



ECOSOC: Topic 2

ENSURING THE SAFETY OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Background:

In 1988, Osama bin Laden and 15 other Islamists formed the group al-Qaida, based in Afghanistan, in an attempt to continue their jihad against the Soviets, who were interfering with their goal to govern the nation purely on Islamic teachings. The Soviets finally left Afghanistan in 1989, leaving the country in a state of political instability as a conflict between rebel groups and the Soviet-backed communist government that was currently in power. In 1995, a new Islamic militia, the Taliban, rose to power with a promise of ending this conflict as long as the country upholds traditional Islamic values, leading to the curtailment of education and employment for women and strict laws regarding their veils.

On September 11th 2001, hijackers commandeered four commercial planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center Towers in New York City, killing thousands. The US immediately claimed that bin Laden, believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, was the prime suspect in the attack. Following unanswered demands that the Taliban turn over bin Laden, US and British forces began to launch airstrikes against the country. Eventually, on November 13th, after weeks of fighting with Taliban troops, NATO entered Kabul. Tensions in the country continue to rise as intensive fighting broke out between Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters, until in 2006, Taliban fighters launched the first wave of suicide attacks and raids against international troops who had expanded their peacekeeping operation to the southern portion of the country.

However, it can be argued that the US's involvement actually became active in 2009, when President Barack Obama announced a new strategy for the Afghanistan war that would dispatch more military and civilian trainers to the country, on top of 17,000 additional troops that he had already ordered. The war began to weigh on the American economy and general morale, as the anti-war sentiment grew stronger and support for the foreign deployment of troops decreased. Thus, in 2015, President Obama announced plans to greatly reduce U.S. forces in Afghanistan by the end of the year, aiming to end US military commitment completely by the end of 2016. "We have now been in Afghanistan longer than many Americans expected"¹, Obama acknowledged during an appearance in the White House Rose Garden. "Now we're finishing the job we've started."² The president had planned to leave 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan after the U.S combat mission formally ended with the purpose of training Afghan security forces to counteract the terrorism of the Taliban. While this never occurred at the rate that Obama had predicted, the withdrawal did slowly begin until it was interrupted in 2017 by the election of President Trump, who was committed to the US's military presence in Afghanistan as he believed it prevented the emergence of "a vacuum for terrorists."³ When Trump's term ended and he was replaced by Biden in November 2020, the administration announced the complete withdrawal of US troops by 9/11/2021. This ended up happening even faster than expected, as US troops left the last controlled airfield by July 5th, 2021. Just a month later, the Afghanistan government collapsed and the Taliban took over Kabul. Immediately, thousands of Afghans tried to flee the country which led to two suicide bombings outside the Kabul airport, carried out by the terrorist group ISIS-K (the branch of ISIS that is active in Afghanistan), marking the renewal of the rule of terror in the country.

¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20140527-barack-obama-troops-afghanistan-us>

² <https://www.france24.com/en/20140527-barack-obama-troops-afghanistan-us>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/trump-speech-afghanistan.html>



Current Situation:

After the Taliban regained absolute control of Afghanistan this August 15th, fundamentalist Islamic traditions and beliefs have begun to be reinforced onto the population, leading to a distinct shift for the conditions of women in the country. According to the Deputy Representative for UN Women in Afghanistan, “and we knew from that moment [when the Taliban took control of Kabul], that life for women and girls in Afghanistan would change.”⁴ In some provinces, working women were told to stay home and not leave their homes without a male relative, as the Taliban claim that their security forces are “not trained to deal with women ... until we have full security in place, we ask women to stay home”.⁵ Women protection centers are being attacked, and the people that work in them are being harassed. The country ranks among the least favorable on the Gender Inequality Index and the literacy rate for women is among the lowest in the world.

Even though the situation is bleak, we continue to observe women fighting for their rights and defending equality. In fact, throughout the decades, Afghan women’s advocacy has led to great changes, like the opening of the first school for girls in 1921 and the 2004 constitution which enshrines gender equality. UN Women in Afghanistan will also continue to stay committed to delivering safety and emancipation to Afghan women and girls.

Important bloc positions:

- **USA & UK:** Currently, US and UK forces are engaged in military action against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The US is also working with various groups that they think may play a role in a future political setup.
- **Russia & China:** America has handed Russia and China considerable opportunities to step in and present themselves as a desirable alternative as international partners. Russia is faced not only by the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to its own security, but also to that of its Central Asian allies. Thus, Vladimir Putin has made recent overtures to the Taliban encouraging a sustained and positive relationship between the regime and Russia.
- **Northern Alliance:** The Northern Alliance, also known as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, is an anti-Taliban, anti-al-Qaeda alliance composed by India, Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the United States and Uzbekistan. At the moment, the Northern Alliance is receiving renewed financial and military support from abroad to intensify its war efforts.
- **UN:** The UN has taken an active role in sending aid to Afghanistan. UNICEF has entered Kabul, and peace groups have started working on increasing vaccine distributions. The UN in Afghanistan is working on reaching the Sustainable Development Goals in Afghanistan.

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/10/experts-take-gender-equality-is-critical-for-the-afghanistans-future>

⁵ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/449988/afghanistan-taliban-tell-working-women-to-stay-at-home#:~:text=%22Until%20we%20have%20full%20security,ask%20women%20to%20stay%20home.%22&text=As%20well%20as%20expressing%20concern,summmary%20executions%20by%20the%20Taliban.>

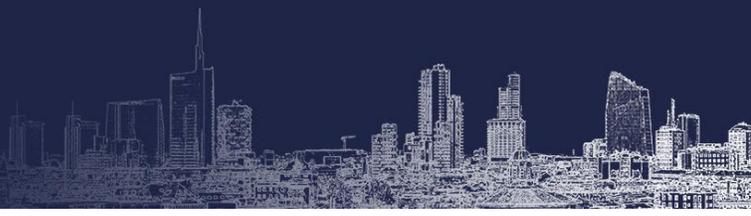


Possible solutions:

- Clauses might address the issue of raising awareness and engaging in advocacy ensures that women's rights are protected and promoted and that Afghan women are not just talked about, but also listened to directly. It's a responsibility for the international community to highlight the situation for women and girls.
- Draft a plan for humanitarian aid that will focus on a variety of different factors:
 - General health:
 - Water/food resources
 - Medicines (provision of iron folic acid in schools to prevent anemia)
 - Doctors
 - Maternal care
 - Work to ensure equality in access to health and nutrition services.
 - Support female vaccinators.
 - Protection of minors:
 - Protection centers
 - Political refugee camps
 - Provide gender separated sanitation facilities and menstrual hygiene management in schools
 - Education:
 - Set up UN/NGO run lessons to increase the literacy/education rate of women. Girls' education helps prevent child marriage and provides a protective space.
 - Financial support for female teachers/schools.
- Setting up a functioning state, supported by neighboring states and integrated into the international community, is likely to be the most effective strategy in preventing terrorist groups.

Further reading:

- "Gender Focus". *Unicef.Org*, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/gender-focus>. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.
- "Expert'S Take: Gender Equality Is Critical For The Afghanistan'S Future, Long-Term Development, And Sustained Peace". *UN Women*, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/10/experts-take-gender-equality-is-critical-for-the-afghanistans-future>. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.
- "United Nations In Afghanistan". *The United Nations In Afghanistan*, 2021, <https://afghanistan.un.org/en>. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.
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- "Afghanistan: Taliban Tell Working Women To Stay At Home". *BBC News*, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58315413>. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.
- "Russia Is Positioning Itself As A Global Partner After The U.S. Afghanistan Debacle". *The Conversation*, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/russia-is-positioning-itself-as-a-global-partner-after-the-u-s-afghanistan-debacle-167030>. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.