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GA3

Research Report

Topic 3: Protecting the Universal Rights of Civilians Affected by the Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan



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# Introduction

When the Taliban suddenly swept into power in the country in August 2021, world governments cut off Afghanistan’s access to international funding and froze the Afghan central bank’s roughly $10 billion in assets held abroad, in a bid to stop the hardline Islamists from accessing that money.[[1]](#footnote-0)

Since then, according to the World Food Programme, Afghanistan is becoming the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 8.7 million people facing emergency levels of hunger this winter. The World Health Organization said 3.2 million children are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in Afghanistan by the end of this year.[[2]](#footnote-1)

# Definition of Key Terms

**The Taliban** = (refers to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) is a Deobandi-Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist, militant Islamist, and jihadist political movement and military organization in Afghanistan.

**Al Qaeda** = a militant Sunni Islamist multinational network of Islamic extremists and Salafist jihadists. It was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam, and several other Arab volunteers during the Soviet–Afghan War.[[3]](#footnote-2)

**ANDSF** = The Afghan National Security Forces

**ISKP** = the Islamic State’s “Khorasan Province”

**UNAMA** = United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

# Background Information

The current conflict in Afghanistan is in its 21st year and continues to result in a large number of civilian casualties. Civilians are being deliberately attacked by the Taliban and other armed groups, violating international humanitarian law.[[4]](#footnote-3)

The crisis began after the Taliban government refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, terrorist leader, in the wake of al-Qaeda’s Sepember 11, 2001, attacks, and the United States consequently invaded Afghanistan.[[5]](#footnote-4) The Taliban government then quickly lost control of the country and relocated themselves to southern Afghanistan, as well as across the border into Pakistan. From there, they violently attempted to take control of the Western-backed government in Kabul, Afghan national security forces, and international coalition troops.

The United States-led coalition ended formally in 2014, and the Afghan National

Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were put in charge of Afghanistan's security. The Taliban continued to attack rural districts and carry out suicide attacks in major cities, and the ANDSF struggled to hold territory and defend population centers. For nearly six years, the war was at a standstill. The Taliban continued to pursue territory across the country, briefly seizing the capital of the Farah Province in May 2018, and recapturing the capital of the Ghazni Province.

In February of 2020, after more than a year of negotiations, the Taliban and the U.S. signed a peace agreement that would eventually lead to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. In return, the Taliban promised to prevent territory under its control from being used by terrorist groups and to begin negotiations with the Afgan government. There was a brief reduction in violence, but no-official cease-fire was put into place. The Taliban quickly resumed attacks on Afghan security forces and citizens, and attempts at having direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government made little progress. Violence continues throughout 2020 and 2021 as the U.S. has increased air trikes and raids that are targeted towards the Taliban.

Meanwhile, the Taliban has attacked the Afghan government and Afghan security forces targets, and have made territorial gains.

In addition to the Taliban’s offensive, Afghanistan faces a threat from the Islamic State in Khorasan, which has also expanded its presence in several eastern provinces, attacked Kabul, and targeted civilians with suicide attacks.

Despite the peace talks, civilian casualties across Afghanistan have remained high over the past several years. The United Nations documented a then–record high of 10,993 civilian casualties in 2018. Although 2019 saw a slight decline, civilian casualties exceeded 10,000 for the sixth year in a row and brought the total UN-documented civilian casualties since 2009 to more than 100,000. Despite another decline in 2020, the first half of 2021 saw a record high number of civilian casualties as the Taliban ramped up their military offensive amid the withdrawal of international troops.[[6]](#footnote-5)

# Major Countries and Organizations Involved

## The Taliban

The Taliban is an Islamic fundamentalist group that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. The Taliban returned to power in 2021 after regrouping in Pakistan and waging an insurgency against the U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The group faces the challenges of forming a functioning government and providing health services and economic opportunities to Afghans.[[7]](#footnote-6)

## The United States of America

The United States and NATO efforts were focused on rebuilding a failed state and establishing a Western-style democracy, spending billions trying to reconstruct a desperately poor country already ravaged by two decades of war.[[8]](#footnote-7) The United States has an interest in attempting to preserve the many political, human rights, and security gains that have been achieved in Afghanistan since 2001.[[9]](#footnote-8)

## Al-Qaeda

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1267 in late 1999, creating the so-called al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee, which links the two groups as terrorist entities and imposes sanctions on their funding, travel, and arms shipments.[[10]](#footnote-9) The crisis began after the Taliban government refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, terrorist leader, in the wake of al-Qaeda’s Sepember 11, 2001, attacks, and the United States consequently invaded Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda was forced to flee Afghanistan after the war of 2001 but has slowly returned. It does not have anywhere near the extensive infrastructure of 20 years ago when it ran a dozen training camps.

## The Islamic State (Khorasan Province)(ISKP)

Afghanistan has become the Islamic State’s “Khorasan Province”, a faction that has adopted a historic name for a swath of land stretching from Iran to the western Himalayas. This faction was founded in 2015 as Isis sought to extend its territorial reach from its heartland in Iraq and Syria further east. The ISKP remains very much committed to long-range attacks against the “far enemy” in the west, and this is likely to become more of a priority now that the immediate “near enemy” – the government in Kabul and its US protectors – have gone.[[11]](#footnote-10)

## European Union

On May 29, the European Union affirmed that its political and financial support for Afghanistan would be contingent upon compliance with key principles, including “safeguarding democratic and human rights gains made since 2001.”[[12]](#footnote-11)

## Germany, Norway, Qatar, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan

These five countries have played a critical role supporting talks between the Taliban and a government-back delegation, and are known as the “quint.” Qatar, the seat of the Taliban’s political office, hosted the first round of the intra-Afghan negotiations that began on September 12.[[13]](#footnote-12)

# Relevant UN Resolutions

Resolution 2596 (2021) was adopted by the Security Council at its 8862nd meeting, on

17 September 2021.[[14]](#footnote-13) The Council stressed the critical importance of a continued presence of UNAMA and other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes across Afghanistan. It called upon all Afghan and international parties to coordinate with UNAMA in the implementation of its mandate and to ensure the safety, security and freedom of movement of United Nations and associated personnel throughout the country.[[15]](#footnote-14)

Additionally, it went on to request the Secretary‑General to submit a written report to the Council by 31 January on strategic and operational recommendations for UNAMA’s mandate “in light of recent political, security and social developments”, and to brief the Council on the situation in Afghanistan and UNAMA’s work every other month until 17 March 2022.[[16]](#footnote-15)

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) focuses on targeted research, reporting, advocacy and engagement in strategic partnerships, and private and public dialogue with the Government, military, international and civil society actors, and communities across Afghanistan in five priority areas:

1. Protection of civilians in the armed conflict
2. Monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations in the armed conflict
3. Elimination of violence against women and promotion of gender equality
4. Peace, civil society and human rights
5. Prevention of torture in detention and arbitrary detention[[17]](#footnote-16)

# Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

## American withdrawal

In September of 202, representatives of the Taliban and of the Afghan government and civil society met face to face for the first time in Doha, Qatar, after nearly twenty years of war. The direct negotiations, which were delayed for months over a prisoner swap proposed in the earlier U.S.-Taliban deal, began after the Afghan government completed the release of five thousand Taliban prisoners.[[18]](#footnote-17)

During opening remarks, both sides expressed eagerness to bring peace to Afghanistan and establish a framework for Afghan society after U.S. troops withdrew. The government pushed for a cease-fire, while the Taliban reiterated its call for the country to be governed through an Islamic system.[[19]](#footnote-18)

In November, the U.S. announced withdrawal of their troops, and by late August 2021, the last U.S. military troops left the country. Facing little resistance, Taliban fighters overran the capital, Kabul, and took over the presidential palace hours after President Ghani left the country.[[20]](#footnote-19)

## Attempts to help the humanitarian crisis

Humanitarian aid that has been provided by the UN and other NGOs have faced difficulties because of security concerns, staff evacuations, closures, and legal uncertainties. However, this humanitarian catastrophe is still urgent, and the US and EU have both stated that they will continue providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.[[21]](#footnote-20)

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) provides vital support to Afghans who have endured four decades of violent conflict, starting already from 1988. Their focus is on providing food, water and shelter for people who have fled to Kabul.

In November of 2019, Afghanistan’s donors and the World Bank met in Geneva to discuss renewed assistance, including conditions on women’s rights, and a draft economic plan for post-settlement Afghanistan.

Additionally, the creation of Resolution 2596, adopted in September of 2021, directly attempts to solve the issue of the humanitarian crisis in the country.

The U.N., in October of 2021, launched a special trust fund to urgently get cash into the hands of everyday Afghans through grants for small businesses and cash-for-work projects that offer temporary income to those without jobs, so they can help restore local infrastructure.

Germany for its part already pledged to provide 50 million euros ($57 million), while the U.N. urged other donors to make commitments.[[22]](#footnote-21)

# Possible Solutions

Human Rights Watch says that Afghanistan’s foreign donors should take immediate action to ensure that necessary aid reaches Afghans facing hunger and collapsing health services following the Taliban takeover on August 15, 2021. They also say that these donors need to develop a coordinated plan of action to address support for education, the banking system, and other critical needs that require the cooperation of Taliban authorities, who threaten basic human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls.[[23]](#footnote-22)

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