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Abstract: *The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked the end of almost two decades of military presence in the country. However, the withdrawal has created significant challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan, the region, and the international community. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan following the US withdrawal has raised concerns about security, human rights, governance, and the economic situation in the country. The international community needs to work together to ensure that Afghanistan remains stable, peaceful, and prosperous. Future prospects for Afghanistan include regional stability, diplomatic engagement, reconstruction and development, and counter-terrorism efforts. Regional stability is essential for Afghanistan's stability, and the international community needs to work with neighbouring countries to ensure peace and stability in the region. Diplomatic engagement with the Taliban is necessary to ensure adherence to international norms and standards, particularly in the areas of human rights and governance. Reconstruction and development efforts are crucial to help Afghanistan recover from the economic crisis and become self-sufficient.*

Key Words: US Withdrawal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Challenges, Terrorism Resurgence

Introduction

The United States military concluded its operations in Afghanistan on August 30, 2021, following a prolonged period of engagement that began in 2001. The agreement between the United States and the Taliban, which was signed in Doha, Qatar, in February 2020, established limitations on combat for both parties, mandated the withdrawal of all NATO troops from Afghanistan in exchange for the Taliban's commitment to counterterrorism

efforts, and was executed without the involvement of the Afghan government at the time (Ghaderi, Nouri, & Ansarifard, 2022, p. 10). The failure of the Afghan National Security Forces can be attributed to two pivotal occurrences: the agreement between the United States and the Taliban, which was brokered during the Trump administration, and the resolution made by the Biden administration in April 2021 to remove all American troops by September 2021 without leaving behind a residual force for the Afghan National Security Forces

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(ANSF). The agreement led to a notable reduction in the frequency of air raids by the United States, which provided the Taliban with a considerable edge in their insurgency. It eventually culminated in the Taliban's capture of Kabul on August 15, 2021 (Shoib, et.al., 2022, p.22).

Following the Taliban-US agreement, the Trump administration promised to reduce the number of American military personnel in Afghanistan from 13,000 to 8,600 by July 2020 and to complete their withdrawal by May 1, 2021. Starting with 2,500 troops, the Biden administration promised in April 2021 that the United States would not begin removing its forces from Afghanistan until May 1 and would finish the process by September 11. On May 1, the Taliban launched their last attack, and on July 8, Vice President Biden announced that the new deadline for the fight would be August 31. As of the beginning of August 2021, the United States maintained a military presence of approximately 650 personnel in Afghanistan, tasked with providing security for both the Hamid Karzai International Airport and the American embassy in Kabul. Afghanistan's security situation has rapidly deteriorated since the conclusion of NATO's Resolute Support Mission on July 12. According to US intelligence assessments, it was predicted that Kabul would succumb within weeks or months following the withdrawal of all American forces from Afghanistan (Humza & Khan, 2022, p.156).

In addition, Operation Allies Refuge was initiated to airlift US translators and some Afghan residents who were thought to be in danger from reprisals by US forces. After the United States military withdrew from Afghanistan on July 6, 2021, a new command, Afghanistan Forward, was set up to handle the exit of any remaining American diplomatic, security, advisory, or counterterrorism employees. Following the Taliban's successful takeover of Afghanistan

in 2021, the Biden administration announced on August 12 that a contingent of 3,000 US military personnel would be deployed to Kabul Airport to facilitate the evacuation of embassy personnel, American citizens, and individuals seeking a special immigrant visa. On August 14, the United States deployed an additional 5,000 troops in response to the rapid territorial expansion of the Taliban into various provinces (Humza & Khan, 2022, p. 122). After the fall of Kabul on August 15, 1,000 male individuals were deployed. An additional 1,000 were sent on a subsequent day, resulting in seven thousand. According to local time in Kabul, the final United States military aircraft departed from Kabul airport at 11:59 p.m. on August 30, 2021 (Rubin, 2022, p. 123).

Background of US invasion

- Following the 9/11 attacks orchestrated by al-Qaeda, the Taliban government's refusal to surrender Osama bin Laden prompted the United States and its allies to launch a military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, resulting in the swift overthrow of the regime. Following the military intervention led by the United States, Taliban leaders relocated to the country's southern region and subsequently crossed the border into Pakistan. According to Rashid and Gul (2022), the Taliban planned and carried out an insurgency against the government of Kabul, the Afghan National Security Forces, and the international coalition forces stationed in Afghanistan.
- Following the cessation of the US-led coalition's combat operation in 2014, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) assumed responsibility for security in Afghanistan. However, they have encountered significant challenges in

retaining territorial control and safeguarding population centres. In addition, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have incurred significant losses as a result of the Taliban's persistent targeting of remote areas and the perpetration of suicide bombings in urban centres during recent years. Despite a marginal increase in US troop deployment in 2017, persistent military engagements, and a shift in US military strategy to disrupt the financial resources of the Taliban, such as conducting aerial assaults on drug laboratories and opium production facilities, the conflict has remained in a state of impasse for more than six years. The Taliban temporarily overran the provincial capital of Farah in May 2018. According to Ulusoy and Uzelakçil (2022), the provincial capital of Ghazni was overtaken by a certain group in August 2018. The group occupied the city for approximately a week until US and Afghan soldiers regained control.

- In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban concluded a peace agreement, known as the Doha Agreement, after over a year of direct negotiations. The agreement outlined a specific timeline for withdrawing US military personnel from Afghanistan. As per the terms of the agreement, the reduction of US military levels was scheduled to be completed within 135 days, resulting in a total of 8,500 personnel. The entire withdrawal process was expected to be finalized within 14 months. As part of a reciprocal agreement, the group committed to engaging in discussions with the Afghan government and preventing the utilization of the region under their jurisdiction by extremist factions.

- Nonetheless, a formal declaration of ceasefire was not made. Following a brief period of reduced hostilities, the Taliban promptly resumed their offensive strikes against the Afghan government and civilian objectives. The start of direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban took place several months after the original start date of March 2020. Nevertheless, the negotiations were beset by obstacles and resulted in minimal advancement. Despite the increased air attacks and operations conducted by the United States against the Taliban in 2020 and 2021, the prevalence of violence in Afghanistan remained unabated. In response, the Taliban initiated assaults on Afghan governmental and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) establishments, leading to notable advancements in territorial control (Ahmed, [2022](#), p. 278).

In recent years, there has been a persistent occurrence of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. 2018 saw a record high of 10,993 civilian deaths, as documented by the United Nations. Despite a slight decline in 2019, the number of civilian fatalities and injuries exceeded ten thousand for the sixth consecutive year, augmenting the overall number of civilian casualties confirmed by the United Nations from 2009 to 2020 to surpass one hundred thousand. In the first half of 2021, the Taliban intensified their military operations in response to the withdrawal of Western forces, resulting in a new peak in casualties, despite an overall decrease in casualties. ISIS-K represents a significant security threat to Afghanistan. The organization has expanded its territorial reach to various eastern provinces, intensified its activities in the capital city of Kabul, and initiated direct assaults on individuals through suicide bombings (Lee, [2022](#), p. 7).

US Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover

In Afghanistan, the present situation is still shrouded in mystery. Security is very precarious and may be in flux. The people of Afghanistan have a perpetual reason to be afraid: terrorism. As of August 31, when American forces departed Hamid Karzai International Airport and the evacuation operation, local aid efforts had to be suspended (Khan, [2022](#), p. 126).

US interests include protecting the progress made in Afghanistan since 2001 in politics, human rights, and security. Because the Taliban are known to have connections to al-Qaeda, Taliban control of the nation might convert Afghanistan into a terrorist haven. The coup might potentially roll back already-substantial progress toward protecting women's and girls' rights. Furthermore, climate change and global food and energy markets may amplify the consequences of rising domestic instability, mass migration of migrants, and a deepening humanitarian catastrophe in neighbouring regions. Further, Kabul and non-state players will likely see competition for power from Pakistan, India, Iran, and Russia (Weitz, [2022](#), p. 279).

At the beginning of May 2021, the Taliban initiated an effective military campaign, capturing extensive rural territories and strengthening their control over other regions. The Taliban's capture of additional districts was particularly surprising, as certain regions in the northern part of the country had previously resisted their rule through military means during the group's previous reign in the 1990s. It renders their recent defeat all the more noteworthy. As per a report, during May and June 2021, the Taliban gained control over more than 100 districts out of the total 400 districts in Afghanistan. According to reports, certain members of the Taliban have expressed surprise at the group's swift advances, with a commander purportedly stating that his forces had intentionally

refrained from capturing provincial capitals in anticipation of the departure of US troops. In July, the Taliban initiated the capture of border crossings with Tajikistan, Iran, and Pakistan, impeding the Afghan government's access to crucial customs revenues. As of July 21, 2021, General Milley estimated that over 200 districts were under the control of the Taliban. The individual emphasized that the Taliban had yet to capture any provincial capitals with a significant presence of Afghan troops (Umar et al., 2022, p. 222).

On August 6, 2021, the Taliban achieved a notable triumph by capturing their initial provincial capital. This development is noteworthy since US commanders and other sources had previously cited the Taliban's inability to seize and hold a provincial capital as evidence of the Afghan government's comparative potency. The Taliban's capture of fifty per cent of Afghanistan's provincial capitals in the subsequent week surprised numerous individuals, including those in positions of authority within the United States. Some reports emerged on August 13, suggesting the American authorities were concerned about the potential for a Taliban-led assault on Kabul in the coming days. Following the capture of Jalalabad in the East and Mazar-e-Sharif in the North, the Taliban had effectively gained complete control over all major cities in Afghanistan. On August 15, 2021, the Taliban commenced their incursion into Kabul. The event in question brought about the cessation of the Afghan government in its previous form. According to recent reports, as of September 2021, the Taliban has gained control over the province of Panjshir, which holds significant historical and strategic importance. Certain previous Afghan officials endeavoured to establish a militant resistance movement in opposition to the Taliban (Bobkin, [2022](#), p. 335).

Challenges Faced by the Taliban Regime

The speed with which the Taliban took control of Afghanistan shocked the world. The Taliban are now confronted with a plethora of pressing problems. They must first win the trust of the Afghan people and the international community by proving that their administration is legitimate. The security landscape is characterized by various challenges, including threats from Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), organized criminal networks, and the imperative to facilitate the reintegration of many former combatants. Moreover, the internal rivalries within the Taliban compound the situation's complexity. They need to get essential government services back up and running despite a nearly collapsing banking sector and a shortage of human resources. The Taliban will also have difficulty providing for the population's immediate humanitarian needs.

The escape of Ashraf Ghani, former President, in the wake of the reemergence of the Taliban due to the collapse of the Afghan government, was an unforeseen outcome despite the anticipated domino effect of the fall of Afghan provinces and districts. This outcome was attributed to the escalating security concerns over the past two years. The speed with which the Taliban seized control of Kabul was a surprising development for a wide range of stakeholders, including experts, ordinary citizens of Afghanistan, high-level government officials, the United States and its NATO allies, neighbouring countries, and even the Taliban organization itself. The Taliban are currently facing several urgent matters that require attention, including but not limited to legitimacy, security, administration, and the fulfilment of fundamental necessities for the general populace (Kam, [2022](#), p. 20).

Following the collapse of the Ghani regime, individuals were faced with a state

of ambiguity and unpredictability. Following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, many Afghans sought to depart the city, resulting in a heated atmosphere at the airport. However, the evacuation process was primarily focused on US citizens, eligible Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, and their dependents. Additional critical concerns encompassed safeguarding the diplomatic populace within the metropolis and fulfilling exigent security requisites on the thoroughfares following the Taliban's abrupt ascension to power. The Taliban and those who supported them lacked understanding in response to the escalating crisis. The world was watching as the Taliban took over Kabul to see how they would present themselves, how they would rule, whether or not they had grown more moderate since the 1990s, or whether or not they would offer new issues (Ahmed, [2022](#), p. 112).

It is difficult to find adequate substitutes for the government's absence. After the Taliban took power, it was clear that no one on a national or international level was ready to deal with the problem and that none had thought ahead to contingencies. It took the Taliban three weeks to settle their differences and name temporary candidates for key national cabinet seats (Faheem, Hussain, & Qmar, [2022](#), p. 550).

The present article delves into the internal discord within the Taliban and the enduring governance challenges that the newly appointed leaders of Afghanistan will encounter, partly due to their limited understanding of the intricacies involved in the country's metamorphosis. The Taliban and the international community need to take a thorough and robust approach to each of the four areas where they struggle (Zhang, [2022](#), p. 269).

Challenges to the Taliban Regime

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Legitimacy Challenges

Overcoming local and international legitimacy concerns will be challenging for the Taliban. So far, they have been judged to be at odds with Afghan and global norms. The Taliban changed the name of Afghanistan from the Islamic Republic to the Amarat-e-Islami (Islamic emirate) without consulting the general population. Despite appeals from Afghan civic society to maintain the tricolour Afghan flag, the Taliban raised their white flag over government facilities in Afghanistan. According to Ahmed Z. (2022), the Afghan constitution of 2004 was also neglected.

To oversee the daily functions of their regime, the Taliban have established an interim government consisting of 33 ministries and numerous deputy officials. Nonetheless, the legal framework that governs this administration needs more transparency. The caretaker appointments are predominantly occupied by the former members of the Taliban's leadership. The Haqqania madrassa, located in Akora Khattak, has successfully produced most of its alums. Certain interim government members have undergone prolonged incarceration periods in American military detention facilities such as Guantanamo Bay and Bagram. As a result, they remain subject to sanctions imposed by both the United States and the United Nations, thereby constraining the nation's ability to engage with the global community. It is also observed that the Taliban leadership has exhibited a lack of consensus on major

decisions made following their takeover of Kabul, suggesting potential vulnerabilities within the organization, which has historically been characterized by a high degree of cohesion (Shah et al., 2022, p. 10).

The present interim government, akin to the Taliban's governance during the 1990s, comprises a religious figurehead and a head of government who oversees the administration. The caretaker government lacks gender and racial diversity. Molvi Abdul Baqi Haqqani, the newly appointed interim minister of higher education, gained widespread attention after expressing scepticism regarding the worth of pursuing higher education in a video that garnered significant traction on social media and was subsequently covered by various domestic and international news sources. During his inaugural public speech, he expressed that advanced academic degrees such as PhD or master's degrees do not hold significant value. Certain proponents of the Haqqani network, a partner of the Taliban, have implemented the black abaya, a full-length outer garment for women, within educational establishments, despite its disapproval of Afghan societal norms (Munshi, 2022, p. 148).

The Taliban have brutally attacked local media and government officials in Kabul and the provinces, including those who spoke out against them. Violence and retaliation murders are harbingers of a dark future. Former Taliban justice minister and current warden of Afghanistan's prisons, Nooruddin Turabi, has lately said that capital punishment in the form of amputations and beheadings would be reinstated (Stepanova, 2022, p. 13).

Pakistan's continued backing of the Taliban is also a significant legitimacy concern. Many Afghans now see the Taliban as illegitimate due to decisions made by the caretaker administration and Pakistan's overt intervention in the country. The resentment of Afghans towards Pakistani

intervention has been exacerbated by the actions of the ISI, Pakistan's covert intelligence agency, and its explicit objective to support the Taliban in both the provinces and the capital city of Kabul. The travel of Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed, the head of ISI, to Kabul on September 4 to negotiate a settlement among Taliban commanders was met with extensive criticism. The dissemination of a photograph depicting Hameed partaking in tea at Kabul's Serena Hotel gained widespread attention, with numerous individuals interpreting it as a source of delight. According to Alexander and Singh (2022, p 31), several sources indicate how Hameed's visit has aggravated tensions between the Haqqani network and other members of the Taliban leadership. It is due to the perception that the ISI may be more closely aligned with and potentially favouring the Haqqani network.

The probability of the international community acknowledging the Taliban government is low due to their acquisition of power through force and their disregard for both domestic and international appeals for an all-encompassing government, safeguarding of human rights, and the liberty of the press, speech, and assembly. As per a recent tweet by Ghulam Isaczi, Afghanistan's newly appointed permanent representative to the United Nations, it has been reported that 17 out of the 33 cabinet members of the Taliban have been subjected to a blockade by the United Nations. The Taliban administration has not been recognized by any countries that are closely affiliated with them, namely Pakistan, Qatar, or China. It is improbable that most nations will establish consistent diplomatic relations with the current interim government soon (Shahab, [2022](#), p. 128).

Security Challenges

It is simpler for the insurgency's many organizations and the rank and file to stick together when they are all fighting for the

same thing. Following the overthrow of Mohammad Najibullah's government in 1992 by the mujahedeen, they assumed political power and subsequently engaged in internal conflict. It is an example of how insurgents may lose their cohesion when they gain political power and lose sight of their shared aim of fighting.

Governing is far more complex than opposing or fighting against a government. As we have seen, Taliban factionalism poses security threats and may stymie efforts at government consolidation. In certain circumstances, factions may choose to dissociate from the established authority and employ violent means to safeguard themselves or advance their political objectives if redistributing power does not resolve internal disagreements. The Islamic State of Khorasan poses the Taliban with a second security dilemma (IS-K) (Niu & Huang, [2022](#), p. 135).

There is a possibility that dissatisfied Taliban members may choose to switch their allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IS-K). During his tenure as the governor of Nangarhar province, he witnessed firsthand the threat that IS-K presented to the Taliban. It was evident when IS-K rapidly took over several districts in the country's southern region in 2019 that were previously under the control of the Taliban. In certain mountainous areas, the Taliban regained control after the Afghan government deployed troops, who were supported by NATO's Resolute Support operation via air and ground attacks on IS-K facilities, ultimately eliminating the latter group's stronghold in the Achin district of Nangarhar. As per a source from Nangarhar, the Taliban are implementing rigorous inspections on all automobiles that enter Jalalabad, the province's capital, aiming to detect any potential presence of IS-K militants in hiding. In addition to the menace presented by IS-K, the Taliban will encounter political adversaries and the

prospect of a scattered armed rebellion across Afghanistan. Despite the absence of reputable national leaders of the opposition, scattered pockets of resistance may cause significant disruption in the immediate and distant future. The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are extremist organizations that are perceived as a potential threat to the Taliban in Afghanistan's northern and northeastern regions, particularly the IMU (Niu & Huang, [2022](#), p. 138).

Afghanistan's other primary security concern is integrating previous militias, ANDSF troops, and even Taliban fighters into a unified force. It is a difficult task, even during typical reintegration procedures. If the Taliban do not assist these former fighters in readjusting to civilian life, many may join criminal and terrorist organizations. The Taliban, as has been well reported, primarily support their operations via local levies on individuals and businesses, as well as from the trafficking of illegal drugs, the mining of precious metals, and the smuggling of lumber. If the Taliban are unable to pay their combat troops because of a shortage of money, those Taliban who are part of criminal networks will still be able to collect money. The Taliban may lose control of its ranks, leading to the recruitment of its members by criminal and terrorist organizations (Ali, [2022](#), p. 528).

Finally, on a more macro level, organized crime networks will remain a severe security concern for the Taliban government, just as they were for the Ghani and Karzai governments. If the government cannot regulate these networks, they will likely persist and grow. They may make local conflict more likely and discourage legal and economic development (Verma, [2022](#), p. 157).

Governance Issues

When it comes to government, the Taliban have many problems. Having already defied national principles and disregarded popular opinion, the Taliban will have difficulty obtaining legitimacy, which is the required basis for government, as mentioned above.

Under Taliban rule, Afghans are hoping for a better standard of living. Since the Taliban administration lacks the workforce and international backing of the previous government, it will be difficult to deliver essential services. A key setback for the Taliban has been the loss of human capital due to the departure from Afghanistan during the past month. Filling the gap necessary to operate government equipment will be challenging in the foreseeable future. More than a million government employees, like police officers and teachers, have gone three months without being paid. (In the last months of the Ghani government, nonpayment of salary was also an issue.) Afghanistan's foreign currency reserves were frozen by the US Federal Reserve. In addition to this, IMF has cut off the country's access to its financial resources. Moreover, the World Bank has stopped making payments to the Taliban government (Byrd, [2021](#), p. 222).

The Taliban will have enormous challenges in trying to control Afghanistan's economy. There is a dire need for individuals that can operate the system smoothly by taking different measures such as the collection of taxes and the distribution of cash to the different organs of the state such as ministries and provinces because the experts in these tasks, working in the previous regime, have either fled away from the state or are not coming to work. Until recently, 80% of the Afghan budget is coming from the United States and other foreign donors. This step resulted in a huge budget deficit. The Taliban government is making an effort to bring back former

government employees and security officers in an effort to restore the country's bureaucratic infrastructure. However, not enough former Taliban officials have returned to their government jobs for productivity to recover to pre-Taliban levels. Both domestic and global economic activity has slowed. The cost of essentials has already risen in local markets.

There is no court system in place. Reports of extrajudicial activities have surfaced in different areas of Afghanistan. The Taliban beheaded four people in Herat for kidnapping (Al Jazeera., [2021](#)). Although the Taliban leadership has promised amnesty for former government officials, there have been reports of the carrying out executions of such individuals by local commanders. The Taliban were responsible for killing a pregnant policewoman in Ghor province (BBC News., [2021](#)). The Taliban's directives in Kabul and the areas are often misunderstood. For instance, barbers in the province of

Helmand was ordered by the Taliban's Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice to stop shaving men's beards. Later, however, Taliban authorities in Kabul disobeyed such a directive (Associated Press, [2021](#)). In a broader sense, the Taliban cannot handle basic human rights issues, including women's education, job security, and the ability to assemble peacefully. The Taliban violently greeted the latest women's rights marches in Kabul.

The Taliban will only be able to fix the underlying issues of bad management sometime soon and permanently.

According to online sentiment, most people are already disillusioned with the Taliban regime. It is particularly true among the educated segments of society. Some Afghans may have a honeymoon period with the Taliban, but that might change shortly. Many people in Afghanistan are hoping that things will improve under the Taliban. Unfortunately, the Taliban's rule

now is not likely to be that different from the Taliban's rule in the 1990s (Ahmad & Mohammad, [2022](#), p. 378).

Humanitarian Challenges

The Afghan people are currently facing a serious humanitarian crisis. A large number of populations lost their jobs and have limited access to cash due to non-payment of salaries. People are suffering from drought-like situations due to the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and widespread displacement due to violence. Most of the world's international crossings and checkpoints have been closed. The price of commonly purchased items has increased by as much as 75 per cent. 14 Ninety-five per cent of households are experiencing food insecurity, which is becoming equally common in urban and rural areas (Ahmad & Mohammad, [2022](#), p.378), as the United Nations has warned.

The World Health Organization has expressed concern that Afghanistan's health system is set to collapse, with just 20% of the country's health institutions operational. The health sector will benefit from the \$45 million the United Nations has provided to meet urgent needs (Shah, et al., [2022](#), p. 10). People in Kabul and other large cities have been reduced to selling off their possessions to make ends meet. The enormous Kabul playground beside Ghazi Stadium is now a flea market selling used products.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan may reach a breaking point this next winter. There is mounting pressure on the Taliban government and the international community to address the most pressing needs of the local populace (Essar, et al., [2022](#), p. 3374).

Conclusion

Afghanistan is now facing a myriad of complex, interrelated problems. These problems can be broken down into four major categories: peace and security,

economic growth and development; humanitarian aid; and threats to global stability.

In the first place, and most immediately, a tremendous humanitarian disaster looms over the nation. In addition to the problems caused by COVID-19, the nation is now experiencing the worst drought in 27 years. The rapid decline in food security is a problem in urban and rural areas and is exacerbated by the economic devastation that has struck cities. No single municipality, big or small, had a positive net income in 2021 (OCHA, [2021](#)).

As the situation in Afghanistan worsens, the country's economic and development gains of the previous two decades are threatened with a rapid reversal. The United States' decision to freeze \$9 billion in Afghan central bank reserves has only worsened the country's economic situation. One of the world's poorest countries is experiencing this economic depression. According to the Asian Development Bank, 47.3% of Afghans lived in poverty by 2020 (ADB, [2022](#)). The UN has warned that this will devastate Afghanistan's economy and growth in the medium term. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) projects that Afghanistan's GDP fell between 3.6% and 13.2% by the middle of 2022, compared to the 4% increase projected if the previous Afghan government had remained in power (The Associated Press, [2021](#)). If these projections come true, 98% of the Afghan population will live below the poverty line.

Third, there are numerous security concerns in Afghanistan. Since the withdrawal of NATO troops in late August, Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) has killed at least 346 individuals (Sky News Data, [2021](#)). After Friday prayers in October, a Shia mosque in Kunduz was attacked by suicide bombers of IS-K which resulted in the killing of dozens of worshippers (Al Jazeera, [2021](#)). In 2018, a girls' school, in Nangarhar, was attacked by IS-K (Human Rights Watch,

[2021](#)). The confidence of the Taliban authority, which depends largely on pledges to restore justice and security, missing during the earlier regime, is eroded by these devastating and lethal attacks.

The incidence of insecurity and uncertainty is linked with the level of development. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has identified Afghanistan as the world's largest producer of opium (Reality Check, 2021). Opium poppy production is rising in Afghanistan due to several factors, including increasing unemployment, political instability, financial insecurity and a lack of education. On one hand declining income and on the other hand, increasing the price of food and other necessary commodities, and decreasing remittances are the major factors that can make Afghan people more vulnerable towards opium production for their survival. Similarly, the Hawala system is also dragging the state into underground cash operations. Criminality, money laundering, and the financing of terrorism are all intertwined with this system.

The fourth and last unfinished business in Afghanistan is to create the political prerequisites for sustainable peace and reconciliation. Even though the current "caretaker" administration is nearly completely made up of Taliban militants from the Kandahari ethnic group, the Taliban have not yet built a representative government to replace it. In response to the UN Security Council's call to be more "inclusive, representative, and united," the Taliban declared, "We are ready for inclusion but not selectivity." (Osama, [2021](#), p. 10) Non-Western aims, in particular, are seen with mistrust.

For moral and practical reasons, the international community must recognize that a political settlement in Afghanistan is just as vital now as it was before the Taliban gained control of Kabul. The peace process in Afghanistan is underway and will continue to develop even after Kabul falls.

There is hope that the United Nations, which relies heavily on regional and Security Council support, can persuade the Taliban to work with a new generation of Afghans that is more educated and wants to take Afghanistan away from widespread corruption, violence, brutality and increasing poverty. It is indeed very difficult to deal with the contemporary complex issues of Afghanistan such as economic crisis, humanitarian crisis and political uncertainty and instability. However, the United Nations is in a good position to give crucial lifesaving aid to resolve some of these issues. UN, major global actors and regional powers by collaborating with both pro-Taliban and anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan can help Afghanistan in making it a more stable nation with greater prospects for all Afghan inhabitants.

Recommendations

1. One major roadblock to stable ties is the international community's unwillingness to recognize the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government. However, the Taliban's hopes of gaining international legitimacy could be more improbable. The Taliban interim government should run Afghanistan and strive to avert a humanitarian and economic calamity instead of spending the next six months seeking legitimacy. Cohesive action on the part of the government is the only way for the movement to earn the trust and support of people worldwide.
2. Achieving this result is only possible with a well-defined plan that can instill the Taliban and the international community with consistent confidence in the trajectory of their relationship. The United States, with the help of more seasoned regional states, could lead negotiations for a bilateral agreement (with specified, step-by-step milestones), setting a

framework with measurable, time-bound objectives that will motivate reciprocal steps. From the Taliban's perspective, this may include allowing safe passage to vulnerable Afghan groups, stopping the diversion of assistance by Taliban rule, protecting women's rights, and forming a government that fairly represents all Afghans, including women and non-Taliban political forces. Retaliatory measures from the international community might include the restoration of development funding, the lifting of certain sanctions, and the ultimate recognition of the Afghan government.

3. The United Nations should assist in negotiating the terms set by Western nations. Despite the need for a cooperative road map (such as the one outlined above), it is never acceptable to make the delivery of humanitarian aid dependent on the Taliban meeting any conditions. Due to the vast differences between the Taliban and Western troops, different strategies are needed to address diverse humanitarian and non-humanitarian concerns. Millions of helpless Afghans are suffering as the two sides make competing demands.
4. Humanitarian problems are not the only thing the nations have in common; terrorism threats are a significant worry for both nations. For instance, the United Nations (UN) may aid the Taliban's gradual incorporation into world society by presenting a unified front against counterterrorism. Terrorism and the rising danger of IS-K have captivated the attention of the international world and the Taliban; as a result, conditionality should not be allowed to overshadow regional security issues and humanitarian needs.

5. Third, expanding UNAMA's mission and providing it with enough resources expresses the high-level political will necessary to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. While the United Nations' ability to act as an outside mediator in Afghanistan will be constrained by several factors, the most obvious is if individual governments use their influence to block the UN from negotiating with the Taliban. If the United Nations is to fulfil its potential as a transformative force, it must be given the authority to carry out all of the tried-and-true roles that have made it successful. Reviving an intra-Afghan discourse toward reconciliation and democratic change to move beyond the blame game and develop confidence between the Taliban and other Afghan parties requires the international community to deploy its good offices and other peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms. The Taliban-led Afghan government, foreign powers, regional countries, and donors can all benefit from the United Nations' mediation efforts. Providing the United Nations with a regional coordinating mandate will improve their utilization of the overland links between Afghanistan and Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan, expanding the range of possible routes for aid delivery.
6. It is essential to keep an eye on how humanitarian, developmental, and peace concerns overlap in Afghanistan instead of rolling out humanitarian-only forms of response. To better react to the Afghan crisis, the international assistance system has to break down its conventional silos. For this purpose, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus's compelling framework is ideal. Initiatives like refugee return and reintegration, asset development, and social safety net initiatives are part of "Triple Nexus" programming, as the United Nations and other actors have dubbed it in Afghanistan over the past few years. When it comes to adapting nexus programming principles and techniques to the unexplored areas of Afghanistan's fast-changing and extremely demanding operational environment, the United Nations can play a crucial role as a convening force and information broker.
7. Last but not least, the country's many issues and challenging operating environment need daring and new ways of finance to cover humanitarian and development requirements at scale without worsening assistance reliance. In October, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) announced the establishment of a People's Economy Fund to bridge the gap between livelihood assistance and macroeconomic stabilization by making funds available to vulnerable Afghans and micro-businesses. Although this is a positive step, far more extensive resource mobilization is required. For instance, the United States government can unfreeze \$1 billion in Afghan assets immediately to capitalize a Multi-Donor Nexus Trust Fund with an independent and honest technocratic governance structure to provide support for the Afghan people. Since most significant donors are decreasing their bilateral help, the United Nations may play a more significant role as an overseer and channel for international aid via several emergency trust funds. It will serve as a de facto international coordinated aid for development, ensuring that all Afghan civilians continue to get essential public services like healthcare, education, and electricity.

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