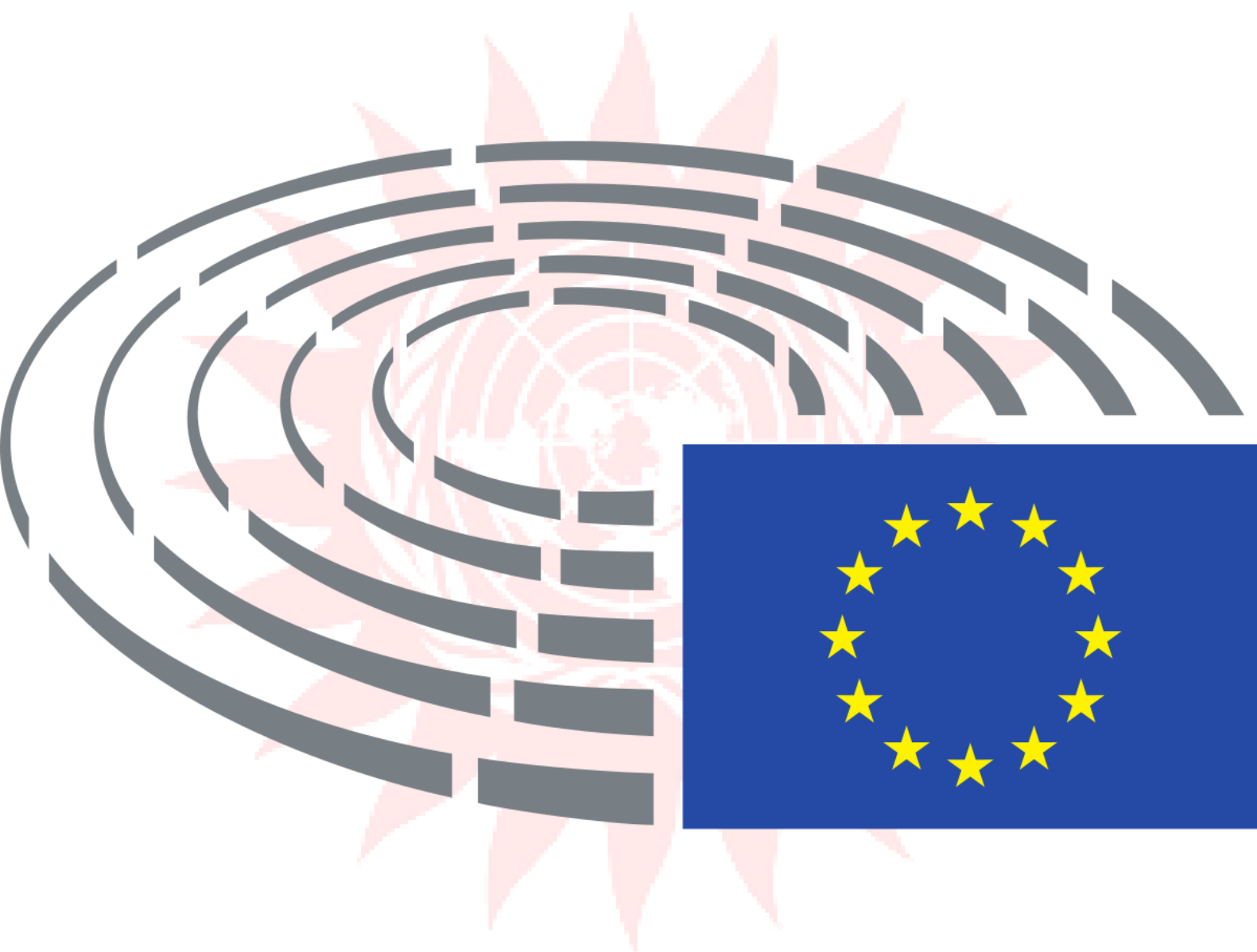


**European Parliament Committee on  
Foreign Affairs Intra-Step By Step Model  
United Nations 2021**



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## **Letter from the Executive Board**

Greetings, Delegates!

We would like to extend a very warm welcome to this simulation of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET).

Set in present-day 2021, this Committee aims to analyse the impact of the withdrawal of United States forces from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Committee would investigate the effect of the withdrawal on refugee safety while also maintaining the security of the European Continent.

The Afghan refugee crisis began in the late 1970s post the invasion of the Soviet Union. Ever since then, the crisis has only grown. During the period where United States forces were present in the region, the number of refugees fleeing to European states rose exponentially.

In this simulation, we expect the delegates to provide solutions to what the European Parliament can do to mitigate the situation while also responding to the increasing aggression of the Taliban and the threat they pose to the security of both the refugees and the member states present in the Committee.

Additionally, this Committee would function as a Joint Crisis Committee running in conjunction with President Ashraf Ghani's War Cabinet, whose agenda is the countering increasing Taliban aggression following the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. Therefore, any action made by our Committee would impact theirs and similarly, any action made by them would impact our Committee.

Your role as delegates would be to critically think, analyse and respond to situations as they come while addressing the agenda at hand that focuses on the plight of the refugee's. While also protecting the security of the member states.

For any queries or clarifications, please feel free to reach out to any one of us at:

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We look forward to seeing in-depth research and thoughtful debate. All the very best!

The Executive Board

European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)

## **Introduction to Committee**

The European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) contributes to the definition of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European security and defence policy (ESDP).

The AFET committee oversees the implementation and monitors how the external action funds from the EU are spent around the world. Its approval is required for international agreements signed by the EU. In addition, the opening, monitoring and concluding of negotiations concerning the accession of European States to the Union falls under its responsibilities.

The Committee aims to ensure that democracy, protection of minorities, the rule of law and human rights are guaranteed in agreements between the EU and non-EU countries. Furthermore, it is responsible for strengthening political relations with third countries, particularly those in the immediate vicinity of the Union, through major cooperation and assistance programmes or international agreements such as association and partnership agreements.

The Committee is also concerned with the relations with other EU institutions and bodies, the UNO and other international organisations and antiparliamentary assemblies for matters falling under its responsibility.

The Committee coordinates joint parliamentary committees and parliamentary cooperation committees. In addition, the antiparliamentary delegations and ad hoc delegations and election observation missions fall within its remit. It remains a driving force behind multilateralism and the global rules-based international order, supporting openness, fairness and the necessary reforms worldwide.

The AFET will function as a Joint Crisis Committee (JCC) running in conjunction with President Ashraf Ghani's War Cabinet. On its own, it will be a Semi Crisis Committee with both formal debate and frequent crisis updates regarding the agenda. Though a European Parliament committee would be adhering to the UNA-USA rules (as shared in the secondary document).

## **Introduction to Agenda**

The Agenda for the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) is the US withdrawal from Afghanistan with special emphasis on refugee protection.

The agenda focuses on how the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan impacts the refugee crisis taking place in the region. The Committee would aim to focus on three aspects. The first aspect would be the guaranteeing of the safety and security of the refugees either present in Afghanistan or are en route escaping Afghanistan. The second aspect is the safety and security of the member states of this Committee. The third and final aspect is further steps that could be implemented to mitigate the increasing Taliban aggression in the region.

The primary aim of the Committee is that the delegates would be encouraged to place the most significant emphasis on the plight of the refugees. Therefore, the Executive Board would appreciate it if delegates aimed to provide possible methods in which the safety of the refugees can be ensured. Additionally, the Committee would focus on mitigating the increasing problems faced by the refugees and respond to the rising Taliban aggression on the security of the Union.

The agenda though placing a special emphasis on refugees, is not only restricted to the refugees. It would be recommended that delegates research the entire Afghanistan situation, placing greater focus on the recent developments in the region.

## **Background on War in Afghanistan**

To understand and address the security situation in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand the history of Afghanistan and the current situation in the country.

Since becoming independent from the British in 1919 and joining the UN in 1946, Afghanistan has experienced several tumultuous events, including King Zahir Shah's "experiment with democracy" from 1964-1973; a military coup in 1973 that resulted in the creation of parliamentary democracy; and Marxist coups in 1978 and 1979 followed by an insurgency and Soviet intervention. At first, the USSR provided support to the new government. Later, when the government refused to take Soviet advice, the USSR toppled the government, installed a different leader, and invaded the country. Finally, in 1980, the Security Council met to discuss (but due to the Soviet veto never passed) a draft resolution condemning Soviet actions.

From 1980 to 1984, although the USSR had as many as 120,000 troops in Afghanistan, it could subdue only 20% of the country. An overwhelming majority of Afghans opposed the communist regime, either actively or passively. Afghan freedom fighters (mujahidin) made it almost impossible for the regime to maintain a local government system outside major urban centres. Poorly armed at first, in 1984, the mujahidin began receiving substantial assistance in the form of weapons and training from the US and other outside powers. By the mid-1980s, the tenacious Afghan resistance movement aided by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others was exacting a high price from the Soviets, both militarily within Afghanistan and souring the USSR's relations with much of the Western and Islamic world.

The Soviet operation aimed to prop up their new but faltering client state, headed by Barak Karmal. However, the rebellion grew in response, spreading to all parts of the country. The Soviets initially left the suppression of the uprising to the Afghan army. However, the latter was beset by mass desertions and remained largely ineffective throughout the war. Soviet troops tried to crush the insurgency by various tactics, but the guerrillas generally eluded their attacks. The Soviets then attempted to eliminate civilian support of these rebels by bombing and depopulating the rural areas. These tactics sparked a massive flight from the countryside.

In August 1984, the UN tried to intervene, sponsoring talks among the US, Soviet, Afghan and Pakistani governments at the UN Secretariat in Geneva. But an end to the war was not negotiated until 1988, when the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the United

States and the Soviet Union serving as guarantors, signed an agreement settling the major differences between them. This agreement, known as the Geneva Accords, “called for US and Soviet non-interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the right of refugees to return to Afghanistan without fear of persecution or harassment, and full Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; by February 15, 1989.”

The ten-year war-devastated Afghanistan. According to the US Department of State, from 1979-1989, an estimated one million Afghan lives were lost. In addition, approximately 6 million refugees fled the country. About three million went to Pakistan, and 1.5 million went to Iran. The remaining fled to European nations or the United States. Moreover, Afghanistan’s economy was at a standstill. The war destroyed schools, businesses, industrial areas, and irrigation projects that moved water to arid regions throughout the country.

After 1989, the war continued despite Soviet withdrawal. This was because the mujahidin were party neither to the negotiations nor the 1988 agreement and, consequently, refused to accept the terms of the accords. Thus there was a new round of internecine fighting between the various militias, which had coexisted only uneasily during the Soviet occupation. With the demise of their common enemy, the militias’ ethnic, clan, religious, and personality differences surfaced, and the civil war continued.

From 1989-1994, the country sank even further into anarchy. Different mujahidin groups and warlords held different parts of the territory. On March 19, 1992, then Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, called for an end to the “human tragedy” that had been occurring in Afghanistan for more than a decade, while at the same time noting that the country had been “subjected to total devastation.”

In April 1992, various rebel groups, together with newly rebellious government troops, stormed the besieged capital of Kabul and overthrew the communist president. However, the political fragility and instability of rebel forces never allowed any transitional government to last long.

In 1994, the Taliban under the leadership of Mohammad Omar emerged and took control of Kabul by 1996. Within months, the Taliban controlled all but a small portion of northern Afghanistan, which was held by a loose coalition of mujahedeen forces known as the Northern Alliance.

This was followed by the adoption of Resolution 1267 by the UN that linked Al-Qaeda and Taliban as terrorist entities and imposed sanctions on their funding and expenses. The

Taliban, which rose from the ashes of Afghanistan's post-Soviet civil war, providing Al-Qaeda sanctuary for operations.

The civil war continued until 1999 when the Taliban, which had captured the southern city of Kandahar from a local warlord in 1994 and slowly expanded its influence over the country, controlled about 90% of Afghanistan.

The Taliban rose to power in reaction to the devastation and anarchy of the civil war. In addition to establishing order, however, the Taliban implemented an extreme interpretation of Islam based upon the rural Pashtun tribal code on the entire country. They committed massive human rights violations, especially against women, girls, and Afghan minority populations. The Taliban had also implemented an extreme interpretation of the Sharia or Islamic law that appalled many Afghans and the Muslim world. The Taliban had closed down all girls' schools, and women were rarely permitted to venture out of their homes, even for shopping. In addition, the Taliban had banned every conceivable kind of entertainment, including music, TV, videos, cards, kite-flying, and most sports and games.

The Taliban's brand of Islamic fundamentalism was so extreme that it appeared to denigrate Islam's message of peace and tolerance and its capacity to live with other religious and ethnic groups. They were to inspire a new extremist form of fundamentalism across Pakistan and Central Asia, which refused to compromise with traditional Islamic values, social structures, or existing state systems.



## **The United States and Afghanistan**

Afghanistan emerged as a significant US foreign policy concern in 2001, when the United States, in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led a military campaign against Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban government that harboured and supported it.

On 11th September, Al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing them into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. A fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Close to three thousand people die in the attacks. Although Afghanistan is the base for al-Qaeda, none of the nineteen hijackers was Afghan nationals. Mohammed Atta, an Egyptian, led the group, and fifteen of the hijackers originated from Saudi Arabia.

Following the attacks, President George W. Bush signed a joint resolution authorising the use of force against those responsible for attacking the United States on 9/11; The US military, with British support, began a bombing campaign against Taliban forces, officially launching Operation Enduring Freedom. Canada, Australia, Germany, and France pledge future support. The war's early phase mainly involved US airstrikes on al-Qaeda and Taliban forces that were assisted by a partnership of about one thousand US Special Forces, the Northern Alliance, and ethnic Pashtun anti-Taliban forces. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1378, calling for a "central role" for the United Nations in establishing a transitional administration and inviting member states to send peacekeeping forces to promote stability and aid delivery in Afghanistan.

In the intervening 19 years, the United States has suffered over 22,000 military casualties (including around 2,400 fatalities) in Afghanistan, and Congress has appropriated approximately \$144 billion for reconstruction and security forces there. In that time, an elected Afghan government has replaced the Taliban; improvement in most measures of human development is limited, and future prospects of gains remain mixed.

The United States and its international partners are removing their military forces from Afghanistan as part of a withdrawal announced by President Biden on April 14, 2021, heralding a possible end to the nearly two-decade US military presence in the country. In a February 2020 agreement with the Taliban, the Trump Administration had committed to withdrawing military forces by May 2021, in return for which the Taliban committed to preventing other groups, including Al Qaeda, from using Afghan soil to recruit, train, or fundraise toward activities that threaten the United States or its allies. US officials contend

that the Taliban have not fulfilled their commitments, as violence between the Taliban and Afghan government has increased, and Taliban links with Al Qaeda remain in place, according to United Nations sanctions monitors.

Afghan government representatives were not participants in U.S.-Taliban talks, leading some observers to conclude that the United States would prioritise a military withdrawal over securing a political settlement that preserves some of the social, political, and humanitarian gains made since 2001. After months of delays, on September 12, 2020, the Afghan government and Taliban representatives officially met in Doha, Qatar, to begin their first direct peace negotiations toward such a settlement, a significant moment with potentially dramatic implications for the course of the ongoing Afghan conflict. Talks between the two sides continue but have not made substantial progress and remain complicated by a number of factors.

In light of the stalling of intra-Afghan talks, the United States appears to have intensified its efforts to broker an intra-Afghan agreement. The United States reportedly produced a draft peace agreement to “jumpstart” negotiations that includes a variety of options, including the establishment of an interim “transitional” government, which Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has rejected.

The culmination of these efforts was to be a senior-level Afghan conference in Turkey planned for April 2021, but the Taliban refused to attend and continue to reject participating in such a meeting. Observers speculate about what kind of political arrangement, if any, could satisfy both the elected Afghan government and the Taliban, who have not specified in detail their vision for Afghanistan’s future beyond creating an “Islamic government.”

Afghan officials have sought to downplay the impact of the US military withdrawal on their own forces’ capabilities, but some official US assessments indicate that the withdrawal could lead to Taliban gains on the battlefield. By many measures, the Taliban are in a stronger position now than at any point since 2001, controlling as much as half of the country, though many once-public US government metrics related to the conflict have been classified or are no longer produced. Future changes in political arrangements and/or in the security environment may, in turn, influence US policymakers’ consideration of future levels and conditions of development assistance. It is unclear to what extent, if at all, the prospect of continued US assistance to Afghanistan (which remains one of the world’s poorest countries) represents leverage over the Taliban.

## **The Present Situation**

### **Withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan:**

President Joe Biden formally announced that the United States would withdraw troops from Afghanistan by 31st August of this year. The announcement comes after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attempted to resurrect the stalled intra-Afghan peace negotiations in Doha, Qatar, with a comprehensive set of ideas. Although the departure would bring an end to America's most protracted conflict, it would have far-reaching repercussions for Afghanistan's hard-won peace, and many fear a resurgent civil war once US soldiers leave.

The new policy decision removes the limitations on the presence of US forces included in the US-Taliban agreement signed on February 29, 2020. That is, Taliban counterterrorism guarantees, direct talks with the Afghan government, talks on a ceasefire, and the withdrawal of US forces are all "interconnected."

However, the Taliban will encounter stiff opposition from Afghan government troops still receiving US funding, as well as militia groups fearing a resurgence of Taliban crimes against ethnic minorities if they attempt to seize control by force. In addition, neighbours in the region are opposed to a return to complete Taliban control and the anarchy and refugee flow resulting from a stepped-up civil conflict.

While perhaps not immediately affecting US security, such mass displacement risks adversely impacting America's allies across the Atlantic, especially the European Union (EU). Moreover, as the US military began the final phase of its drawdown on May 1, the increased Taliban aggression has only since grown.

### **Taliban and Afghanistan's view:**

The Taliban's public response bemoaned the fact that the US will not fulfil its previous deadline of May 1 to remove troops. As previously stated, their spokesperson said they would not discuss Afghanistan's political future until all foreign soldiers have departed - if this stands, it is a concerning position for the peace process.

On the Afghan government's side, opinions differ as well. President Ashraf Ghani had anticipated this choice, and despite its downsides, he may prefer it to the United States pressuring him to reach an unacceptable (in his opinion) Taliban accord. Though they may have private reservations, the president's administration shows confidence in Afghan

soldiers' ability to hold the line against the Taliban. Additionally, the Afghan government is ready for talks, and a ceasefire and the Taliban should now prove that they were committed to peace.

### **Refugee Crisis:**

According to data conducted by the UNHRC (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), approximately 26 million individuals have been relocated as refugees throughout the world as of 2020 due to conflict, disaster, and/or xenophobia. As evident, a refugee crisis has its pros and cons. Most of these migrants were forced to live in deplorable conditions in various refugee camps until they were able to find a house or get citizenship. As a result of the flood of migrants entering Europe, housing and land are under strain. In addition, the emergence of shadow economies put an economic and political strain on several governments.

Afghans are among the top nationalities requesting asylum in the EU or being caught by European authorities as irregular migrants, and they were the second-largest group travelling to Europe during the 2015-16 migration crisis, which is unsurprising. In 2019, however, Afghan arrivals in the EU more than quadrupled. They accounted for 36% of all maritime arrivals to Greece by early 2020, when numbers began to drop owing to mobility restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 epidemic.

Since January 2021, an estimated 270,000 Afghans have been internally displaced, mainly due to instability and violence, increasing the total uprooted population to above 3.5 million. Families who have been forced to abandon their homes in recent weeks say the main reason for their departure is the deteriorating security situation, incidents of extortion by non-state armed groups and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on major roads, as well as a loss of income and interruptions to social services.

In the meantime, Turkey has become a destination and a vital hub for Afghans heading towards Europe. The March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement required the Turkish government to close its borders to onward irregular migration to be able to benefit from the EU funds it was promised to support Syrian refugees, leaving most Afghans with no way forward, even irregularly.

Additionally, Pakistan, which was already working on fencing its 1,400 km (870 miles) frontier with Afghanistan and deploy a 50,000-strong paramilitary force along the border, is preparing for a fresh influx of refugees in the event of disorder. Camps will be set up near the

border to manage a fresh wave of Afghan refugees, and illegal migrants and Afghans will not be allowed to set up illegal homes in Pakistan.

Tens of thousands of Afghan families are fleeing to escape the Taliban's rapid advance across the country's northern region as the US and its allies pull out the last of their troops ahead of the withdrawal deadline. The new wave of internal displacement – largely across the provinces of Badakhshan, Kunduz, Balkh, Baghlan and Takhar – comes as the Taliban has captured large swathes of rural territory in the region following battles with Afghan forces.

In the northern city of Kunduz, for example, roughly 35,000 displaced people are being housed in schools and public buildings and need food, water and sanitation. The fundamentalist Taliban who has been fighting the internationally-recognised central Government for years, have taken over all districts surrounding the city.

As the Taliban continues to make military advances, geopolitical observers believe that Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkey and the EU will be hard-pressed to host millions of refugees. Describing the security situation as fluid and deteriorating, the Afghan envoy to India Farid Mamundzay has said the Taliban need to cease violence, and there should be an end to the bloodshed. "More than 200,000 Afghan civilians are displaced already. There is an active fight going on between Afghan forces and Taliban fighters in 200 districts out of a total of 375. There is also trouble in 18 border districts that share a border with several countries Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran," the envoy said.

Local officials suggested that Turkey is now sheltering thousands of Afghan refugees. The number has been growing daily since the US announced re-affirmed its withdrawal decision in early April. Tajikistan, which also shares a border with four Afghan provinces, has recently taken in about a thousand civilian refugees fleeing violence in Badakhshan in particular. Moreover, it has hundreds of Afghan national troops who retreated from their positions in Northern provinces where the Taliban has seized control.

## **Human Rights:**

The current conflict in Afghanistan entered its twentieth year and continued to claim large numbers of civilian casualties. Attacks by the Taliban and other armed groups deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects in violation of international humanitarian law; sites that were attacked included a maternity hospital and educational institutions. There was no accountability for these crimes as impunity persisted.

Women and girls continued to face violence, harassment and intimidation. Violence against children persisted. Afghan asylum-seekers continued to be forcibly returned to Afghanistan, particularly from Iran, where the Iranian security forces had attacked some.

The UNHCR warns of a looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as the escalating conflict brings increased human suffering and civilian displacement.

According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, civilian casualties increased by 29% in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2020. Women and children made up a growing percentage of those targeted. Those who have been forced to escape unexpectedly have immediate needs. Despite obstacles in reaching vulnerable people, UNHCR and partners provide newly displaced Afghans with emergency housing, food, health, water and sanitation support, and financial assistance as part of a coordinated response.

Prolonged violence, high levels of displacement, the effect of COVID-19, recurring natural catastrophes, particularly drought, and growing poverty have all tested the Afghan people's resilience. In addition, children and young people make up 65 per cent of the Afghan population, both inside and outside of Afghanistan.

In February, the Afghan Taliban signed a peace agreement with the USA ahead of a proposed withdrawal of US troops. The deal included a pledge to release "up to 5,000" Taliban fighters held in Afghan government prisons from a list initially given to the USA, in exchange for 1,000 members of the Afghan security forces held by the armed group.

The Afghan government resisted releasing 400 fighters from the list, who were alleged to be responsible for serious crimes. The proposed release of certain Taliban fighters also triggered concerns from France and Australia as it included those responsible for killing their soldiers.



However, under pressure from the USA, they too were released; a few who were accused of killing foreign citizens were subsequently transferred to Qatar. Eventually, more than 5,000 Taliban prisoners were released, including prisoners charged with serious crimes.

The US-Taliban peace agreement deferred a political settlement in Afghanistan to direct talks between representatives of the Afghan government and various mainly political groups on one side and representatives of the Taliban on the other.

The so-called “intra-Afghan talks” began in September in Doha, Qatar. However, there was little representation of women on the side of the Afghan government and no representation of women in the Taliban delegation. There was also no representation of conflict victims, despite the demands of human rights groups. By December, the negotiating teams had only agreed on an internal guiding principle for the negotiation processes.

Women and children in Afghanistan, in particular, have a lot on the line. They have achieved significant educational achievements, and their concerns are increasingly incorporated into government decision-making processes. They also play critical roles in the civil society and economics of the nation. But, unfortunately, the Taliban’s attitude toward the treatment of women has remained mostly unchanged.

Women are not permitted to work outside their houses or travel outdoors without a mahram (blood relative) in regions under their authority. For example, girls’ education is limited to sixth grade. As a result, women’s empowerment initiatives have been halted, and NGOs have been advised against employing women.

#### **Status of Aid:**

Some 18 million Afghans, or half the population, require assistance. A third of the country is malnourished, while half of all children under five are experiencing acute malnutrition. The \$450 million received so far, half of which came from the United States, falls far short of what is needed.

The US though pulling its forces out, is still willing to provide humanitarian aid. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is also supporting Afghan efforts to respond to the critical shortfalls in oxygen and medical ventilation support by providing emergency and structural assistance. To strengthen this effort, the USAID has ordered over 300 oxygen cylinders and several months’ worth of ventilator consumables to be shipped to Afghanistan as quickly as possible. The USAID also plans to install oxygen plants in four hospitals that will serve smaller facilities in the surrounding areas.

The USAID recently committed \$38 million in emergency COVID-19 supplemental funding to the UN World Food Program (WFP) to address the food and nutrition needs of approximately 1.2 million COVID-impacted vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

The potential for aid to help build sustainable peace and prosperity in Afghanistan is greatest in the context of meaningful peace negotiations and a peace agreement. Key institutions and instruments that could support peace and be employed to ensure the application of aid:

- A somewhat functional Afghan administration;
- National programs such as public health that deliver basic services to the population;
- “The Citizen’s Charter,” a community development program able to implement community-based reintegration of combatants and victims;
- The ARTF, a highly successful multi-donor pooled funding budget support mechanism; and
- Very modest investments in peacebuilding, in particular, engaging civil society organisations and Afghan citizens in discussions about peace and the country’s future governance

Unfortunately, in recent years the government has suffered from self-inflicted administrative deterioration caused by over-centralisation, micro-management, frequent changes in senior officials and political infighting that has spurred a growing “brain drain.” If government institutions and programs continue to deteriorate or, worse, fail, it will be costly and probably impossible to recreate or replace them, making future peace all the more difficult to achieve and sustain.

Global organisations such as UNICEF requires US\$143.6 million to meet the humanitarian needs of women and children in Afghanistan in 2021. This lack of aid has led to various issues.

The health system is struggling to absorb internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees, as well as additional caseloads related to COVID-19. Lack of health service coverage and capacities are limiting access to essential health care, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. Child immunisation declined by 22 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, compared with the same period of 2019, primarily due to COVID-19 and related quarantine measures.

Food insecurity is alarmingly high in Afghanistan. Over 42 per cent of the population is facing crisis and worse levels of food insecurity. Twenty-seven out of 34 provinces are now



experiencing acute malnutrition levels that exceed the emergency threshold. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a 13 per cent increase in the estimated number of children under five years who are severely malnourished.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government closed all schools across the country for six months, affecting more than 7.5 million children attending public schools, particularly girls, and 500,000 children enrolled in community based-education. When schools reopen, the majority of vulnerable children will require remediation and catch-up classes to prevent them from falling behind or dropping out entirely. In addition, over 35 per cent of schools and health facilities lack reliable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.

The protracted crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened underlying protection vulnerabilities. Returnees, especially children, are at higher risk of death and injury due to explosive remnants of war. An estimated 74 per cent of children experience violent discipline, including psychological aggression and/or physical punishment, in their homes. Vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women, girls, those living in poverty, the internally displaced, female-headed households and people with disabilities, are vulnerable to gender-based violence and the use of negative coping mechanisms for survival.

The crisis has also aggravated pre-existing gender inequalities that undermine women and girls' access to essential services. For women, access to health and protection services has been decimated: 67 per cent of women are unable to access health services without a male escort.

### **International and Taliban Response**

The international community has taken cognisance of the impact of the withdrawal of US troops would have on refugees and the stability of the region and the citizens of the respective countries residing in Afghanistan. On 25 May 2021, Australia closed its Embassy in Kabul due to security concerns. Belgium and France withdrew their diplomats.

The Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan issued a travel warning on 19 June, urging Chinese citizens to “leave Afghanistan as soon as possible” and demanding Chinese organisations to “take extra precautions and strengthen their emergency preparedness as security deteriorates in the country”. The Chinese government dispatched a charter flight operated by Xiamen Air to evacuate 210 Chinese nationals from Kabul on 2 July.

Most European troops have already pulled out of Afghanistan, quietly withdrawing months before the U.S.-led mission was officially expected to end — part of an anticlimactic close to the “forever war” that risks leaving the country on the brink of civil war.

Germany and Italy declared their missions in Afghanistan over, and Poland’s last troops returned home, bringing their deployments to a low-key end nearly 20 years after the first Western soldiers were deployed there.

NATO agreed in April to withdraw its roughly 7,000 non-American forces from Afghanistan to match US President Joe Biden’s decision to pull all American troops from the country, starting May 1.

Germany announced the end of its nearly 20-year deployment in a statement and a series of tweets from the defence minister late Tuesday, shortly after the last plane carrying its troops had left Afghan airspace.

The German pull-out came amid a spate of withdrawals by European nations. Poland’s last departing troops were greeted by Defence Minister Marcius Braszczok. Some 33,000 Polish troops have served in Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

The last Italian troops from Italy’s base in Herat arrived at the military airport in Pisa. Italy officially declared its mission in Afghanistan over in a statement, with Defence Minister Lorenzo Guarini paying tribute to the 53 Italians who died and 723 who were injured over the past two decades.

Georgia’s last troops returned home, while Romania brought home its remaining 140 troops when Norway also pulled out. Troops from Denmark, Estonia and the Netherlands also

returned home. Spain withdrew its last troops on May 13, Sweden on May 25, and Belgium on June 14. The small contingents deployed by Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Finland, Albania, North Macedonia and Luxembourg have left as well.

Turkey, which for years has secured the airport in Kabul, has told the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that its troops may leave as well, the officials said. Turkey's potential departure, after it initially had planned to stay until after the coalition withdrawal, could prompt some Western nations to reconsider plans to keep embassies open in the capital without an international force at Hamid Karzai International Airport, officials said.

The new concerns voiced by European allies accentuated the challenge for US officials planning a quick exit from Afghanistan while coordinating with so many partners. The U.S.-led NATO coalition, which accounts for personnel from more than two dozen countries, has long adhered to a pledge of "in together, out together" regarding its presence in Afghanistan.

Soon after the withdrawal started, the Taliban launched an offensive against the Afghan government, quickly advancing in front of a collapsing Afghan Armed Forces. By 12 July 2021, the Taliban had seized 139 districts from the Afghan National Army; according to a US intelligence report, the Afghan government would likely collapse within six months after NATO completes its withdrawal from the country. According to The Washington Post, local militias in the north of the country have engaged in combat against the Taliban. Footage taken on 16 June and released on 13 July showed Taliban gunmen executing 22 Afghan servicemen who had been attempting to surrender.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. How can the safety of the refugee's be ensured now that there are minimal security forces present?
2. Would more nations be encouraged to take in Afghan refugees? If yes, would this be a prudent idea considering the logistical, security and financial requirements?
3. To what extent does the withdrawal of all forces impact the security of the EU?
4. What measures will this committee take to ensure the stability of the region?
5. What actions shall the member nations carry out to provide security to their citizens and the refugees?
6. How would the EU respond if asked to provide military and or humanitarian aid?

**Please note that all information pertaining to dates of events are accurate as of the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. Any changes post this date we would expect the delegates to know as a part of their research. The Executive Board will be aware of any changes that do occur between this day and the date of the conference.**

**Furthermore, a timeline has not been included in this background guide. For research purposes, please use the following link to understand the timeline of events.**

**<https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>**

### **Links for Further Reading**

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/04/us-withdrawal-afghanistan-end-endless-war>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/14/biden-afghan-withdrawal-europe-refugee-crisis/>

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/bidens-decision-to-pull-troops-from-afghanistan-risks-a-major-refugee-crisis/>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/afghanistan-brink-humanitarian-crisis-un-refugee-agency-2021-07-13/>

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