked the Pakistan-United States relationship on the grounds that it encouraged Islamabad's 'aggressive' military capabilities and clandestine nuclear program. Moreover, the Soviets charged that the United States was acquiring in Pakistan the military bases that would jeopardize Indian security.⁵²⁰ It was also added that the CIA was plotting against India from Pakistan and that American military supplies to Pakistan would be used against India⁵²¹ and that China was pushing Pakistan into conflict with India.⁵²²

The most important attempt of its strategy was made by exploiting cleavages among the numerous actors engaged. For instance, the soviet literature frequently claimed that the refugee camp's living conditions were appalling and that the refugees wanted to return to Afghanistan but

⁵¹⁶ *Pravda*, 5 February 1980.

⁵¹⁷ *Pravda*, 6,7 January 1980; see also, JVIT, 8 January 1980.

⁵¹⁸ *New Times*, 7, 1981.

⁵¹⁹ *Pravda*, 17 October 1980; V. Shurgin, *Base for aggression*, *Pravda*, 10 April 1985, cited in Current Digest of the Soviet Press (hereafter, CDSP), no. 37, pag. 15.

⁵²⁰ A. Vlasov, *Lackeys of American Imperialism*, *Izvestiya*, 29 March 1981, cited in CDSP, no. 31, pag. 13; I. Garbuzov, *Pakistan in U.S. aggressive strategy*, *Soviet Military Review* (February 1984), pag. 51-53.

⁵²¹ See for example, *Pravda*, 8 January 1980.

⁵²² V. Volodin, *Peking manoeuvres in South Asia*, *International Affairs*, November 1978, pag. 19-27.

were being prevented from doing so by the Mujahedeen and Pakistani authorities. Additionally, they said that in the refugee camps,⁵²³ prison cells were being managed by resistive factions.

*“To be honest, I am surprised at how little is written about Afghanistan and about the Soviet people who are honourably doing their duty, often risking their life.”*⁵²⁴

Due to the low volume of reporting, until 1983-84, the Soviet press played down any mention of Soviet military activity in Afghanistan. Reports from journalists linked to the Soviet troops, however, extolled their material values, friendship, and the excitement of military life after 1983–1984, when the Soviet press started to sporadically reveal the existence of Soviet casualties. Particularly after 1985, when Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan were showered with medals and praised as heroes and saviours.

Only when there was believed to be some moment toward a political settlement, did the Soviet media briefly give some coverage to the problems and difficulties faced by Soviet troops in combat operations.⁵²⁵

However, this trend was reversed again; in fact, the Soviet media didn't provide in-depth coverage of the political the country's military situation, the conflicting factions within the PDPA, which is in power or even the fact that there is a protracted conflict in the nation.

The Soviet media's coverage of foreign affairs, particularly which of the Afghan war, expanded within the scope of glasnost. Accordingly, Gorbachev's directives set rough guidelines for how the Soviet media may report on the Afghan conflict within the ill-defined confines of glasnost. As a result, self-criticism and cynicism replaced the magnificent tales of altruistic internationalism in the media coverage of the Afghan conflict.⁵²⁶

The campaign for openness on domestic issues in the Soviet press began gradually to unfold in 1985. However, many issues remained forbidden, and particularly little change was visible in Soviet reportage on world events. For instance, in January 1986, *Izvestya* commentator Aleksandr Bovin called for changes in Soviet media reporting on events in foreign countries: *“the country's leaders have stated the necessity of humanizing international relations, of renouncing primitive stereotypes, and of abandoning the concept of the enemy.”*⁵²⁷ Conversely, sometimes, journalists covering foreign affairs agitate stale issues and lay the stage for conflict.⁵²⁸ Hence, in February 1987 *Pravda* published several letters from readers who called on the newspaper to give more coverage of

⁵²³ See, for example, *Pravda*, 22 December 1980; *Krasnaya zvezda*, 27 February 1983.

⁵²⁴ *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 10 February 1984, cited in T. Kuzio, *Opposition in the USSR to the occupation of Afghanistan*, *Central Asian Survey*, no. 6,1 (1987), pag. 99- 117.

⁵²⁵ *Krasnaya zvezda*, 26 February 1983.

⁵²⁶ D. Mahoney, *Soviet press enters new stage in coverage of Afghan v/ai*, *RadioLiberty Research* (RL) 337/87,18 August 1987, pag. 1-4.

⁵²⁷ *Izvestya*, 18 January 1986.

⁵²⁸ *Sovetskaya kul'ura*, 21 May 1987; for a similar criticism by B. Tumanov, see *Zhurnal*, June 1986.

foreign affairs and to drop ‘slogan-mongering’ in its coverage of the West.⁵²⁹

“What is one to do? Journalists are denied the opportunity to carry out objective. Our political and moral duty is to tell the people the truth about Afghanistan. The Soviet people did not accept this war, and the country’s political leadership did the only thing it could do.”⁵³⁰ Moreover, there was a considerable antipathy among youth towards what was happening in Afghanistan. Accordingly, a public opinion poll carried out by the Sociological Research Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the French polling organization IPSOS revealed that 53% of the 1,000 Muscovites who took part favoured the total withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.⁵³¹

Although Soviet reporting from Afghanistan began to give a more realistic picture of the combat and the strength of the Mujahideen, the uninformative style of the past continued in most press reports, causing some Soviet readers to register their protest. In June 1987, in the Moscow News, a Soviet officer gave readers hard figures on the scale of opposition in Afghanistan: “at present the armed gangs number over 100,000 (and are) subdivided into 3,000 groups and units.”⁵³²

More importantly, depictions of the horrors of the war as seen by the soldiers also began to surface.⁵³³ Many letters to the editor condemning the exaggerated and inaccurate media coverage of the conflict began to surface in publications, such as: “our mass media... reflects events occurring in Afghanistan very superficially.”⁵³⁴ In other words, the popular discontent with the war was growing, in fact many reports indicated that the Afghan war had become unpopular among the Soviet rank-and-file deployed in the country.⁵³⁵ In addition, in July 1987, a Soviet daily gave its readers as glimpse of how vulnerable even Kabul was to the Mujahideen.⁵³⁶

“We often ignored public opinion, or failed to take it into consideration, and we acted on the assumption that we had a monopoly on the truth.”⁵³⁷ Indeed, the government had erred for many years in believing that there were foreign policy solutions to problems, particularly economic development, that required domestic policy changes.⁵³⁸ Moreover, it has been stated that the introduction of troops into Afghanistan reflected an excessive tendency to use military force in

⁵²⁹ *Pravda*, 30 March 1987.

⁵³⁰ See for example, his interview “*Tretya Sproba*” *Molod Ukrainy*, 23 June 1988, pag. 1-3, as cited in Bhodan Nahaylo, “*Aleksandr Bovin gives candid interview to Ukrainian newspaper on Soviet foreign and nationalities policies*” RL 297/88, 30 June 1988, pag. 1-4.

⁵³¹ *Le Point*, 789,2 November 1987, pag. 47.

⁵³² *Moscow News*, (No. 25, June 21, 1987). Likewise, Radio Moscow cited Western estimates of Mujahideen strength in a program broadcast on March 27, 1987, see: *more selective Glasnost about Afghanistan*, RL 167/87, May, 6, 1987.

⁵³³ *Ogonyok*, Nos. 28 & 29, 1987.

⁵³⁴ A. Trehub, *Popular discontent with the war in Afghanistan*, RL 483/87, November 30, 1987, pag. 1-4.

⁵³⁵ P. Taubman, *More war for Afghan*, NYT, April 15, 1988.

⁵³⁶ *Trud*, July 11, 1987.

⁵³⁷ Soviets: “*We Share Fault in Conflicts*”, *The Miami Herald*, June 26, 1988.

⁵³⁸ *Ibidem*,

Soviet foreign policy.⁵³⁹ Thus, Soviet commentators and officials began to speak with increasing frankness about the blunders that led them into the Afghan conflict.⁵⁴⁰ This led to internal political pressure, letters to the leadership, editors, and complaints from intellectuals, and Afghanistan, thus, became “an extremely acute internal problem.”⁵⁴¹

Finally, evidence of disenchantment on the home front was complemented by frank reporting on the war itself: “*I went to cover the war, and the war covered me.*”⁵⁴² and “*something called ‘Afghanistan syndrome’ would emerge and that it would be more serious than the war.*”⁵⁴³

In conclusion, like how Western media outlets did not consider any assertions of consolidation by the Kabul regime, Soviet media propagandists habitually discounted all claims made by the Mujahideen. The Karmal regime was portrayed by the Western media as a Russian tank-borne puppet of Moscow.

However, in many ways, any comparison would be unjust because journalism in these two countries serves essentially distinct purposes, adheres to very different philosophical tenets, and plays very different roles. The Soviet case did not involve the competition between different news organizations and publications, nor did it involve commercial interests that promised in-depth reporting and a range of viewpoints on Afghanistan. While the Western journalists occasionally even risked their lives to record the combat from a landlocked, remote area, the Soviet media—who were basically submissive to the official line—tried to keep the conflict hidden from the Soviet audience for the most part. Having said this, mainstream Western media coverage has been by and large in line with Administration perceptions and policy postures.⁵⁴⁴

Eventually, Afghanistan has been the case in which the mainstream Western media shown little, if any, dissension to Washington’s policy of the largest covert operation since the Vietnam War.

In comparison, under Gorbachev, Soviet media coverage shifted from a spirit of self-congratulation to complete frustration and cynicism, and finally to national soul-searching. Despite significant changes in Soviet media coverage under Gorbachev’s rubric of glasnost, it would be incorrect to conclude that the media in the Soviet Union was instrumental in bringing the ‘undeclared war’ in Afghanistan to Soviet living rooms, as it was in bringing the Vietnam War to

⁵³⁹ *Izvestiya*, June 15, 1988.

⁵⁴⁰ P. Quinn-Judge, *Soviet look back on short war..that wasn’t*, CSM, April 13, 1988, pag. 1.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibidem.*,

⁵⁴² A. Borovik, *What kind of war was this?* U.S. News Camp; World Report, May 30, 1988: 32. 236 Pravda, April 4, 1987.

⁵⁴³ A. Borovik, *The Sounds of War and Peace*, US News and World Report, April 18, 1988, pag. 49.

⁵⁴⁴ A. T. Sheikh, *Soviet and Western Media Coverage of the Afghan Conflict*, *Strategic Studies*, Spring 1990, Vol. 13, No. 3.

American living rooms. Nonetheless, it appears that in recent years, it has aspired to do both: some information dissemination and some public opinion. Thus, even if the Soviet media did not provide a lead to policy changes in Afghanistan, it did help Gorbachev's decision to disengage and withdraw.

1.1 US mass media: portrayal of Afghanistan by Newsweek and Time

Paying special regard to the role of visual images in the reporting of disasters, this chapter reviews the narrative strategies adopted by television news.

More specifically, the first section will be focused on the portrayal made by the US mass media, particularly the coverage of *CCN America* in comparison to the one of *Al Jazeera*, and it concludes,

with a critical review of media examples that break away from conventional news formulae.

The last part of my research thesis, wants to bring out the image of oppression attributed to the Taliban, seeking a point of comparison between the situation before and after their arrival.

The study aims at investigating as how Afghanistan is being represented and portrayed in two leading US magazines: *Newsweek* and *Time*. The paper's introductory paragraphs provide some light on the development of Afghanistan's economy and media, and then a quick summary of relations between the US and Afghanistan over the previous ten years follows. An analysis of the information provided by *Newsweek* and *Time* shows that there was significantly more negative coverage (57.08%) than positive coverage (6.08%). As a result, *Newsweek*, and *Time* portrayed Afghanistan primarily as the home of the Taliban and extremism, a prison for women, a shelter for illegal drugs, a hub for Islamization, and a haven for Al-Qaida and Usama Bin Laden.

Nothing could significantly alter the way of life of Afghans, despite efforts by the US and the former Soviet Union to convert Afghan society to a secular one.

In 90s, the relations between Afghanistan and the US were not cordial rather deteriorated to the great extent that the US imposed economic sanctions and did not recognize the Government of Taliban. In addition, since the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the rise of Taliban, America took no serious interest to resolving the problem of Afghan rivals and it surprised the Afghan Mujahadeen and the world alike.

The Taliban were harshly condemned by the American media for how they treated women, for destroying Buddha sculptures, and most importantly for allowing Osama Bin Laden to remain in

Afghanistan. As a result, the US convinced the UN to impose severe sanctions on the Taliban, which grounded the Afghan airline in addition to having an impact on Afghanistan's banking and other foreign transactions.⁵⁴⁵ The above to confirm that media, in many ways, are responsible for the creation of mental pictures based on the best output of a professional production crew.⁵⁴⁶

Hence, most of us gather our impression and images of other countries and societies from the media.⁵⁴⁷

It can be argued that the media is slowly but surely becoming a force to be reckoned with in the industry of constructing, reconstructing, or distorting the images of different nations, communities, religions, castes, colours, and ethnic groups. Recent technological advancement further crystallized the notion wherein millions of people are looking at the world events through the prism of media.⁵⁴⁸

According to several studies, the White House or the Pentagon have used⁵⁴⁹ the American mainstream media as a tool to further the objectives of American foreign policy around the world.

Moreover, some techniques as, for example, framing, slant in story, negative tags, and connotation, source selections have the aim to promote, or endorse policies and to develop positive or favourable images, or to induce negative reaction like fanatics, frenzy, barbaric, extremist or terrorists.

In addition, several methods for the manipulation of information and image building, also known as '*suppression by omission*'⁵⁵⁰, or framing have been used by American media to mute, play down or bending the truth using emphasis and other auxiliary embellishments. Confirming that, most of the studies in 50s, 60s, and early 70s⁵⁵¹ endorse with substantive proof about the manipulative role of mainstream media to explain issues of the target in support of their own country.

Similarly American mainstream media shifts the direction of their foreign affairs coverage in accordance with the shifts in American foreign policy.⁵⁵² Therefore, words like fundamentalism, terrorist, extremist militant, and violent were found to be linked with the words like Muslim, Islam and Islamic.⁵⁵³ In other words, American media like *Newsweek* and *Time*, among others⁵⁵⁴, have been found to using these techniques, thereby distorting the image of Muslim world.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁴⁵ J., B., P. Thomson (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of United States Foreign Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

⁵⁴⁶ C. Dewdney, *The Skin Of Culture: Investigating The New Electronic Reality*, London: Kogan, 1997.

⁵⁴⁷ B., C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963.

⁵⁴⁸ J., R., Michael, *Crisis in International News: Policies and Prospects*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

⁵⁴⁹ E., S. Herman, *Words Tricks and propaganda*, Zena, 2002.

⁵⁵⁰ M. Parenti, *Monopoly Media Manipulation*, 2003.

⁵⁵¹ S. Mughees-ud-Din, *Editorial Treatment of US Foreign Policy in the New York Times: The Case Study of Pakistan (1980-90)*, National Development and Security Quarterly, No. 2, 1997.

⁵⁵² J. Werner, S. James, W. Tankered, *Communication Theories*, New York: Longman, 1988.

⁵⁵³ M. W. Sabri. *Factor Analysis of the Impact of Mass Media on Viewers: Discourses on Power and Violence*. PhD dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, 1996.

⁵⁵⁴ For instance, New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, CSB and NBC.

⁵⁵⁵ K. Al-Aswer, *The Incorrect Image of Islam in the Western Media*, May, 2005.

An eleven-year period from 1991 to 2001 is noteworthy because, following the global collapse of the USSR and the dissolution of communism, the USA emerged as the only superpower in the globe. After the conclusion of the Cold War, it was widely believed that the Muslim world may pose a threat to the West and the USA, as depicted by the worldwide media. In the wake of the conclusion of the cold war era, American foreign policy goals and trends related to the Muslim world were likewise altered and resurrected. After the collapse of the Kremlin, the western media heavily concentrated on the Islamic world (USSR).

The US media, especially *Newsweek* and *Time*, used to honour the Afghan Mujahedin for their enduringly valiant efforts in thwarting the Russians and preventing the spread of communism. However, their services were no longer necessary following the fall of the former USSR and the global downfall of communism. Mujahedeen were no longer important. Many American media once referred to them as freedom warriors and the conflict with Russia as a ‘Holy War.’

Afghanistan was once more depicted as a centre of terrorism after the Taliban rose to power.

Taliban imposed Islamic Shariah in Afghanistan, however both publications portrayed the Taliban government inaccurately. They were described as violent, wild, and barbarous beasts: “a visit to capital of Afghanistan extremist regime reveals a harsh world of suppression and despair.”⁵⁵⁶

Both magazines contained a total of 1002 sentences regarding Afghanistan. According to the data, there were 572 sentences totalling 57.08% (negative coverage)⁵⁵⁷ in the 20 articles:

Overall coverage of Afghanistan in News week and Time Magazine

Name of magazine	Total articles	Positive sentences	Negative sentences	Neutral sentences	Total sentences
News week	10	36 6.22%	328 56.7%	214 37%	578
Time magazine	10	25 5.89%	244 57.54%	155 36.51%	424
Grand total	20	61 6.08%	572 57.08%	369 36.82%	1002

558

⁵⁵⁶ *Time*: “Tyranny of the Taliban – A visit to the capital of Afghanistan’s extremist regime reveals a harsh world of suppression and despair”, October 13th, 1997.

⁵⁵⁷ Sentences which reflect social strife, natural and human steered deaths and destruction, political instability, catastrophic, chaos and anarchy, shabby living conditions, and political, economic, and social intra state and interstate conflicts and deputes will be coded as negative sentences. All such sentences which depict criticism of policies in abovementioned sectors as well as derogatory remarks to distort the personality of the Muslim rulers of the twelve Muslim countries would be coded with negative slant.

⁵⁵⁸ *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook*, 2002: the table indicates that Afghanistan received 6.08% positive coverage and both the magazines carried 1002 sentences about Afghanistan. It was assumed that the proportion of negative coverage would be greater in case of Afghanistan, because Afghanistan’s relations with USA are not friendly, as USA did not recognize the Taliban rule. The same could be seen in the data. That’s why the proportion of negative coverage (57.8%) was greater than the proportion of positive coverage (6.08%).

Indeed, the Taliban were called the ‘Mecca of terrorism’, ‘terrorist, fanatics, fundamentalists’, and ‘Muslim extremists’, and the negative campaign persisted even after the Taliban were overthrown. The mainstream American media continues to depict the Taliban in an unfavourable light.⁵⁵⁹

Everyone believes that raising awareness is the media's primary goal. It connects people whose opportunities for interaction are constrained. Sadly, the American mainstream media, including *Newsweek* and *Time*, have mostly fallen short of their duty to advance better global understanding. On the other side, the periodicals have consciously participated in a propaganda operation to create misinformation, distorted images, and hostility about Islam and the Muslim world in the minds of US citizens. It can be claimed that the White House's foreign policy toward Muslim nations was in line with the propaganda campaign ushered in by the periodicals. They have given the most coverage to the subjects and problems that have given readers a bad impression of Muslim countries. Thus, Afghanistan, Taliban as extremist regimes, women's situation, drug hub, Islamization process under Taliban control, Osama Bin Laden's issue are just a few of the topics that *Newsweek* and *Time* have focused on.

Finally, it is suggested that the image of Islam and Muslims in the West requires strong and persistent efforts from the Muslim themselves, both in the Muslim world and in Muslim communities in the West.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, it is a duty of every Muslim expert to clarify the incorrect view of Islam held by some that lead to conflict and confrontation between the west and Islam.⁵⁶¹

Accordingly, the Western civilizations enjoy a wealth of media coverage that prevents them from looking outside, and it is difficult for Muslim media to penetrate the Western media. As a result, the responsibility for organizing a media campaign to promote Islam's real image rests with the relevant organizations. Such a campaign must be supported by the required financial and human resources to be successful. It is also claimed that Muslim thinkers should organize meetings with believers of other religions and write books and articles to better explain Islam. There should be more satellite radio and television stations broadcasting in English in Muslim nations.⁵⁶² In other words, Islamic thinkers would be able to respond to inquiries concerning Islam, Muslim nations, and their political,

⁵⁵⁹ G. Shabir, S. Ali, Z. Iqbal, *US Mass Media, and Image of Afghanistan: Portrayal of Afghanistan by Newsweek and Time, Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January-June 2011.

⁵⁶⁰ K. Al-Aswer, *The Incorrect Image of Islam in the Western Media*, May 12, 2005.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶² G. Shabir, S. Ali, Z. Iqbal, *US Mass Media, and Image of Afghanistan: Portrayal of Afghanistan by Newsweek and Time, Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January-June 2011.

social, and economic conditions thanks to these satellite channels.

1.2 CNN and Al-Jazeera's media coverage of America's war in Afghanistan

The Twin Towers collapsing, and the Pentagon's burning debris were shown in horrifying detail to the American public, who then witnessed terrible footage of anti-American protesters celebrating in numerous Middle Eastern nations.

In the American media, particularly *CNN television* coverage, the marketing of the plan took place as American policy makers determined on a course of action in response to these attacks.

Several Middle Eastern media outlets, notably *Al Jazeera television*, simultaneously reported the American military reaction to the Arab world.

How did CNN and Al Jazeera frame the discourse about the war? And how did CNN use news reports presented by Al Jazeera and what consequences did this footage have for the range of information available in the U.S. information environment?

This section focuses on the framing of wartime news coverage from both regions of the conflict in the Afghanistan war. Indeed, past research on international crises has typically centred mostly on 'one-sided' perspectives, which are frequently found in American media coverage. This investigation aims to advance that effort by conflicting 'two-sided' media perspectives and the way the war in Afghanistan has been reported on *CNN America* also on the Arab television network *Al Jazeera*, which has become a significant primary source of news from the front lines inside of Afghanistan. Furthermore, we can learn more about the diversity of viewpoints present across cultures, a better understanding of the debate in various regions, and the similarities and differences in how these media influenced perceptions of the war in Afghanistan by looking at news footage of the conflict provided by CNN and Al Jazeera.

Media framing, also known as the 'second level of agenda setting', is a mechanism of influence in which journalists employ a frame of interpretation in presenting an issue to the public.⁵⁶³ In other words, media coverage is characterized by an active construction, selection, and structuring of information to organize a particular reality in a meaningful manner for the public.⁵⁶⁴ Framing

⁵⁶³ M. McCombs, *Explorers and surveyors: Expanding strategies for agenda-setting research*, *Journalism Quarterly*, 69 (4), Winter, 813–24, 1992.

⁵⁶⁴ W. Gamson, *Talking Politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

occurs when media make some aspects of a particular issue more salient to promote ‘a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.’⁵⁶⁵ Media framing can also influence opinion through the choice of news sources. Sources differ in credibility and those that are seen as more credible can be more persuasive in influencing opinion.⁵⁶⁶

During the war in Afghanistan, the Bush administration and Pentagon tried to control the information getting out to American media sources and the Taliban attempted to control the information getting out of Afghanistan, but Al Jazeera emerged as an alternative source of information from behind the battle lines. Hence, it was one of the only sources inside Afghanistan to have unhindered access to the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership.⁵⁶⁷

Immediately after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the al Jazeera television network began to set the visual agenda for American news coverage of the war by supplying images of unfolding events in Afghanistan. On September 11, Peter Jennings from *ABC News* reported that there were explosions in Kabul, Afghanistan and that pictures were being supplied by al Jazeera. As another reporter questioned Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, it became clear that the questions resulted from news emanating from visuals supplied by al Jazeera to CNN in the United States.⁵⁶⁸

Without the reports from these Middle Eastern sources, in especially from al Jazeera, American media would not have been aware to pose these queries. This situation presents several crucial queries that shed light on how cultural differences affect how the same event is covered in two different parts of the world.

*How did CNN America frame its coverage of the war in Afghanistan and how did this coverage differ from al Jazeera, a media source from the Middle East?*⁵⁶⁹

Diverse cultural circumstances should influence the tone and balance of frames present in political discourse from different cultural perspectives, even though some frames of war may be ubiquitous.

Many journalists claimed that CNN received favored status in reporting on the war in

⁵⁶⁵ R. M. Entman, *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, *Journal of Communication*. 43 (4): 51–8, 1973.

⁵⁶⁶ P., B., S., R. and G. R. Dempsey, *What moves public opinion?* *American Political Science Review*, 81, March, 23–43. 1987.

⁵⁶⁷ L., S. and M. Rose, *Al Jazeera Goes It Alone*, *BBC Newscast*, 8 October 2001.

⁵⁶⁸ *ABC News Special Report: America Under Attack*, 11 September 2001.

⁵⁶⁹ P. Norris, M. Kern, M. Just, *Framing Terrorism – The News Media, the Government, and the Public*, pag. 124.

Afghanistan due to the access to information from Middle Eastern news sources, such as Al Jazeera.

Generally, in times of international crisis, the American public supports its political leaders and military actions taken in these contexts. In fact, the warning of the strikes on Afghanistan⁵⁷⁰ created the so-called effect ‘rally-round-the-flag’ and the crowd began to chant “USA, USA.”⁵⁷¹ Bush’s message was echoed as well in media outlets by various political elites from around the world. For instance, Shimon Peres, Israel’s foreign minister affirmed: “*I don’t have the slightest doubt that the decision that was taken by the President of the United States is the right one, the just one, and you are going, and we are going to win it for the simple reason, not just because you have the technological supremacy, you have the moral supremacy.*”⁵⁷² France and Canada also agreed. Accordingly, EU Defense Minister, Javier Solana, communicated a message of the legitimacy of the Western actions against Afghanistan: “*Well, we think that this operation is fully legitimate, according to the U.N. Security Council and the European Union has all the solidarity with the United States in these operations. The fight against terrorism is our fight, and together we are going to win it.*”⁵⁷³ However, when opposition to actions in Afghanistan was shown, protesters were portrayed as not fully engaged in their opposition to the U.S. effort. Indeed, dissent was reported as under control and better than expected, rendering a more optimistic picture of the reaction of the world to the American’s actions:⁵⁷⁴ “*we have seen anti-American protests, and the pictures are stunning, the demonstrations themselves. But when you count and put them in a context, perhaps not as great as many had anticipated.*”⁵⁷⁵

Another interesting aspect is the ‘humanitarian’ frame that was present to a lesser degree, in approximately 17 percent of the *CNN* stories analysed. In fact, in *CNN*’s coverage on the war in Afghanistan, an equal number of stories covered deaths or humanitarian problems caused by Americans or the Taliban/Al Qaeda. Much of this coverage was available only through the cooperation of al Jazeera since the station provided visual images of damage on the ground. Al Jazeera provided a new perspective because *CNN* had access to its coverage. In Addition, Al Jazeera and its reporters served as eyewitness sources for *CNN*, oftentimes providing video images along with an alternative view of events than the Pentagon. In one segment common of the use of such *CNN* footage, al Jazeera’s reporter Taysseer Allooni, describes attacks that he has seen directly on

⁵⁷⁰ G. W. Bush, *Speech to the Nation*, reported on CNN, 7 October 2001.

⁵⁷¹ *CNN*, 7 October 2001.

⁵⁷² *CNN Breaking News*, 7 October 2001.

⁵⁷³ *Ibidem.*,

⁵⁷⁴ P. Norris, M. Kern, M. Just, *Framing Terrorism – The News Media, The Government and The Public*, pag. 137.

⁵⁷⁵ *CNN Tonight*, October 13, 2001.

buildings, radar antennae, and the home of a civilian near a military site.⁵⁷⁶

*“As you have seen, the American missiles have hit a humanitarian aid building and a poor populated area was destroyed. But it seems that the fighting concentrates on airports and the air defense installations.” “There were pictures from the hospital inside Kabul, which showed some injuries, showed some children, women, and men who the Taliban claim have been injured in the previous night’s attack. Reports of fear from ordinary civilians.”*⁵⁷⁷

In other words, this coverage offers additional proof of the influence of *Al Jazeera* and its viewpoint on how *CNN news* is framed. *Al Jazeera*’s inclusion in *CNN*’s coverage of the war in Afghanistan really gave viewers a fresh perspective on the conflict. Accordingly, the perception of the American public was clearly influenced by this reality-based picture. Less than half of Americans believed that the United States was winning the war against terrorism, despite the overwhelming support for Bush and the combat effort in Afghanistan. For instance, on 31 October 2001, only 4 in 10 Americans thought that it was likely that we would succeed in removing the Taliban from power. Only one fourth of Americans in a *CBS/New York Times* poll felt that the war was going very well.⁵⁷⁸

However, the American public remained steadfast in its support for Bush’s presidency and some form of military action against terrorism.

For what concerns the Middle East region, it has been said that the Bush administration’s full support of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who Arabs saw as a ‘war criminal’ rather than a ‘man of peace,’ as President Bush described him, angered the Arab street. Additionally, many Arabs viewed American policy with scepticism due to the daily exposure to images on Arab satellite television depicting the ruthless suppression of Palestinians in the occupied regions of the West Bank and Gaza. In a *New York Times* article, Mark Rodenbeck argued: *“never, in a half a century of Middle Eastern conflict, have ordinary Arab so identified with the Palestinian tragedy as they do today. As network coverage of Vietnam shocked Americans with the immediacy of far-off war, satellite television’s insistent graphic imagery of the intifada has taken its bloody drama into millions of Arab households.”*⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁶ CNN, 8 October, 2001.

⁵⁷⁷ *CNN LIVE*, 13 October, 2001.

⁵⁷⁸ Newport, Frank, *Public Opinion of the War in Afghanistan*, Gallup News Service Poll Analyses, 31 October, 2001.

⁵⁷⁹ M, Rodenbeck, *Broadcasting the War*, *The New York Times*, 17 April, 2002.

After 9/11, most Middle Eastern governments instantly expressed their open sympathies for the United States. Most of these governments were sincerely sympathetic to the tragedy that befell the United States on September 11 because they had already seen the effects of radical Islam inside their own society.

However, a Pew Research Centre⁵⁸⁰ survey performed in the summer of 2002 in several Muslim nations revealed that the initial sympathy for the United States in the wake of September 11, 2002, has diminished due to what are viewed as the country's anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and pro-Zionist policies.

The United States' response to September 11 further aggravated what little support it had even among Arab regimes after having designated Iraq and Iran as members of the 'Axis of Evil,' further evoking in the minds of many Arabs the imagery of the Christian crusades, these regimes were driven to distance themselves from the United States. Additionally, the US accused Saudi Wahabism of being the source of terrorism in the Islamic world for the first time since establishing diplomatic relations with the conservative country. However, the Saudis reduced their usual dose of religious programming emphasizing the 'huge' gap between them and bin Laden's radicalism, and the Libyan and Iraqi media increased their endless glorification of their respective dictators as peacemakers and secularists. It was clear⁵⁸¹ them all made attempts at distancing themselves from both the September 11 disaster and the Afghan-U.S. conflict.

Moreover, nothing in *Al Jazeera's* or most of the Arab media's coverage suggested sympathy or support for bin Laden or the al Qaeda group. Naturally, the media was not pro-US either, but in the zero-sum world that the Bush administration enforced, most of the US media labelled any nation that did not support the US as being anti-US. After September 11, many Arabs could see America's justifiable hostility toward Arabs and Muslims, and *Al Jazeera* played a significant role in spreading that message.

Senior Bush administration officials understood that the United States' interests in the area would be harmed by rejecting these new Arab channels as censored and hence useless. They made a special effort to give interviews both during and after the Afghan campaign to clarify American policy toward the Arab world and Islam.

Generally, *Al Jazeera* was privileged enough to have monopolized some of the coverage of the Afghan War, which was the first actual war to be reported by any Arab network. The Arab stations

⁵⁸⁰ The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, *How Global Publics View: Their Lives, Their Countries, The World*, America Washington,DC, 2002.

⁵⁸¹ BBC Worldwide Monitoring, Director says al Jazeera TV meets Arab's "thirst for democracy." Published by Belgian newspaper De Standaard ,11 September, 2002.

that participated in the coverage, however, were learning how to cover a conflict, what to look for, and most importantly, what they can get away with saying or showing without offending the sensibilities of their state governments. This makes them different from many other networks. It was clear that while having a lot of freedom to broadcast the news, the three stations led by al Jazeera placed some self-censorship on themselves. These stations were persuaded by the Afghan experiment that their conservative owners are more tolerant than they had thought, and this was reflected in the freedom they were given. Their spending has increased, as have their activities. Their audience has multiplied many-fold, and the topics they cover are more contentious than ever. The fact that conservative owners have learned that press freedom can be profitable, beneficial, and legitimate is interesting.⁵⁸²

Al Jazeera was the only network with staff inside of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and prior to the September 11 attacks it had an estimated viewership of twenty to twenty-five million people.⁵⁸³

“It’s very controversial, but at the same time very popular, because it tells all sides—in other words, it may cover the Palestinian uprising very intensely, but also allows access to

*Israeli officials. It gets the videotape of Osama bin Laden that every network in the universe, including CNN, has now aired many times, but it also puts Tony Blair on the air to give the Western view.”*⁵⁸⁴

Part of this effort to show all sides included broadcasting the message of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda directly to the international public. In fact, on October 7 Osama bin Laden delivered several speeches on videotape via *Al Jazeera* with the assistance of a translator.⁵⁸⁵

Consequently, even though the coverage may have originated from the same dates, it was frequently exceedingly difficult for an impartial observer to tell whether the Arab media and the U.S. media were reporting on the same events during the war in Afghanistan. The way the American military carried out its campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda seemed to be of primary interest to the American media.

To accomplish this, U.S. coverage was primarily restricted to images and analysis of U.S. bombs dropping on different regions of Afghanistan where Taliban and al Qaeda soldiers were allegedly stationed. However, the focus of the original *Al Jazeera* film and, consequently, other Arab media channels, was on how the war affected regular Afghan citizens. Therefore, many of the media

⁵⁸² Agence France-Presse, *Al Jazeera Thrives on Afghan and Bin Laden Business*, 24 June, 2002.

⁵⁸³ National Public Radio, 8 October, 2001.

⁵⁸⁴ CNN, 10 October, 2001.

⁵⁸⁵ *“America has been hit by god at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings”*, referencing the September 11 attacks on the US. Bin Laden did not claim responsibility for the attacks in the recording, BBC News. October 7, 2001.

concentrated on the destruction that American bombardment caused to Afghanistan's citizens, cities, and already crumbling infrastructure.

While there was a unifying humanitarian element in all 42 of the tales provided by the *Al Jazeera* network, they also shared some of the same frames with *CNN*'s combat reporting.

The primary contrast in news coverage and framing is that *al Jazeera* did not gloss over a humanistic portrayal of the consequences of war. In addition, *Al Jazeera*'s pictures, and ground zero reports from within Afghanistan provided the impetus for *CNN* reporters, as representatives of the American media, to question information from official Bush administration sources.⁵⁸⁶ Nevertheless, even though *CNN*'s coverage included *Al Jazeera*'s point of view, American media frames contextualized its humanistic approach.

Further investigation finds that there has been a significant shift in media coverage of Middle Eastern events since the American War in Afghanistan. Particularly the *Al Jazeera* and Abu Dhabi networks have been successful in getting the attention of U.S. and European media services. American broadcasters now present events with greater balance while covering Middle East affairs. To compete with *al Jazeera* and target younger Muslims who are perceived as being anti-American, the U.S. government has determined that it is necessary "to invest \$500 million on the development of a satellite channel."⁵⁸⁷

CNN is also in the process of creating a new U.S. Arab network to compete with others in providing the Arab world of its positions on various global issues.⁵⁸⁸ In other words, *Al Jazeera* created a revolution in the Middle East since the creation of these new Arab networks may led to the beginning of a common Arab consensus on some global issues. However, the U.S. was angered by *Al Jazeera*'s unrestricted reporting, accusing it of fomented anti-Americanism in the Arab and Islamic world.⁵⁸⁹

Yet, despite these findings, *Al Jazeera* is never certain of its stance and is continuously doing a balance act⁵⁹⁰ while walking a razor's edge. It is still learning and becoming more legitimate.

In the past, no Arab media outlet has used its own resources or journalists to cover a battle, so, even if it is much too early to tell how other Arab media outlets will cover future wars, thanks to *Al Jazeera*, it will certainly be radically different from past coverage.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁶ M. J. Paul, *Terrorism and the Media: a handbook for journalists*, UNESCO, 2017.

⁵⁸⁷ D. Campbell, U.S. Plans TV Station to Rival *al Jazeera* - The Guardian, 23 November, 2001.

⁵⁸⁸ R. Tiare, *Al Jazeera in English? CNN in Arabic?* - The Daily Star (Beirut), 7 February, 2002.

⁵⁸⁹ M. Wells, *Al Jazeera Accuses U.S. of Bombing Its Kabul Office* - The Guardian, 17 November, 2001.

⁵⁹⁰ P. Norris, M. Kern, M. Just, *Framing Terrorism – The News Media, the Government and the Public*, pag. 140.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

2. *Image of oppression: freedom of media and speech in Afghanistan before and after Taliban*

Today, a free media has an important part to routing the governments on the accurate way to protect, enforce and promote human rights, combat corruption, and work for public awareness.

Media train the readers, listeners, viewers with knowledge and information that enable them to take part in all politics, democracy and give them a sense of their basic human rights.

Media has become very prevalent in Afghanistan in the last eighteen years. Therefore, a historical review will focus on early trends in connection to present. As a broad field the media is, its importance and role have widespread involvement in a society's changing process. From political role to social, development, educational, reconstruction and achievements and to impact on opinions and behaviour of the government decision makers in times of national and international issues related to governance. Thus, media is playing an important role and a tool for national power because of its phenomenal influence over the opponents as well as on the public. It also easily to manage our foes and quickly responses to effect positively on our capability to rapidly care of its bad effects.⁵⁹²

This section is particularly focusing on media's role in understanding how the Taliban has waged, and now won, a singular, focused, twenty-year information war. While the platforms and methods of this conflict have evolved, the Taliban's Islamic fundamentalist goals have not.

In fact, the first part of this section aims to examine the evolution of the Taliban's information operations and it charts free periods: the origins of the Taliban's propaganda and early digital strategy (2002-2009); its adoption on modern social media platforms and distribution techniques (2009-2017); and its rapid ascent and diplomatic legitimization (2017-2021) which expanded its access to online services and tools.

Since the 9/11 attack in New York, Afghanistan media as an influential factor put its impact on society. Accordingly, after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, by the United States, the people of Afghanistan achieved greater freedom to participate in public domain, such as expressing ideas about their basic rights, access to healthcare, education, technology, work, and employment.

⁵⁹² J. Jones, M. Trice, *Social Media Effects: Hijacking Democracy and Civility in Civic Engagement*, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH USA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA USA.

However, the Afghanistan's media initially raised during the period of *Seraj-ul-Akhbar* known as the most leading first newspaper in Afghanistan, published in 1906.⁵⁹³ Hence, the media's position in Afghanistan has grown to be very significant, particularly from that moment, onwards.

As Post-Taliban, the country went through a dark period, political anarchy and economic stagnation was plunged and the country was not opened to the world. Media was fully banned, even nobody could make a cell phone call in 2001 and people had no access to TV.⁵⁹⁴ Moreover, more than 44 journalists have been killed in Afghanistan, more than 450 violations against media have been recorded, and in most of these incidents the government was blamed.⁵⁹⁵

According to the 34th article of the Afghan Constitution, "*freedom of expression is guaranteed and there is not limit unless it is against national interest or personal privacy.*" However, the reality is that many limits to freedom of expression exist in Afghanistan.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, when a journalist asks for information from government staff, he is then subjected to verbal and even physical harassment.⁵⁹⁷

Different circles within the government of Afghanistan oppose freedom of expression even though the government has not hesitated to claim to foreign audiences that the mentioned freedom is one of its key successes. Furthermore, the peace process with the Taliban is another barrier to freedom of expression. In fact, the government of Afghanistan often sacrifices it to bring the Taliban into peace negotiations. However, the Taliban continue to challenge freedom of expression as well as the peace process. It is worth mentioning that during the Taliban era there was no TV in Afghanistan, and the only radio station was run by the government along with a few papers using it for their own propaganda.⁵⁹⁸ The sector has experienced substantial investment, innovation, and commitment. In a few cases, local TV and radio stations even compete successfully with national and international stations. Nevertheless, the future of many local stations remains uncertain.⁵⁹⁹

In addition, during their harsh rule, the Taliban closed cinemas and destroyed video recorders. They were comfortable with radio and newspapers but, like many strict Muslims, saw the visual image as problematic.

⁵⁹³ "*The Dari publication Siraj al-Akhbar is one of the earliest and most interesting of Afghanistan's newspapers. Published in 1906 and between 1911 and 1919, at a time when the international situation was changing rapidly, it exerted a considerable influence and was without doubt instrumental in bringing about Afghanistan's eventual independence,*" see: U. Sims-Williams, *The Afghan Newspaper Siraj-al-Akbar*, Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies), Vol. 7, No. 2 (1980), published by Taylor&Francis, Ltd.

⁵⁹⁴ BBC News: "*Taliban 'carrying out door-to-door manhunt'*", August 15, 2021, Live Reporting.

⁵⁹⁵ A. M. Khalvatgar, *Freedom of Expression Under Threat in Afghanistan?* International Journal of Security & Development, pag. 4.

⁵⁹⁶ BBC Media Action, *The media of Afghanistan: The challenges of transition*, Policy Briefing, March 2012.

⁵⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch: "*Stop Reporting, or We'll Kill Your Family*" - *Afghanistan: Media Under Attack*, January 21, 2015.

⁵⁹⁸ Taliban joined Youtube in 2009: Danger Room Reports affirms: "*by turning to YouTube, the Taliban gain a free, highly-reliable video broadcast service with the potential to reel in a vast, viral audience*" October 13, 2009.

⁵⁹⁹ *Altai Synthesis Report*, pag. 116 and pag. 122.

Since 2001, they have changed their views and become much more media-savvy. While they do not have their own TV channels, they do have a website presence that is updated regularly and makes prominent use of video footage. They keep the organisation on message and have pro-active spokespersons for the northern and southern zones of the country. *“Their message is very consistent, clear, quick and available”* said a BBC journalist based in Kabul.⁶⁰⁰ As a result, the Taliban obtain regular coverage of their point of view in all the main Afghan and international media.⁶⁰¹ They also monitor the media and bring their own pressures to bear on journalists, even those working for international agencies. *“They have accepted the modern world of communications”*⁶⁰² according to the fact that its first primitive website, ‘*www.taliban.com*’, has been launched in 1998. In other words, Taliban were not against Internet; it wanted to rule Afghanistan. Accordingly, on the ground, the Taliban continue to battle ISAF and Afghan forces and use the new media to propagate a narrower vision of Afghanistan’s future.

Journalists travelling in Taliban-controlled parts of the country report that the Taliban use video clips of bombed convoys or slain commanders in a highly systematic and effective way to create support for their cause. These clips are distributed by mobile phone to supporters and local media to keep them informed of Taliban activities. *“The speed at which these clips appear is extraordinary”* said one Afghan journalist who had been travelling widely in the north of the country. *“All young people have at least one on their mobile phones”*⁶⁰³

After 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban was temporarily shattered, but one year later it founded a revitalized media arm that focused on winning legitimacy, both among the local populace and in the eyes of the international community and undermining the US-backed Afghan government.⁶⁰⁴ *“Afghan people have to be told that we are good for them, that is our job and that is what we will continue to do.”*⁶⁰⁵ The regime renovated printing presses and, like nearly every regime before it, created its own organ, *Sharia*, with the aim to project positive images of the regime. Afghanistan Radio continued under the name *Radio Voice of Sharia*; presenters were punished if they did not read out Taliban statements in full. Music, except for

⁶⁰⁰ Interview, Daud Azami, Kabul, 23 February 2011.

⁶⁰¹ BBC Media Action, *The media of Afghanistan: The challenges of transition*, Policy Briefing, March 2012, pag. 9.

⁶⁰² Abdul Hakim Mujahid, a former Ambassador to Pakistan and representative in New York during the Taliban period, who now sits on the High Peace Council.

⁶⁰³ Interview, Shuaib Sharifi, Kabul, 24 February 2011.

⁶⁰⁴ *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?* Asian Report N°158 - 24 July 2008.

⁶⁰⁵ C. Lees, *Turn on, tune in to Radio Taliban - The Independent*, 26 October 1996. Mullah Nizami initially fled with the Taliban leadership, taking refuge in Peshawar, but in 2007 returned to Kabul under a Karzai government reconciliation program.

unaccompanied religious chants, was banned.⁶⁰⁶ However, a few regime and pro-regime websites were maintained for external use.⁶⁰⁷

One more interesting aspect is about the official website of Taliban insurgency, *El Emarah* (The Emirate) that came online in 2005 and it published in five languages: English, Arabic, Pashto, Dari, and Urdu.⁶⁰⁸ Much of its content came in the form of short, rapid-fire press releases either claiming various victories over the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or disputing casualty figures. Later, this constellation of websites would grow to include downloadable audio and video propaganda.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, in the early years of Taliban's resurgence, the so-called *night letters*⁶¹⁰ have been distributed in Afghanistan, particularly with the focus on American 'atrocities.' Taliban abandoned strictures against pictures of living images and used graphic pictures of Afghan casualties and the destruction of property allegedly by foreign forces.⁶¹¹

To this point, in a 2006 Pashto-language statement, the Taliban complained about widespread bias in news reports, threatening violence if the situation did not improve. "*Many news sources cruelly treat the Taliban,*" the statement read.⁶¹² "*They do not air our reports... We will kill anyone who mistreats us like this.*"⁶¹³ At the same time, the group was becoming adept at quickly spreading its preferred narratives. In a 2008 interview, the Taliban's then-information minister bragged that it took twenty-four hours for the Afghan government to put out a press release to journalists, "*while we can give the information through satellite phones in record time.*"⁶¹⁴ In Afghanistan less than a quarter of the adult population is estimated to be literate, with only 2 per cent claiming to read newspapers regularly.⁶¹⁵ Around a third of households have a television and 88 per cent radios,⁶¹⁶ while only a tiny fraction of the population has access to the internet. In such a situation the Taliban keeps online resources basic. The internet is used to allow the leadership to communicate quickly

⁶⁰⁶ Chants by Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens) were popular and broadcast nearly every night on the English program. Presenters and producers from this time say they received letters from as far away as Scandinavia about their nightly English language shortwave transmission. *Crisis Group interviews*, Kabul, March-April 2008.

⁶⁰⁷ P. Di Justo, *Does Official Taliban Site Exist?* Wired, 30 October 2001.

⁶⁰⁸ BBC News: "*The Taliban embrace social media: 'We too want to change perceptions'*", September 6, 2021.

⁶⁰⁹ T. H. Johnson, M. DuPee, W. Shaaer, *The Taliban's Use of the Internet, Social Media Video, Radio Stations, and Graffiti*, Oxford University Press (2017), published in February 2018.

⁶¹⁰ Time: "*Deadly Notes in the Night – How the Taliban is using a new kind of terrorist threat to intimidate Afghans*", Kandahar, Wednesday, July 5, 2006.

⁶¹¹ Orthodox Muslims believe that the depiction of living images is *haram* (forbidden).

⁶¹² Taliban Propaganda: *Winning the War of Words?* Asia Report N°158 – 24 July 2008.

⁶¹³ *Ibidem*,.

⁶¹⁴ Ahmad Mukhtar, "*Interview with Qudratullah Jamal*", op. cit., pag. 15.

⁶¹⁵ The adult literacy rate is estimated at 23.5 per cent. "*United Nations Human Development Report 2007*", conducted by the Centre for Policy and Human Development, pag. 19. There is a gross gender disparity, with only 12.6 per cent of women literate compared to 32.4 per cent of men. *Ibid*, pag. 24. According to the results of a nationwide survey, 74 per cent said they never relied on newspapers for information and only 2 per cent said they read a newspaper almost every day. "*Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People*", The Asia Foundation, Kabul, 2008, pag. 108. This surveyed 6,263 respondents in all 34 provinces.

⁶¹⁶ "*Afghanistan in 2007*", op. cit., pag. 97.

and broadly – nationally and internationally – with media and other opinion-makers, replacing faxes, which were more common in 2002 and 2003.

In addition, video quality notably increased, and sometimes filmed by drones. Surprisingly many Taliban gunmen had smartphones during a series of assaults on the city of Kunduz in 2015 and 2016. In one instance, militants tweeted jubilant selfies⁶¹⁷ while Afghan citizens nearby tweeted for assistance. In one, they seized a significant downtown intersection and raised the white flag of the Taliban, controlling the area for several hours. While Kunduz locals and Taliban propagandists flooded Twitter with video footage, the ISAF spokesperson's account continued to maintain that a significant attack had not occurred. Additionally, for years, only rarely did Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter remove Taliban content when it became too graphic or enraged US policymakers. The Taliban was caught up in the subsequent crackdown as those platforms bowed to public pressure and stopped carrying Islamic State propaganda after 2014.

The Afghan government was likewise determined to dismantle this propaganda machine after years of embarrassment at the hands of the Taliban's increasingly skilled online presence. Kabul gained increased control over issues relating to public transparency, public relations, and information policy as ISAF combat deployments ended and more US forces left the nation. But it wouldn't make good use of this power. Indeed, by 2017, the Afghan government, supported by the US, was becoming less open about military activities and more receptive to censorship. For many years, the US military had periodically released⁶¹⁸ data on the size, effectiveness, and attrition of Afghan forces as well as an estimate of losses among US troops and Afghan civilians. These numbers were kept from the Afghan and US public as of late 2017 at the request of the Afghan government.

Kabul has imposed a 20-day ban on WhatsApp and Telegram use inside the nation, citing undefined 'security considerations.'⁶¹⁹ Journalists in Afghanistan exploded in rage, claiming the restriction violated the right to free speech guaranteed by the constitution. The Afghan administration changed course in the face of growing public outcry. However, the harm had already been done to its credibility. Consequently, the Taliban delighted in asserting that it was more approachable and open than representatives of the Afghan government. In fact, it did all in its power to make matters worse for officials. Taliban forces started damaging adjacent cell phone towers as part of their combat preparations, which hindered the Afghan government's ability to contact residents and provide timely reports. In other words, the purpose was to create an information

⁶¹⁷ *BBC News*: "Taliban selfies: Why militants posed for photos in Kunduz," September 30, 2015.

⁶¹⁸ *The New York Times*: "Afghan War Data, Once Public, Is Censored in U.S. Military Report", 2017.

⁶¹⁹ *BBC News*: "Would banning Whatsapp really make Afghan safer?", 2017.

vacuum, one that the Taliban could fill itself.⁶²⁰

The first (short) truce in the nation since 2001 occurred in 2018 when the Taliban's three-day, unconditional cease-fire was announced by Ashraf Ghani,⁶²¹ who was then president. Importantly, the truce was first announced on Ghani's Facebook page, which highlights how significantly Afghanistan's information landscape has shifted. The internet and cell phones were essentially non-existent during the US invasion. In 2018, about 40% of Afghan homes had internet connectivity,⁶²² while 90% had a mobile device. Social media was becoming an integral part of Afghan public life and was no longer just a fad or toy for the wealthy. The Taliban's internet propaganda had reached its peak by 2019. It quickly released English-language news alerts about ongoing battles, frequently with shareable infographics and quick videos.

After the agreement between U.S. and Taliban representatives for the withdrawal of all US and international forces by May 2021, Taliban's apparent power and international legitimacy vastly increased. For instance, in October 2020, local officials reported that an errant Afghan air strike on a rural religious school had killed eleven children⁶²³ and their prayer leader. But the Afghan government contradicted the reports, insisting that no civilians had died. When a local spokesperson who had visited the surviving children in the hospital refused to echo the central government's position, he was arrested and imprisoned. The spokesman felt "*amid two stones*," as he later explained to *The New York Times*: caught between the Afghan government and the Taliban.⁶²⁴

The spread of this attitude would mark the death knell for the Afghan government. For two decades, the Taliban had cast itself as the legitimate claimant to Afghanistan; no more corrupt or violent than the US-backed administration in Kabul. A growing number of Afghans came around to this view⁶²⁵ of the US-backed government, and by the time the Taliban began its *blitzkrieg* offensive in August 2021, many defenders had run out of reasons to fight. These sorts of incidents only served to further erode the Afghan people's loyalty to and contribute to a significant loss of trust in—the US-backed government.

In conclusion, the Taliban of today knows how to spread its propaganda quickly and widely.

⁶²⁰ The New York Times: "Fire, Films, Tweet: The Taliban's New Way of War", a 2016 interview of Zabihullah Mujahid.

⁶²¹ BBC News: "Afghan Taliban agree three-day ceasefire – their first," June 9, 2018.

⁶²² DataReportal – Digital 2022: Afghanistan, February 15, 2022.

⁶²³ BBC News: "Afghanistan conflict: Children among dead in air strike on school", October 22, 2020.

⁶²⁴ The New York Times: "Afghan Leaders Sideline Spokesmen in an Escalating Misinformation War", 2020.

⁶²⁵ FP Insider Access: "How to Partner with the Taliban", August 26, 2019.

It has learned to value how its English-language media can be used to disarm and divert the attention of the international community by portraying a ‘moderate’ veneer that helps hide the massacres and violent retaliation⁶²⁶ that have already started under its rule.

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan will not put a stop to this informational conflict. Anti-Taliban fighters have already requested military assistance from the West. Afghan civilians have started the first online opposition movement⁶²⁷ rumblings using aliases with the goal of undermining the Taliban's claims of moderation and mercy and exposing the brutality of its rule. In other words, the Taliban's use of the Internet to intimidate and threaten the Afghan people today is identical to how they used to ban it in the 1990s. For instance, one of the first victims of the Taliban administration following Kabul's fall were the journalists at the Afghan network *Tolo News*. The TV station, which is now the target of Islamic fundamentalist repression, served as the symbol of Afghanistan's media industry's resurgence. Turkish soap opera broadcasts, in-depth programming, and news shows were all popular on *Tolo News* for a long time. In short, a reference point for plural information in the country.

This is a sign of how they may one day use technology to consolidate their authority.

2.1 Enhancing government capacity to communicate

The effective communication is a key component of contemporary governance.

Government and public interaction that is effective in both directions increases legitimate public authority. In turn, this raises the possibility of getting the results of excellent governance.

Regimes that are competent, receptive, and responsible are in the best interest of governments.

By giving individuals sufficient information on priorities, programs, and activities, the public authority is more likely to be viewed as legitimate by the public and other stakeholder groups, which helps to stabilize the political climate of a nation. Many contemporary leadership processes are supported by the communication function, which is supportive of many kinds of technical competence. Additionally, persuasion is frequently necessary for successful and long-lasting public sector transformation, including enlisting elite support, promoting change within bureaucracies, and striking a moral balance between soliciting public opinion and guiding it.

Governments must, nevertheless, conduct themselves impartially to uphold their reputation and adhere to standards for accountability and openness. Governmental organizations, on the other

⁶²⁶ Amnesty International: “Afghanistan: Taliban Responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men – new investigation”, August 19, 2021.

⁶²⁷ The New York Times: “How the Taliban Turned Social Media Into a Tool for Control.”

hand, must also promote their own policies. Therefore, maintaining credibility and trustworthiness while promoting policy in a competitive communication environment is a major problem for government communications. Whatever the level of government or the sector, improving the capacity of agencies, officials, and bureaucrats to engage in a two-way conversation⁶²⁸ with their constituents is part of strengthening government communication.

Moving to the Afghan's context, one major pillar of the international community's diplomatic and development engagement in Afghanistan, over the past two decades, centred on strengthening subnational governance with the aim to 'build trust,' 'foster dialogue,' and strengthen linkages between the state and citizenry to teach Afghans to talk to one another. However, they failed to acknowledge that the primary barriers to communication between the governed and governors were often political, not technical.⁶²⁹ Second, they sought to strengthen the capacities of district- and provincial-level councils, but these training initiatives were consistently thwarted by these organizations' lack of distinct powers or responsibilities. Third, donor programs frequently placed more emphasis on developing skills that were more useful for receiving good aid than they were for negotiating the real politics of the local Afghan order, whose residents had long considered the state's intrusion into their villages as predatory or undesirable.

A more comprehensive decentralization of authority and power away from Kabul would have resulted in long-term governance structures for Afghanistan that are more promising. Donor participation, however, fell short of facilitating this kind of change, in part due to these enduring problems.⁶³⁰ In other words, the experience of local government support in Afghanistan has brought a familiar tale to yet another heart-breaking new chapter. Moreover, the case of Afghanistan also highlights the tremendous difficulty of operating in a setting that is frequently beyond the control of Western interveners: for almost twenty years, local governance structures in Afghanistan were 'caught in confusion,' and for many Afghan players, this ambiguity was advantageous.⁶³¹

In other words, despite many efforts made by the international community in Afghanistan over time, local governance aid featured several shortcomings that remained remarkably consistent. Although the international community aimed to use subnational governance aid to help decentralize

⁶²⁸ For instance, providing all interested parties with access to government information and data; providing the public with access to technical analyses of government priorities and performance from multiple perspectives; popularising analysis of government performance; engaging the public.

⁶²⁹ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "USAID Afghanistan Stabilization Fact Sheet," USAID, June 2011; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Support to SubNational Governance Structure*, last updated May 7, 2019

⁶³⁰ F. Z. Brown, *Aiding Afghan Local Governance: What Went Wrong?*, pag. 3.

⁶³¹ S. Lister, *Caught in Confusion: Local Governance Structures in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2, 2005.

authority to local communities, these efforts fell short of that ambition.⁶³²

Civilian stabilization programs explicitly aimed to build more ‘responsive, capable, and accountable governance’ at the local levels by lavishing unprecedented attention and financial resources on district officials and government entities.⁶³³ Yet these initiatives often undercut their own long-term goals. The huge injection of external money undermined any accountability between the state and citizens, effectively turning district-level administrations into rentier ministates. Meanwhile, the deluge of Western-led ‘quick impact’ projects drew attention away from strengthening the line ministries’ capacity, and their incentives, to deliver local services in the long term.⁶³⁴ Hence, throughout the years, foreign aid programs constantly emphasized the objectives of ‘building trust,’ ‘fostering dialogue,’ and strengthening linkages between and among Afghan government officials and the Afghan population.⁶³⁵ Many programs were aimed to augment communications between locally based Afghan officials and their own citizens, prompting both sides to interact at district centres. Accordingly, local officials were further prodded to participate in the opening ceremonies for donor-funded projects to show their engagement,⁶³⁶ “to enable citizens to communicate their needs and concerns directly to their governors” and “to help provincial governors develop communication plans to better engage with constituents.”⁶³⁷ Nevertheless, citizens at the local level lacked interest in being connected to the central state, which they viewed as extortionate and corrupt, and the state was disinclined to bolster its communication with a periphery demanding more authority or resources.⁶³⁸

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has immediately flooded the international community with serious concerns. The continued humanitarian crisis, counterterrorism, the nation's economic collapse, the protection of women's and minorities' rights, and the avoidance of atrocities under the new administration are all legitimate concerns for policymakers.

The international community must evaluate the long-term transformational strategy it pursued in Afghanistan in addition to attending to these pressing issues. It should also benefit from the lessons

⁶³² F. Z. Brown, *Aiding Afghan Local Governance: What Went Wrong?*, pag. 4.

⁶³³ U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, *US Government Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan*, U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, August 10, 2009.

⁶³⁴ R. Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012); S. Dempsey, *Is Spending the Strategy?* - Small Wars Journal, May 4, 2011,

⁶³⁵ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *USAID Afghanistan Stabilization Fact Sheet*, USAID, June 2011; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Support to Sub-National Governance Structure*, last updated May 7, 2019.

⁶³⁶ Management Systems International, *Stability in Key Areas: Final Performance Evaluation*, USAID, September 2015, 19.

⁶³⁷ USAID, *Support to Sub-national Governance Structure Fact Sheet*, USAID, last updated May 7, 2019.

⁶³⁸ Coburn, *Bazaar Politics*, pag. 145;179.

acquired, and in this regard, the story of subnational governance assistance is only one aspect of a larger narrative. Despite the stated reservations of some Westerners closest to the actual situation, programs frequently resorted to a familiar collection of "theories of change" that did not match the conditions on the ground. A remarkable number of reform and rationalization initiatives were started by donors,⁶³⁹ but they fizzled out after diplomat rotations. Few on the donor side were aware of the striking similarities between foreign aid programs and policy discussions on local government in 2018 and those in 2008 because of the international presence's revolving door.

Yet, the experience in Afghanistan demonstrates that it impacts the larger authorities and incentives that drive centralization or decentralization, local governance assistance will not have much of an impact on the basic dynamics of centre-periphery relations. Elite capture is a phenomenon that can happen locally as well as nationally. Episode-based, externally motivated attempts are unlikely to significantly change the "rules of the game" of local administration.⁶⁴⁰ Instead of hoping that one more training module will ultimately solve the problem, donors would do better to acknowledge the limited resources at their disposal and concentrate on creating incentives for all parties.

⁶³⁹ This phenomenon is not limited to the international intervention in Afghanistan; it bedevils many internationally sponsored peacebuilding missions around the world. For examinations and considerations of why, see, for example, S. Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and S. P. Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁶⁴⁰ On rules of the game in governance reform efforts, see R.I Kleinfeld, *In Development Work, Plan for Sailboats, Not Trains*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, December 2, 2015.

CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to identify the importance of the mass media on the ideologies and perceptions over the conflicts happening worldwide, and how they can differ from different points of view.

The review of the political and historical contest of Afghanistan during the 1970 and the 1980

highlights how the Afghan state has always been the main actor in the so-called *Great Game* between Soviet Union and United States of America. Together with the United Kingdom, they

intervened on the ground to defend the State against the Soviet Union with the aim to aid and protect the citizens.

The situation on the ground evolved consistently and negatively until the rise of a new conflict to contrast the American armed forces. This consequently led to a humanitarian crisis that still affects Afghanistan despite attempts and efforts made by states to evacuate, help, and protect the Afghani citizens from the airport of Kabul.

Some other humanitarian aids are still into place, but it is necessary to keep supporting Afghanistan in terms of humanitarian matters, as the State is still very fragile under the government of the Taliban.

The media played an important role in the Afghan war because of the coverage on the main international magazines and channels that had a strong impact on the public opinion.

However, Afghanistan's media development remains incomplete. Since it still faces many challenges, the international community must continue to assist and support it.

The Eastern and Western channels highlighted the similarities, such as the soul searching and reckoning of how this story has been covered, as well as the differences on the conflict.

Al Jazeera had the advantage of being on the ground with the privilege of having access to

Osama Bin Laden intelligence, meanwhile *CNN* framed it based on the support given by the government and political leaders in each country, including issue of national unity and public support for the government itself.

However, after twenty years of conflict, the international community seems to have shifted the attention on something different than Afghanistan. In a recent interview, *Moshavi* affirmed that people don't know credible information anymore. In addition, they do not have any critical reporting on their government and the impact of that over time is going to be astronomical.⁶⁴¹

In other words, while there were risks to the media under the previous administration, the emergence of the Taliban quickly reduced the room for free speech.

The country currently ranks 156 out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders index, where No. 1 is most free. It is a significant decline on the 2021 rating of 122. RSF confirmed that the Taliban return had 'serious repercussion' for media freedom and journalist safety:

Killed since 1 Jan 2022

- 36 journalists
- 4 media workers



Currently in prison

- 502 journalists
- 20 media workers



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⁶⁴¹ Z. Noori, *Reporter: World Must Not be Silent on Afghan Media Restrictions*, June 2nd, 2022.

⁶⁴² *Reporters Without Borders, RSF, World Abuses in Real Time*, 2022.

In the past and present, being a journalist in Afghanistan is dangerous. What has changed is that the current administration is intentionally limited and restricting press freedoms.

In conclusion, a key pillar for society is a free press; a unique tool for people to communicate and an instrument for States to highlight issues and make the salient for the international community.

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