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THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE
WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNITED STATES FROM AFGHANISTAN

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1. Introduction

The year 2021 marks the end of the longest war of the United States. US President Joe Biden has decided to withdraw all military forces from the Central Asian country of Afghanistan. This comes 20 years after the terrorist attacks on the United States, when two planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the twin towers of New York, another airliner crashed into the west side of the Pentagon and a third plane crashed in Pennsylvania. According to media reports, then President George W. Bush described the incident as a terrorist attack on the United States. After a thorough investigation, the Bush administration strongly suspected that al-Qaeda, in particular Osama bin Laden, was behind the attacks. According to US intelligence, bin Laden was then harbored by the Taliban in Afghanistan, which was reason enough for the US to send troops to Afghanistan in October 2001. Thus began the longest and most expensive war the United States has fought. When military forces arrived in Afghanistan, they removed the Taliban from power, who had ruled the country for four years. The US presence succeeded in getting the Afghan government to hold democratic elections and proclaim a new head of state, head of government and other political leaders. The Taliban, who are only found in Afghanistan, are an extremist terrorist group who went into decline after the arrival of US troops in 2001 and over the years have seemed to have less and less chance and strength to return to power. This changed when the Biden administration decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. Starting with the withdrawal of US troops, the Taliban began to move in and take over parts of the country. By August, the Islamist group had taken over the entire country and seized power. Although it was said that the new Taliban rule would not be as extreme and harsh as it had been between 1996 and 2001, a large part of the population, especially women, were worried about the future. The current situation in Afghanistan was unprecedented in the country in the last two decades, and since it is not really covered in the Hungarian literature, I would like to dive into the subject and get a deeper understanding about what is going on, what has led to this chaotic situation and what the possible consequences might be. Another reason for my choice of topic is that I am also interested in conflicts in the global arena in general, especially when they have a serious regional or wider international impact on other global actors, and how these conflicts can be resolved. As I have been studying international relations for almost 5 years, this topic is very close to my interests. I had already shown this interest when I had to write my first thesis at the end of my undergraduate studies. At that time, I was writing about the civil war in Yemen, which had also developed into an international conflict, or more precisely, a proxy war.

Nowadays, the most useful sources are articles in the mainstream media and official governmental statements, which I use to compile the core material for my research. I will begin by introducing the country of Afghanistan and outlining its brief history, the Soviet invasion and its aftermath, and the events that followed the rise of the mujahedin and the Taliban. This will include the country's geography, history, society, religion, economy, etc. The part that follows, partly after the 9/11 attacks on the US, will feature prominently, in particular the entry of US troops and the removal of the Taliban from power. The same chapter also discusses the withdrawal of the US and its allies from Afghanistan and how this has changed the situation in the country. The impact of the US presence and withdrawal on local and global terrorism is the focus of the next chapter, which also looks at the regional and international outlook, the impact of the '20 Years War' on the region, and the role of international organizations, particularly NATO, in Afghanistan. I conclude my research with my own opinion and thoughts on the whole situation based on my findings and information on the subject.

I wanted to know more about why the Taliban takeover was so swift and unopposed. The short duration of the takeover raised questions in my mind, such as whether the withdrawal could have been managed differently and, if so, why the Biden administration did not do so. The large-scale emigration from Afghanistan shows that many Afghans were not willing to live under another Taliban regime, even if the new elite promised a more lenient leadership than the 1996-2001 regime. Things such as the current situation of women have led the population to believe that this new Taliban regime is not much different from the one in power two decades ago.

In this study, I will try to answer the following research questions:

- Is Afghanistan a failed state?
- What other solutions could have been found to normalize the situation in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, from an economic and social point of view?

Since my goal is to become a diplomat, I find it very interesting how history has shown that the tools of diplomacy have proven to be a successful solution to all kinds of international conflicts. Even if this case is not specifically international but more like a domestic problem, diplomacy can be a useful solution. That is what I will work on to explore these possibilities. However, sometimes not all parties of a conflict show intentions to resolve their problems and differences through diplomacy and peaceful negotiations. I will try to focus on this too.

2. AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is situated in South Asia, bordered by Pakistan to the south-east, Iran to the west and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. The country is landlocked and it covers more than 650 000 km² of land and has a population of 33 million people. There are 34 administrative divisions which are called provinces. Its capital is Kabul, the population of the city is nearly 4,5 million people. Two-thirds of the country's territory is mountainous, although there are plains in the north and in the southeast, the country is sparsely populated. The official languages are Dari and Pashto. The official currency is Afghani. The climate of the country is mostly arid. A little more than half of the land is used for agriculture. The most common natural resources are natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, and other basic elements. About the social aspects of Afghanistan, we can say, that the ethnic composition of the country is quite diverse, there are the Pashtuns who take up the majority of the Afghan population. The territory where they are native is situated right on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is also referred to as the Durand Line that got its name from the deal between the secretary of the British Indian government, Sir Mortimer Durand and Afghan emir Abdur Rahman Khan. (nationalgeographic.org, 2011) The Pashtuns are mostly identified as highly protective of their own land, tradition and Islamic faith. They showed that they insist on these principles early on: first when they fought for and gained their independence from the British in 1921, and then later when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Their strong presence in the Afghan political life made them influential even in today's Afghan politics. Also, the majority of mujahidin fighters were of Pashtun origins as well. The next major ethnicity in Afghanistan are the Tajiks that take up 27% of the population. They are also Sunni Muslims speaking Persian. The Pashtun population generally accepts them as an ethnic group in Afghanistan. They mostly live close to the border with Tajikistan, which also explain their high level of presence in Afghanistan. The third big minority is the Hazara whose base is found mainly in the center, mountainous regions of Afghanistan. The history of their choosing of their traditional location is that they had to flee from the Pashtun population, who did not accept the Hazara people, since they are the followers of another branch of Islam: they were Shi'ite Muslims. Because of the persecution of the Pashtun people the Hazara often felt the most marginalized ones among all the ethnicities in Afghanistan. Another neighboring country has an ethnic group to give to Afghanistan as well, they are the Uzbeks that are 10% of the Afghan population.

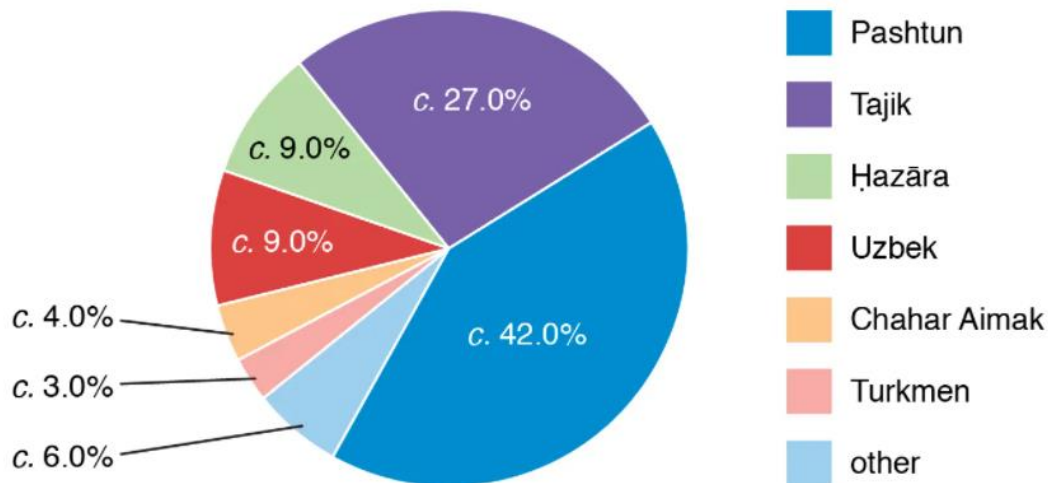


Figure 1: Ethnolinguistic composition, 2004

In the second half of the 20th century the urban population has grown a couple percentages every decade, and the rural population has also grown by a couple thousand people in every decade except for the 1990's when a small drop could be seen.

Area	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Rural (in thousands)	7,679	8,898	10,645	11,962	10,666	18,152
Urban (in thousands)	473	773	1,320	2,224	2,366	4,704
Urban (in %)	5.8	8.0	11.0	15.7	18.2	20.6

Table 1: Urban and rural population in Afghanistan, 1950-2000

As for the religious affiliations, the most current reliable data is from 2009, which showed that 85-90% of the population considers themselves Sunni Muslims, 10-15% are Shia Muslims, and there are less than 1% who belongs to other religions. The political life of Afghanistan has changed a lot since the Taliban takeover in August, 2021, so it has no internationally recognized government. Formerly Ashraf Ghani was the president of Afghanistan, but after the growing threats and influence of the Taliban he fled the country and went to Pakistan. He was also the head of government. The President had the authority to appoint the ministers and the National Assembly had to approved those appointments. A president could rule for 5 years, and he was eligible for a re-election. Before the Taliban takeover the National Assembly used to be

bicameral, consisting of the House of Elders and House of People. (cia.gov, 2022)

Today, Afghanistan ranks quite low in terms of its democracy status. As an analysis on an internet website shows the country was classified as a hardline autocracy in 2022. The numbers show, that the overall grading of different points of view are contributing factors when examining aspects like political and social integration, stability of democratic institutions, rule of law, political participation and stateness. If we take a closer look at one of the most problematic aspects of the Afghan social-political aspects, we find that the exercising of civil rights, especially women’s rights are much limited. As far as the performance of the democratic institutions is concerned the lack of communication, trust and negotiation among the leaders of different institutions also contribute to the fact, that Afghanistan is deemed a failed state. This lack of cooperation questions the legitimacy of these institutions. Moreover, over the past few years, the divided leadership of President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah has shown little transparency, adding to the problem of people being confused and not knowing what is going on behind the political scenes. (atlas.bti-project.org, 2022)

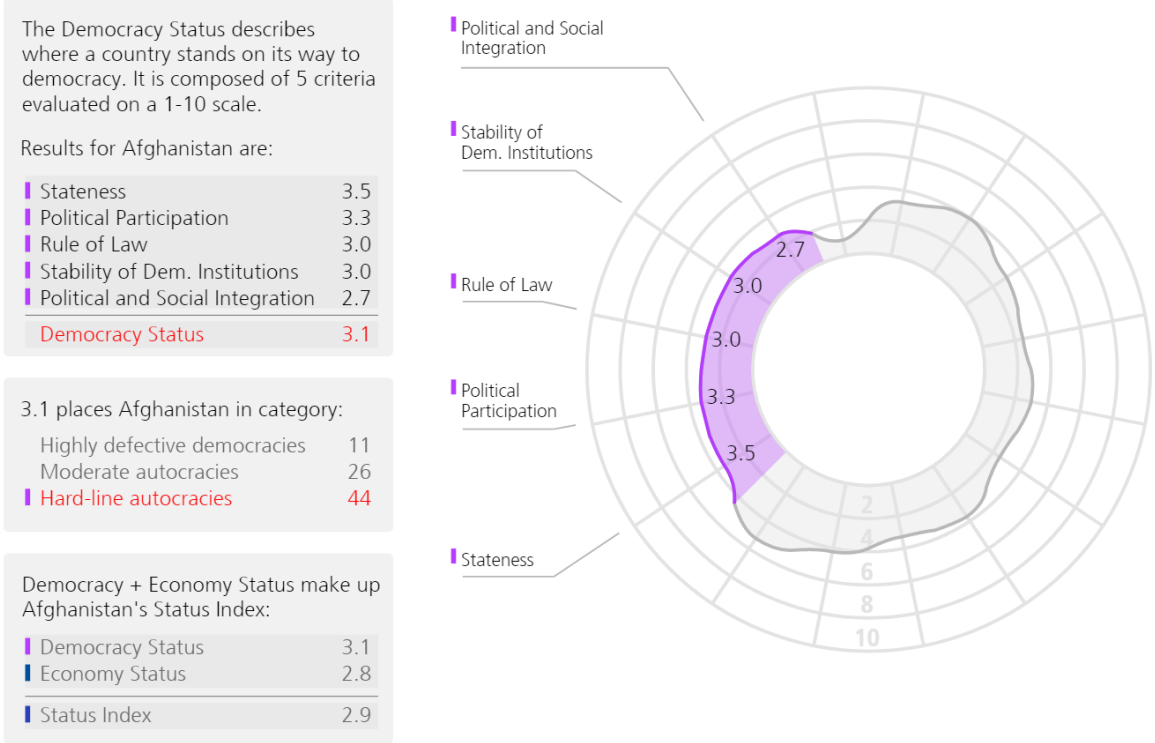


Figure 2: Afghanistan democracy status

After seeing the main challenges Afghanistan has to face today we have to dig deeper in its history and unveil what has been going on in its past of a hundred years.

2.1. Historical overview

In the 19th century, the land known today as Afghanistan served as a buffer zone between the Russian Empire in the North and the British Empire which controlled British India – modern-day Pakistan – in the South. This imperial rivalry became known as the great game. Of the two, Britain was the more aggressive when it came to controlling the country having fought two major battles over the control of the territory, the second of which saw Afghan land ceded to Britain and a loss of control over the handling of its foreign affairs. Afghanistan, being a landlocked country and therefore reliant on the good graces of its neighbors to allow the passage of diplomats and traders. By the end of the 19th century Afghanistan had become a client nation of Britain receiving British weapons, goods and money in exchange for helping keep the rival Russian Empire at bay. However, the establishment of the Durand Line which finally clearly defined Afghanistan's borders saw many tribes, such as the Pashtun people divided between Afghanistan and India. It should be noted that the Durand Line was intended by the British to mark the border between British India (of which present-day Pakistan was a part) and Afghanistan, which was intended to act as a buffer zone between the British and Russian empires. The Durand Line is now accepted by Pakistan, but disputed by Afghanistan as a legitimate border. Naturally, the Pashtun people refused to accept this line, having lived on the land for hundreds of years, and so nomadic tribes often crossed the new border as they always had done. By the second decade of the 20th century Afghanistan was a country of two worlds with the old tribal ways existing in the countryside, while in the cities such as the capital Kabul more modern concepts of statehood under king Habibullah flourished. Afghanistan's ruling class were now tired of having to live under the insults of being a puppet of the British and demanded full independence. It would not be until after Habibullah was assassinated by his son Amanullah who then took the throne from his elder brother after having reigned for just one week that Afghanistan declared its independence. This sparked the third British-Afghan war beginning in 1919 which would last two years after which Afghanistan earned its independence. However, peace did not come to the country for Amanullah who wanted to have total rule over his kingdom and that meant shifting power away from tribal and religious leaders who naturally opposed such a move, thus throughout his short reign Amanullah fought a series of uprisings

opposed to his reforms even when those reforms benefited the people. Amanullah was toppled from power in 1929 and after a brief power-struggle Nadir Khan would emerge victorious and seize the throne. Khan allowed the tribal leaders to retain much of their power but he still had to contend with dissent amongst some ethnic communities. In 1933 he was assassinated and succeeded by his son Mohammad Zahir Shah, so his reign would last significantly longer than his father's. Zahir introduced innovations in many areas during the first two decades of his long reign. These innovations included the use of Afghan resources for internal development, the expansion of external relations and a cautious policy of national consolidation. These developments slowed down during the Second World War, but the neutrality that had been the norm in Afghanistan was maintained. In the neighboring area, a Pashtun political problem emerged in which the Pashtuns hoped to establish a "Pashtunistan" state after Pakistan's independence in 1947. (pbs.org, 2021)

Mahmoud Shah was Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1946 to 1953, who allowed free elections and achieved freedom of the press, and a "liberal parliament" from 1949 to 1952. However, at the end of Mahmud Shah's reign, his cousin, Lieutenant General Mohammad Daoud Khan, was supported by the conservatives and eventually came to power. He convinced the king to turn to the Soviet Union for military aid. Then, in 1963 Zahir carried out one of his most questionable moves yet by trying to develop a constitutional monarchy under the policy of the new democracy which lasted from 1964 to 1973. During this time, intellectuals enjoyed greater freedom, while women began to enter the workplace and government. However, despite the name, the legislation governing the establishment of political parties in Afghanistan has not been implemented. In 1973, Daoud led a coup against Zahir supported by the military and the Soviet Union and he took effective control over the government. Under Daoud the country again underwent sweeping reforms that aimed to create a modern socialist Islamic state. In the cities men and women discarded their traditional robes and began wearing Western-style clothing as they studied and worked together for the first time, much to the distain of the more conservative elements of the Afghan society. (pbs.org, 2022)

The period between 1973 and 1978 marked the second tenure of prime minister Daoud. During this time, the prime minister attempted to use innovative political tools such as introducing social and economic reforms, establishing a new constitution and gradually breaking with the socialist ideology that the government had previously represented. The Afghan government has also sought to advance relations with other Muslim countries and to distance itself from both the United States and the Soviet Union in the context of a move away from socialist ideology. In the Afghan foreign policy, Daoud also managed to reach an agreement with Zulfikar Ali

Bhutto, the prime minister of Pakistan, on the Pashtun issue. Later on, the Loya Jirga (the Grand Assembly) approved Daoud Khan's proposal to introduce reforms, following which new articles were added to the constitution and several articles were amended.

The rise of the Khalq (People) and the Parcham (Banner) parties

Daoud appointed the members of the new government, who were mainly family members and close friends. This led to the coming together of Marxist-Leninist opposition groups: the Khalq (People) and Parcham (Banner) parties, which had previously operated separately for a decade. The characteristics of the Khalqis was that they were mostly Pashto people and also used the Pashto language, while the members of the Parcham party were mainly native in Kabul and spoke Dari which was also the language of the educated, urbanized people. The confrontation between the two parties and Daoud also led to bloody scenes such as political assassinations and demonstrations that turned brutal. These were followed by the detentions of several leftist figures. The head of the Khalq party was the target of such arrests during his time in detention, when he organized a coup to change power, which ultimately proved successful. The coup was not without brutality, as Daoud Khan and several of his family members were assassinated. The country was subsequently renamed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan on 27 April 1978. The leader of the Khalq faction, Nur Mohammad Taraki took office on 30 April. Afghanistan's next leader was the President of the People's Party, Nur Mohammad Taraki, who held several positions at once, as President of the Revolutionary Council, Secretary General of the PDPA party and Prime Minister of the country. His two deputy prime ministers were Babrak Karmal (Parcham Party) and Hafizullah Amin (Khalq Party). The government's rhetoric sought to place a strong emphasis on independence from the Soviets, as well as a focus on Afghan nationalism, Islamic ideology, socio-economic fairness and respect for the treaties concluded by the Afghan leadership earlier. This new government was different from the one it succeeded in a variety of ways, for example the members of the joint government of the Khalq and Parcham parties had different background, unlike the previous cabinet which mostly consisted of family members and close friends. However, the bond between the two ruling parties did not last long, with the People's Party gaining more power and influence, as a significant part of its power was in the Afghan armed forces. Meanwhile, politicians of the Parcham party were sent on ambassadorial duty and a systematic purge of the Parcham Party began.

In line with Marxist-Leninist principles, the Taraki-led government sought to abolish usury by introducing new reforms, equal rights for women, and new land reform and administrative policies. The Afghan leadership was believed by people in rural areas to have maintained

friendly relations with the Soviet Union. The announcements of reforms have led to resentment among the Afghan population, many of whom believe that they have undermined Afghanistan's cultural foundations. However, it was not until later, in 1978, that the protests that resulted from this resentment took place. Thereafter, uprisings became more popular throughout the country, and were occasionally accompanied by explosions, mainly in Kabul and other major cities. This tense situation led to the assassination of Adolph Dubs (US Ambassador to Afghanistan) on 14 February 1979, after which it was clear that US aid to Afghanistan would be cut off. (britannica.com, n.a.)

On 28 March, Hafizullah Amin was appointed as the new Prime Minister of Afghanistan, but Taraki continued to hold the posts of President of the Revolutionary Council and Secretary General of the PDPA. The insurgency in the countryside continued unabated, and the Afghan armed forces were disbanded. This made a call for help from the Soviet Union necessary, which the Afghans received. Taraki's rule was overthrown in September, and as Amin ordered, Taraki was killed. The Soviets' idea was to remove Amin because of his leading role in starting the rebellions. However, once Amin learned that an assassination attempt was being planned against him, he managed to prevent it in time. Following the failed assassination attempt, Amin, seeking to increase his influence, sought to put the security of Afghanistan at the interest of Pakistan and the United States.

The Soviet invasion

The attempt of the Afghan leader failed as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on 24 December 1979, sending 30,000 troops to forcibly overthrow the Amin-regime. Three days later, Hafizullah Amin and his followers were killed. The Soviets had interest in invading Afghanistan, they wanted to maintain a stable client state. In response, a number of Afghan groups mounted a rebellion. The government cracked down on groups and individuals belonging to the domestic opposition and launched sweeping reforms, which aroused the resentment of the mainly Muslim and anti-communist sections of the population. (britannica.com, n.a.)

The former Deputy Prime Minister of Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal, returned to his country from the Soviet Union and became Prime Minister, as well as Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and Secretary General of the PDPA. The anti-Soviet and anti-Karmal protests grew in number and intensity and began to unfold in more and more areas across the country. A significant number of the groups involved in the protests were Muslim, collectively known as the mujahedin (an Islamic term describing those fighting in the path of righteousness), who

organized not only in Afghanistan but also beyond its borders, particularly in Peshawar, Pakistan. The ideology of most Muslim extremists was that the Muslim community and Muslim territory should be protected from any external attack. One such external attack was the Soviet invasion, which galvanized the Muslim community not only in Afghanistan but also those beyond its borders. This explains why many people from countries with a Muslim-majority came to Afghanistan to take up arms and rebel against the Soviets. Even notorious fanatics such as Osama bin Laden arrived from relatively distant Saudi Arabia. The Soviets responded by launching intense military crackdowns around the country to stamp out opposition. This forced many of the fighters to retreat to neighboring Pakistan where they set up training camps and schools in the border town of Peshawar. Here, they received funding and training from Pakistani intelligence, Saudi Arabia and the United States, all with vested interests in countering the spread of communism in the region. The mujahedin's stubborn resistance was greatly aided by mainly military support as well, mainly from the US, China, several Arab and European states. As both financial and military support intensified, the Pakistani authorities ensured the coordination of foreign assistance. This responsibility was assumed by the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) under the Pakistan Army. The Pakistani-controlled organization has also expanded into a number of other areas, such as refugees, and has had a significant influence on resistance movements. A leading figure of this organization was a Palestinian scholar, Sheikh Abdullah Azzam who had declared a ruling or fatwa while teaching in Saudi Arabia that urged all able Muslims to travel to Afghanistan and take up arms against the Soviets. On the opposition side in Afghanistan there were 7 parties called the Peshawar Seven, all of which were under such Pakistani influence. However, there was a fault line between these parties, and the resulting differences were quickly put aside in the name of resistance and they formed a coalition. The fighting in Afghanistan did not involve groups representing secular interests, due to Pakistan's influence, because it was Azzam who first insisted that it was a religious duty to take part in the fight to free the Afghan people from the tyranny of the Red Army. This served two interests at once, the Islamist leanings of the Pakistani military leader, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, and Pakistan's interest in preventing any territorial claim of Afghanistan. The persistent resistance of the mujahedin was greatly helped by the fact that many young Afghans from the refugee camps in Pakistan returned to their homeland and took up arms against the Soviet advance. The clashes between the Soviets and Afghan insurgents were characterized by small-scale, lightning fights. The most prominent of the Afghan rebel groups were Hezb-i Islami headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jamiati Islami founded by Burhanuddin Rabbani and its military wing the Northern Alliance which was led by the guerilla

commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. (c-r.org, n.a.) Massoud joined the Islamic Society, one of the most influential of the mujahedin groups. The Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan, among others was a similarly important organization, whose members were largely foreigners. One of the fault lines within the opposition was the perception of the US. One of the counterweights to the US-friendly line that was prevalent among the opposition was the Hezb-i Islami. As for the religious fault line within the opposition, in addition to the Sunni group, who had their stronghold in Peshawar, there was also a Shiite tendency. They were supported by Iran, which is not surprising, given that Iran is a bastion of the Shiite bloc.

Few people really believed in the success of the uprising against the Soviets. But for those who supported the mujahedin, the uprising was a good opportunity to keep the Soviet Union at bay and cripple its economy. As is usually the case with insurgent forces, the mujahedin continued to believe that the uprising would be successful and would drive out the Soviet invaders. The undisputed military superiority of the Soviets began to wane as the US, China and the UK supplied the mujahedin with more and more sophisticated weapons. These included, for example, shoulder-launched missiles that could easily destroy Soviet helicopters. It was then that air force losses on both sides began to show.

In May 1986, Karmal was stripped of his post as PDPA Secretary General and replaced by Mohammad Najibullah, who was formerly the chief of the Afghan secret police. Karmal was later suspended from all further political duties. The aforementioned feuds between the Khalq and Parcham parties have not subsided. The Politburo, which was the highest decision-making body of the Soviet Communist Party, agreed to a ceasefire, but this was not met with any significant demands, not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan. Najibullah was elected president of Afghanistan even after a new constitution was issued.

The rebels were growing in popularity across the country, and their resistance made the Soviet military advance increasingly ineffective. Nevertheless, the Soviets took control of some major cities and provinces, while the mujahedin preferred to use rural and less populated areas as their main margin of manoeuvre. After this, the Soviet invasion soon reached a stalemate, as the invading Soviet troops did not expect such a massive resistance. The mujahedin insurgency was initially the responsibility of the Afghan army, but after the Afghan army was significantly reduced by desertions, it became much ineffective against the insurgent group. Due to the reduction of the Afghan army through desertion, it had shrunk from more than a 100 000 strong in 1978 to only 20-30 000 military personnel by 1987. After seeing the Afghan army being incompetent to deal with the revolts, the Soviets took matters into their own hands and began attacking areas used by the mujahedin. The aim of the bombing campaign targeting the rebel

group was to make the regions they were using uninhabitable. As a result, the Afghan population began to flee the country in droves, most of them to Pakistan and Iran in particular to escape the war.

During the invasion, the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers held talks in Geneva, mainly on the withdrawal of the Soviets and the withdrawal of military aid to the mujahedin. A treaty to this effect was signed towards the end of the war in 1988. Mikhail Gorbachev, then head of the USSR party, stuck to his earlier promise that the Soviets should start withdrawing from Afghanistan in May of the current year. Subsequent events followed the peace agreement, with all Soviet soldiers leaving Afghanistan by February 1989. It is also important to note that, in addition to the conflict with the Soviets, Afghanistan was also the scene of a civil war. The mujahedin set up an interim government in neighboring Pakistan against an Afghan government led by Najibullah, who, despite the civil war, had rhetorically advocated reconciliation and peace. The mujahedin's aim was to replace the Najibullah leadership, but internal strife within the extremist group made this impossible.

As the war drew to an end, the Soviets had to admit that they could not repel this kind of resistance and, at the end of the 10-year invasion, decided to end the fighting. The war ended with a treaty with the Soviet Union, the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan on 15 February 1989. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is generally said to have ended in Moscow's defeat, and indeed proved to be a failure that contributed significantly to the collapse of the Soviet Union shortly afterwards. This assessment, however, is only partly correct and seems to be a gross exaggeration of the collapse. The Soviet invasion was undoubtedly a defeat, if we assess it in terms of the purpose of the invasion. Moscow neither succeeded in stabilizing the internal situation in Afghanistan, nor in establishing and leaving behind a political regime that would have guaranteed Kabul's lasting loyalty to the Soviet Union. Despite this, Moscow could have maintained a military presence in Afghanistan for many years without its losses there forcing its withdrawal. Nor can public pressure be said to have had any compelling influence on the political leadership. The decision of the political committee ordering the withdrawal was taken long before the public, liberated by the Gorbachev perestroika, became a real political force (13 November 1986). The withdrawal from Afghanistan is part of a radical Gorbachev revision of late Soviet policy-making. (britannica.com, n.a.)

After the 1992 civil war and the rise of the Taliban

When a country establishes a system that a large part of the population does not like, in some cases it can lead to civil war and revolution. However, they can have serious consequences such as damage and destruction. In most cases, the first stage in the use of such means is revolution, followed by civil war if this does not bring about a meaningful change. However, in more drastic cases, history has also shown that civil war has broken out simultaneously. In the case of the Afghan civil war, we can speak of several phases, mainly due to its protracted nature. This civil war was unique in that it was preceded by the socialist revolution of 1978. In this case, the revolution did not achieve a resounding success. This was partly due to the fact that they were unable to win over a significant part of the Afghan population.

Shortly after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Najibullah was removed from power in April 1992. The mujahedin managed to set up a government, but it was fragile and weak, and peace and stability still did not seem easy to achieve in Afghanistan. Building an Afghanistan that was stable in all respects was a distant hope, as competition for influence between different military factions, tensions generated by ethnic groups and a bleak economic situation left the country in an increasingly precarious situation. The rotating chairmanship of the Afghan executive office was won by Burhanuddin Rabbani, previously held by Sebghatullah Mujaddedi. However, Rabbani had no intention of resigning at the end of the two-year term. In response, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the chairman of the Islamic Party, bombarded several points in Kabul with rockets, necessitating the use of aid and food aid by several aid organizations, in particular the UN. Law and order was completely abolished in large parts of the countryside, and the country was dominated by military groups and leaders who introduced restrictions such as taxing trade abroad by levying road and transit tolls. Thus began a generalized pattern of extortion, increased kidnappings and growing desperation among the population. Among other things, this situation has also contributed to the emergence of a new movement. The followers of this movement are called Taliban, which comes from a Persian word meaning students. Their leader was Mohammad Omar Mullah, a former mujahedin fighter who was seen as a leader by the Taliban because of his major role in the fight against the Soviets. Many members of the Taliban movement had studied in conservative religious schools in Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan, and some of them have also fought as mujahedin, just like Mullah Omar. They received more international attention when they dismantled the transit fee collecting groups and ended the tyrant's rule and corruption. Following such successes, the Taliban movement has grown in numbers, with people such as former soldiers led by communist leaders

and more former mujahedin fighters joining the movement. (hrw.org, 2005)

Soon after their emergence, the Taliban quickly gained the support of senior Pakistani military leaders, who helped the Afghan militia to trade across the border to bring routes from Afghanistan to markets in Central Asia. In addition, the Pakistanis have assured the Taliban of their support for the construction of a gas and oil pipeline should the Taliban succeed in taking full political power in the country. The Taliban promised Pakistan that their leadership, which would pursue pro-Pakistan policies, would deviate from the pattern of those in power before them, who pursued friendly policies towards Pakistan's rival India.

The Taliban base has pinned its hopes of further gains on the unification of Pashtuns opposed to the Rabbani-led government. The Islamist militant group then faced the challenge of winning the support and acceptance of those outside Pashtun territory. The 1995 advance attempt, during which they successfully captured the city of Herat, was a good opportunity to test this. In 1996 the Taliban had seized the capital. They declared Afghanistan an Islamic Emirate and started imposing their own strict interpretation of Islamic law. People were forbidden to watch movies and listen to music, women were not allowed to go to school and other than doctors they could not go to work either. Women had to wear a certain type of clothing, while men had to have a certain kind of beard, so the regime became more and more restrictive.

The next major town, Mazār-e Sharīf, was taken by the Taliban in 1998. During the repressive rule that lasted until 2001, the Islamists controlled 90% of the country, and disarmed the population to prevent any rebellion. However, the northern part of the country was controlled by a group mentioned earlier, the Northern Alliance, the majority of which was Tajik including its leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, so that was the only area that was not controlled by the Taliban. After the capture of Kabul in 1996, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban leadership, but Afghanistan was denied a seat in the UN General Assembly, and the Taliban government was condemned by international public opinion for its radical ideology and views, particularly its disregard for human rights and the situation of women. Osama bin Laden had been in the CIA's sights before the 2001 attacks, but the Taliban, suspected of harboring him, refused to extradite him. The Taliban have also been accused of trying to build a global terrorist network by training gunmen to launch insurgencies not only in Afghanistan but also in China. Iran has also criticized the treatment of Afghanistan's Shiite population, specifically the massacre in Mazar-I Sharif where the Taliban massacred a large number of Shia Hazara residents and staff of the Iranian consulate. Additional criticisms from Iran targeted the Taliban's links with groups that have been trafficking drugs across Iran's borders. Despite fears of the rise of radical Islam, the Pakistani leadership has maintained its

economic support for the Taliban and has given them various accolades for their military achievements. As described above, the Northern Alliance continued to oppose the Taliban, but a ceasefire between the two sides did not seem to be in the interests of either international power, nor did it seem to be in the interests of the Taliban to make them more inclined to share power. The only international assistance continued to be humanitarian aid, which was still important to many Afghans. Much effort was needed to stabilize the internal political situation in the country, as well as to reconcile the opposing parties, which was a prerequisite for that stability. This was also in the interest of the regional players, as the exploitation of the natural resources in Afghanistan could have been a major basis and driving force for a stable economic background, not only for the country but also for the prospects of the region. (journals.openedition.org, 2007)

This is what Afghanistan looked like in the 20th century, at the end of which power was in the hands of the Taliban. The new century ushered in a whole new era for Afghanistan, the Taliban and global terror. In the previous chapter I described how Afghanistan fell victim to the invasion of the former superpower, what the consequences were for the Asian country and what happened afterwards. The next chapter deals with the intervention of another superpower following an attack by a terrorist organization. I will discuss how the United States tried to export democracy to Afghanistan, how it drove the Taliban from power and how it forced them to retreat.

3. The US invasion after the 9/11 attacks

In the beginning of the 21st century a lot of things has changed in terms of the situation of Afghanistan and the United States and warfare against global terrorism. It is important to mention, that the US has always showed openly its interests in Afghanistan ever since the 1950's. As the South Asian country was one of the arenas of the Cold War the US wanted to represent a counterweight against the Soviets there as well, especially when the Soviet Union went to invade Afghanistan in 1979. This means that the common history of the United States and Afghanistan did not start in 2001 after 9/11, but reaches back in time way further.

In 1996, the Taliban reached Kabul, took over and established their own Islamic regime, and they held power until 2001. The event that led to the expulsion of the Taliban from the power took place in the United States in 11 September, 2001. However, 2001 was not the year of the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. More than eight years earlier, on 26 February 1993, a disaster had already preceded the 9/11 tragedy, with no secret connection to 9/11. Although the terrorists had hoped that the explosion would cause the North Tower to fall on the South Tower, both buildings remained standing, but more than a thousand people were injured and six were killed in the attack. Ramzi Yousef, the main planner of the attack initially wanted to bomb in the predominantly Jewish neighborhoods of New York, but later decided to target the World Trade Center. He said he hoped to take the lives of 250,000 Americans for them to realize what the victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki must have felt. Yousef was also supported with money and advice by his cousin, Haled Sheikh Mohammed, who later became known as one of the masterminds of the 11 September, 2001 terrorist attacks. The bombers hid the nearly 600 kilograms of explosives in a rented yellow van on the day of the attack in 1993. The van parked shortly after noon in a public parking lot under the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Yousef armed the bomb and left the scene with his partner, driver Eyad Ismoil, before the explosion at 12:17 p.m.

The year 1998 was a busy year for al-Qaeda as well, the organization carried out a number of terrorist attacks on different US embassies in African countries. There were bombings in two African capitals, in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es-Salaam (Tanzania). The attacks occurred at 3 a.m. East African time, when trucks laden with explosives were planted at US Embassy buildings. A few minutes later, the bombs exploded, killing 213 people in Nairobi and 11 in Dar es-Salaam. The attack caused thousands of injuries in addition to the destruction of properties. Although the bombing was primarily aimed at Americans, those affected were mainly from the two African countries. (nkerepo.uni-nke.hu, 2021)

These events were the precursors of the 9/11 terrorist attacks when the hijacking of three airplanes happened, two of which crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and one landed near the Pentagon, damaging one of its walls. A fourth jet was also hijacked by terrorists, but the passengers on that plane managed to land on a safer area which means that the plane did not hit any populated area, although none of the people on that plane survived. When president George W. Bush was informed by the terrorist attacks he immediately declared war on terror. At first, it was not really clear who they were or where they were, but after thorough investigation the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) managed to locate the ones whom the Bush Administration later held accountable for the attacks.

While the al-Qaeda was busy operating abroad the Taliban did not sit idly by either. As I mentioned earlier, there was a so called Northern Alliance that was an anti-Taliban formation, which showed a longstanding resistance against Taliban forces. Two days prior to the attacks on the United States members of al-Qaeda assassinated Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance on 9 September. Two al-Qaeda suicide fighters, disguised as Western journalists went to go interview Massoud, and in their video camera was concealed a massive bomb, which blew up and Massoud died immediately. (apnews.com, 2021) Some experts claimed that this event meant for Osama bin Laden that he was under the security of the Taliban, and so thought the United States. In my opinion, Bin Laden's act of assassinating Massoud turned out to be a tactically brilliant move, because he beheaded his most powerful enemy in Afghanistan. Bin Laden realized, that if the Americans were to attack Afghanistan, somebody like Massoud would be a vital ally to them.

So by the time of the attacks on the World Trade Center, al-Qaeda was well-prepared to carry out such an act. Shortly after the CIA named the al-Qaeda as the main organizers of the attacks on 11 September, president Bush convened the war council at Camp David on 15 September. The council was attended by lawyers, the FBI Director, the defense department, the State Department and the Vice President who was Dick Cheney at the time. Even though the decision was quite unanimous there was a debate over whether the US was ready militarily for such a war, but the president tried to take a definite action as a response to the terrorist attacks on its country.

As an outcome of the council the US decided to send troops to Afghanistan. According to reports of the CIA, it was the Taliban that offered shelter to the head of al-Qaeda: Osama bin Laden. On 7 October 2001, the Pentagon launched "Operation Enduring Freedom" against Afghanistan, which began with a large-scale bombing campaign and the deployment of ground troops to eliminate Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan.

The United States has repeatedly called on the Taliban leadership to hand over Osama bin Laden and to dismantle all training facilities, but they have not complied with these requests. Fed up with this, the US and the UK launched air strikes and started bombing the Taliban, while also providing substantial military support to the Northern Alliance, which is still fighting the Taliban. Coordinated, decisive and well-organized ground attacks by the US, Britain and the Northern Alliance quickly brought the Taliban to their knees. Kandahar, their last stronghold, was abandoned by the Taliban in December.

Shortly afterwards, a meeting of anti-Taliban organizations took place in Bonn, Germany, and an interim Afghan government was appointed and inaugurated two weeks after the meeting. The interim government remained in place until June the following year, when the Loya Jirga met and formed a caretaker government until the next elections and the drafting of a constitution.

When it comes to a country interfering in another country, the justification of that act is much questionable, since every state is sovereign. There are specific countries which are allowed to intervene into other specific countries. There is an international organization that justifies this interference concerning its member states, and it is called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, shortly referred to as: NATO. NATO was established by the United States in 1949 as a military organization in order to make a strong and common security for those who join it. It allowed to its member states the interference in another member state which is either internal or external attack. The article that explains what are the cases in which the interference is justified is the 5th article called Collective Defense. The article says, that: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”*

The case of the US invasion of Afghanistan sheds a new light on this matter, because the Bush administration found a way to justify its military invasion of another country. As the US is a member state of the NATO and two of its cities were attacked by another country the Pentagon

* Collective Defense – Article 5 (2022). North Atlantic Treaty Organization. [on-line] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm (Downloaded: 03.22.2022)

called upon all the other NATO members to help its military operation to retaliate the acts of terrorism of 9/11. Many, mainly experts still questioned the authority of the decision of the Bush administration. Plus, the fact that there are all kinds of theories around the terrorist attack on the US only makes it more complicated to be certain whether the US had or did not have the authority to attack a sovereign state. On the other hand, Afghanistan was not the only target of the US military operation as part of the “war on terror”. Iraq was also attacked by the US, but that was an act even more questioned by the international community. It followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 2003 which did not involve attacks or any other kind of threat to the US. In 20 March, 2003 US troops entered Iraq in order to destroy weapons of mass destruction that the Bush administration thought the Arabic country had. Plus, the Americans wanted to overthrow the regime of then leader of Iraq Saddam Hussein. US forces managed to capture and execute Saddam Hussein and shortly after that a new election took place in Iraq. Since this is not a study on the US invasion of Iraq, I would not go further into the details of that conflict, however I find it important to compare the causes of the two invasions. (cfr.org, 2022)

Since the topic of this study involves terrorism as well, it is important to lay down some fundamental facts about that. Terrorism can be defined in a variety of ways, according to one of these is violence or threat of violence designed to achieve fundamental political change. However, there is one way of describing terrorism according to which groups and organizations that are deemed terrorists have one thing in common: keeping a number or a group of people in fear of those terrorists. The members of these groups are often hard to find and the number of them are barely known. But the US invasion in Afghanistan showed that these terrorist groups do not have a significant military power regardless of how threatening they try to seem or what kind of bombing attacks carry out. Their main reason still is to keep the population in fear and under the feel of being in danger. This way of operation cannot be more powerful than an army of a stable state, which contributes to the fact, that both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State set foot only in countries that are at the brink of total collapse, or that are considered failed states (e.g. Yemen, Syria, Somalia, etc.). Since Afghanistan was also almost in ruins in the 1990’s al-Qaeda could take power and hold control of the majority of the country. And my previous statement, according to which a terrorist organization cannot stand a chance against any major power, let alone a great power, was proved by the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

After the United States successfully removed the Taliban from power there was the question of who was a good fit to replace them, built a new government, create a stable state and maintain long-lasting peace. All of that was the aim of a conference in Bonn, Germany which was a negotiation under the auspices of the United Nations. The UN Secretary General was Kofi

Annan at that time, and there was a special representative particularly for that occasion, Lakhdar Brahimi who was an Algerian diplomat. The UN appointed him several times before, once in Afghanistan in 1997 in order to solve the conflict between the Taliban and counterparts, unfortunately the attempt failed and Brahimi resigned from the position in 1999. The Bonn conference decided to appoint Hamid Karzai as president of Afghanistan.

Who was Hamid Karzai?

Hamid Karzai comes from a family with active presence in the Afghan politics, as both his father and grandfather were members of the government of Mohammad Zahir Shah. Originally the Karzai family had more friendly relationship with the United States, so when the Soviets helped put a puppet government into power in the 1980's, the Karzai family fled to Pakistan. Hamid showed his interest in political sciences in the early stages, he studied political sciences in India and helped the mujahidin against the Soviets, and also often flew to the US in order to get support. After the mujahidin overthrew the government of Najibullah Hamid was named deputy foreign minister in 1992. However, there were serious internal conflicts within the coalition of the mujahidin, and he resigned from position in 1994. After the growing tension between faction in the coalition, the Taliban saw the opportunity and took power. Hamid was not satisfied with the outcome of the ongoing political situation in Afghanistan and fled to Pakistan once again. The events that took place during his absence were a great opportunity for the US to set up a leadership in Afghanistan from which it could benefit. The most tragic of those events was the assassination of Hamid's father, Abdul Ahad Karzai for which he blamed the Taliban. Plus, Hamid automatically became the leader of the Popalzai, who were Pashtun people from the Durrani clan, formerly led by Hamid's father. After the 9/11 attacks, the US overthrew the Taliban and Hamid returned to Afghanistan and made huge efforts to win the support of the US. In order to avoid an internal power struggle, a relatively unanimous decision, backed by the US, various international actors and Afghan representative groups, allowed the formation of an interim government under Karzai, after which Karzai was also appointed as President of the transitional government by the Loya Jirga. Even after the expulsion of the Taliban from power, the challenges of Afghanistan did not vanish. One of the most important task of the new government was to make sure that the Taliban will not return to power. The second task was to rebuild the damaged country and maintain stability. Karzai's work was also challenged by the series of assassination attempts against him, but even with these difficulties a new constitution was announced and the government announced new election in 2004, which Karzai won again. (britannica.com, 2022)

War on Terror

The expression “war on terror” first appeared in public after the 9/11 attacks when then US president George W. Bush claimed that the attacks were carried out by a terrorist organization called al-Qaeda. A lot of people had not heard about al-Qaeda earlier, although when Massoud visited Strasbourg at the invitation of the European Parliament in April, 2001 he warned of the threat posed by Osama Bin-Laden and Al-Qaeda, five months before the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001. (hu.euronews.com, 2021) President Bush decided to deploy US troops in Afghanistan as a way of retaliating the terrorist acts of al-Qaeda, and to assassinate Osama bin Laden who was the leader of the aforementioned group. (He was not the only leader of al-Qaeda, there was another famous terrorist called Ayman al-Zawahiri who was Egyptian and also on the list of world’s most wanted terrorists.) When the Americans started their strikes on Afghanistan everyone had confidence that the US is going to be successful in this war, the real question was how long would it take. (As of the defeating the Taliban forces, the US was successful, but when it comes to the withdrawal from Afghanistan opinions differ.) Just like for the Soviets back in 1979, Afghanistan was an incredibly complex challenge for the US military. It is a landlocked country halfway around the world, plus it was geographically very challenging, because there are steep mountain ranges that ring half the country. Not to mention that it is bordered by countries that have a strained relation to the United States, if they have a relationship at all. Then US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld still tried to justify the decision of invading Afghanistan by using unconventional capabilities and the support of Afghan groups that opposed both al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Shortly after the US started bomb shelling Taliban territories troops of the Northern Alliance entered and took Kabul in 13 November, 2001. The Taliban then headed South, towards Kandahar which served as a spiritual base for them, and the Taliban regime was hunkered down there, that was where they made their last stand. In December, 2001 the United States thought it had bin Laden cornered in the Tora Bora mountains. Given Afghanistan's mountainous terrain and the character of the mountains, the Taliban could easily turn the caves of Tora Bora into safe havens.

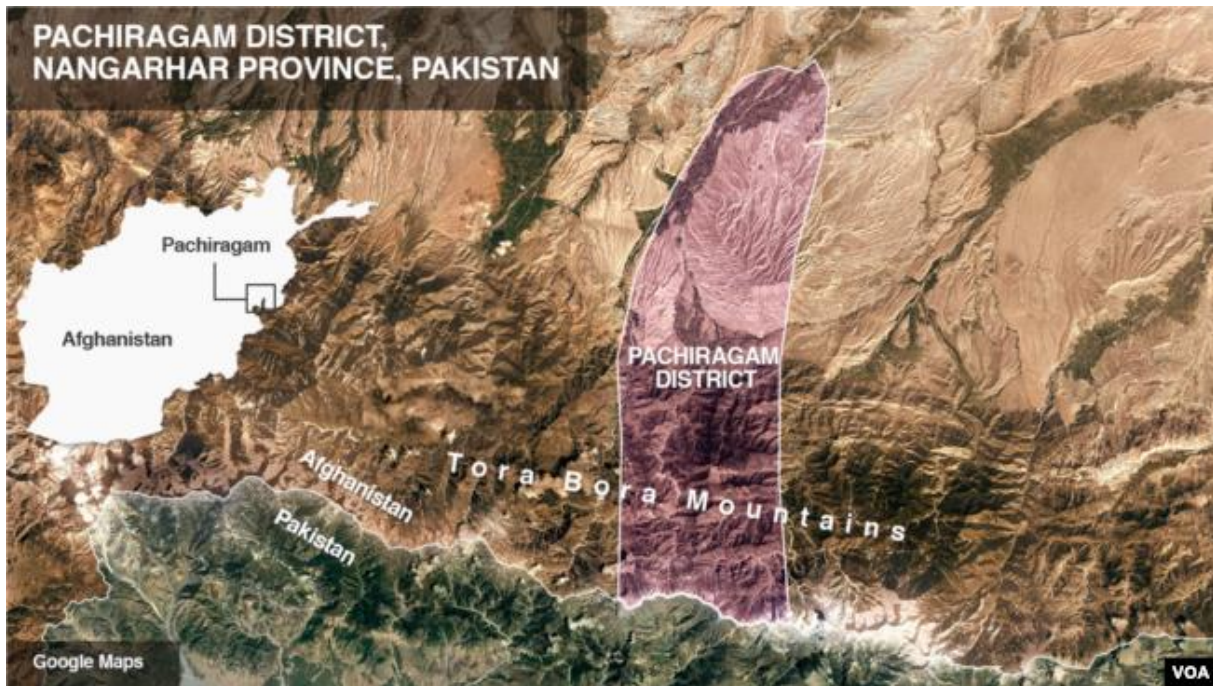


Figure 3: Pachiragam District, Nangarhar Province

Intelligence got to US and Afghan forces, but inexplicably, the US did not send a huge contingent of special ops soldiers to try to capture or assassinate bin Laden. Instead it was left to a ragtag group of Afghan soldiers with a small number of American advisors. In many ways, it seemed inexplicable that the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, the leader of al-Qaeda was within the grasp of the US, but the US did not make any effort to seize the moment to do so, even though there was no more important mission in the eyes of the Bush administration than to find and capture Osama bin Laden. (cfr.org, 2022)

The Battle of Tora Bora

The caves in Tora Bora served as an important base for the operations of bin Laden way before the US invasion. After the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, Osama bin Laden went from Afghanistan to Northeast Africa to export terrorism to Sudan and spread it there. When the US intelligence got reports that bin Laden is in Sudan spreading terrorism, it urged the African country to expel the terrorist, thus he had to flee the country. He went back to Afghanistan, Jalalabad, a major city for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, capital of the Nangarhar province, situated in the Tora Bora mountains. Thus began the constructions of the fortress in the mountain. It was basically a base camp, where the entire family of Osama bin Laden stayed, along with all

the other senior military personnel of al-Qaeda. There were caves dug even a 100 meters deep inside the granite walls of the mountain. As bin Laden had a strategic thinking he went to explore the surrounding terrain in order to know it better in case of an external attack comes - which later arrived. (Kerry, 2009)

The US military officer who was the organizer of the military operation conducted in the Tora Bora offensive was called Dalton Fury (which was only his pen name), and the so called Delta Force and CIA operatives carried out the attacks. (The United States Army's Special Forces Unit Delta Force is a rapid reaction force, used for precision and counter-terrorism missions. They often work under camouflage, even in areas where there are no official US troops present.) (portfolio.hu, 2019) The US also cooperated with Afghan militias which meant that the soldiers of the Delta Force often wore the same clothes and had the same beard as the Afghan civilians in order to get closer to the targets.

On 3 December, 2001 an explosion hit Tora Bora when an aircraft carrying an almost 7000-kg bomb (C-130) hit the mountains and also the caves. This crippled the communication system of al-Qaeda in the caves of Tora Bora, and for a period of time special ops troops thought that Osama bin Laden was killed, but as a latter footage showed he escaped the mountains and went to Pakistan. Fury believed that bin Laden was in Tora Bora both at the time of the 9/11 attacks and during the Tora Bora mountain was under attack by the Delta Force. (Kerry, 2009)

The battle of Tora Bora was basically a hunt for Osama bin Laden, and it was America's best chance to eliminate the leader of al-Qaeda, however, they failed. At the beginning of December, Fury asked his superiors for 800 men from a US secret command to block the escape routes of bin Laden and his lieutenants. But he did not get the men he asked for: Tommy Franks, the US commander responsible for the operations in the region, said that the US strategy so far (relying on Afghan tribes to oppose the Taliban) had worked and that sending in more serious US forces would take too long. Meanwhile, on one occasion, a squad of US soldiers in the area approached bin Laden's hideout about two kilometers away, according to intelligence, but had to abandon the mission: their Afghan allies simply turned back, with US orders that they could only support the Afghans, not play a leading role. US intercepts on 13 December indicated that bin Laden had spoken to his fighters, giving them permission to surrender. By 17 December, the battle in Tora Bora had ended. Some 220 gunmen, mostly Arab, Afghan, Chechen and Pakistani, were killed and 52 captured, but bin Laden was not among them. (duol.hu, 2010)

Afghanistan after the Bonn Conference

The interim government appointed by the Bonn Conference was in power until June 2002, after which the Loya Jirga was convened. The assembly elected an interim Afghan government until a new constitution was drafted and new elections called. The next Loya Jirga met in late 2003 and examined the draft constitution. Three weeks of negotiations preceded the approval of the constitution, which decided on a bicameral legislature and direct presidential elections. The law was signed by Hamid Karzai, who at the time headed the interim government. The next democratic elections took place in October this year, which Karzai also won with 55% support. (britannica.com, 2022)

This period marked the first years of the era of the US aiming at reconstructing basic institutions in Afghanistan. After the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the focus of the international community, especially the US, shifted to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The then US President George W. Bush announced in a speech that he would make a substantial financial contribution to Afghanistan, which he referred to as the "Marshall Plan", to help the reconstruction process in the country. Despite this, however, the promising pledges of president Bush have proved ineffective for Afghanistan, as the attention of the White House has increasingly turned to Iraq, which was preparing to invade Kuwait. In the nearly decade-long US presence in Afghanistan after the 2001 invasion, the US Congress has allocated less than \$40 billion in aid to Afghanistan, mostly for reconstruction and humanitarian purposes. Much of this money has been used to train Afghan soldiers, while according to experts the rest of the money would have been far from enough for reconstruction. Another problem was the chaotic way in which the assets were managed and distributed, which meant that there was a lack of competence and system in the spending. (britannica.com, 2022)

In respect of the Iraqi invasion, among other things the difference from the invasion in Afghanistan was, that the US did not want other nations to join the military operation in Iraq. In my opinion, it is saying a lot about the interests of the US, especially about allegations of the US having other interests than just the aspect of military interference. A lot of article were written about the US having interests in the oil industry when attacking Iraq, meaning that the accusation against Iraq of having WMD (weapons of mass destruction) were untrue, even more so after reports came back about Iraq not having any of the above mentioned weapons. (nbcnews.com, 2005)

Even though a lot of countries were present in the war in Afghanistan, the major role was played by the US, which also means however, that they suffered the most casualties. That is not only

because of the fact that the US had the most troops there, but also because they were stationed mostly on area where the resistance of the Taliban and al-Qaeda were the toughest. However, many countries suffered more and more casualties, the civilians of the countries present in Afghanistan started to worry, that it is going to cost too much for the states, thus the political pressure increased on the governments. The worries of these citizen were eased initially by Donald Rumsfeld, who announced, that the toughest and most challenging part of the war is over. (washingtonpost.com, 2003)

The aftermath of the 2004 election

One year after Hamid Karzai won the elections in December, 2004, there were parliamentary elections, where a number of women claimed seats in the parliament. The Afghan central government proved to be strong, but regional and local authorities were weak, which was different comparing to Afghanistan's traditions. Whatever the results of the presidential elections, president Karzai had to face a variety of challenges, for instance he was not strong enough as a leader in the eyes of the voters. Plus, his position was in great danger, as a lot of attempts have been made in order to assassinate him. Even though these attempts failed, he was greatly isolated, mostly due to the war aside from assassination attempts. The situation of women advanced however, Karzai was the first Afghan president to appoint a female governor. He also advocated for equal and human rights, and constantly tried to advance the situation of women across the whole country. Other characteristics of the Karzai government were the high level of corruption, the small amount of international support to recruit and develop the police and the army and the differences between the Afghan ethnic groups. (worldleaders.columbia.edu, 2022)

After their removal from power, the Taliban worked to regain their former position, which they tried to achieve by assuming the mantle of Iraqi insurgents in the fight against Afghan forces, the US and its allies from 2005. The Taliban initially prepared for open fighting, but after seeing its failure, they sought to take on US and NATO forces using suicide bombings and so-called IEDs. Between January 2005 and August 2006, no fewer than 64 suicide attacks were carried out by the Taliban resistance, marking a completely new tactic in the history of Afghan warfare. The increasingly rapid development of the bombs used in such incidents has significantly increased the initially low death toll, as illustrated by the 2007 attack in which 70 people were killed in the city of Baghlan. The next major attack occurred less than a year later at the Indian embassy, where more than 50 people were killed. In connection with this attack, the Afghan government blamed the Pakistani intelligence services, but the Pakistani government denied

this. (bbc.com, 2021)

At the same time as the Taliban began to regain some of their strength, Afghan confidence in and sympathy for America and the West declined. Contributing factors included the slow progress of the reconstruction process in the country, the overly aggressive US treatment of detainees, the increasing levels of corruption and the rising number of civilian casualties from US and NATO bombing. This led to the eruption of anti-US demonstrations on the streets of Kabul in May 2006. NATO then took control of the war, with the US playing a reduced role, and the war became increasingly international in character. Events in Iraq made this clear, as the fighting there placed greater demands on US resources and efforts. (nytimes.com, 2006) In July, the area under NATO's influence and control expanded vis-à-vis that of the US, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization took the lead in military operations in southern Afghanistan, followed by further expansion into the East. This kind of expansion by NATO led to the point where, after a short time, they were in control of the whole of Afghanistan. This can be traced back to the aforementioned factor that a significant part of the US attention and power was taken up by the occupation of Iraq. The Western powers continued to fight the Taliban, with the result that the number of innocent civilian casualties increased. (britannica.com, 2022) Following a change of president in the US, the new incoming president, Barack Obama, sent an additional 17 000 troops to Afghanistan. The then president argued that the US had not paid enough attention to the war in Afghanistan, so the Obama administration increased its military presence in the Asian country. (magyarhaz.hu, 2009)

As far as Afghan domestic politics is concerned, the mandate of then President Hamid Karzai expired in May 2009, after which the incumbent president must step down, according to the Afghan constitution. In view of the events in the country (fighting between NATO and the Taliban), the elections due in May were postponed and rescheduled for August. Karzai has subsequently declared his intention to remain in office until the August elections, in which he is also a candidate. However, his stay in office was criticized by his critics, who feared it would give him an advantage ahead of the elections, and urged him to step down before the elections and form an interim government. The Supreme Court, however, approved Karzai's stay in power until the elections. (sgp.fas.org, 2015)

In the August presidential elections, Karzai won more than half of the votes. In the weeks that followed, riots broke out in Kabul and there were numerous complaints of electoral and vote counting fraud, prompting the UN Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) to launch investigations. The results of the investigations led to the decision to cancel the votes of more than 200 polling stations. This meant that around 30% of Karzai's votes did not count, bringing

Karzai's share of the votes to 49.7%. This necessitated the calling of a second round of elections, scheduled for 7 November, in which Karzai's challenger was Abdullah Abdullah, who withdrew from the race shortly before the round. With only one candidate remaining, the second round was cancelled and Karzai was allowed to retain his position as President of Afghanistan. (theguardian.com, 2009)

Among the many obstacles to NATO and US reconstruction efforts, the booming opium trade in Afghanistan, particularly after the ouster of the Taliban in 2001, has played a significant role. Opium has been used for thousands of years as a sedative and painkiller. A powerful narcotic, the most dangerous drug produced from it is heroin. The pharmaceutical industry uses it as a painkiller, anticonvulsant, etc. It was widely used in Rome, Persia and India before BC. Greek and Roman doctors used it frequently, and some people attributed miraculous powers to it. In Europe it has been the leading analgesic since the 17th century. (brainmanpictures.piwigo.com, n.a.)

At the time, Afghanistan accounted for 90% of the global opium trade. As the drug trade was widespread within Afghan society, it was difficult for the government to fight it. The major beneficiaries of the opium trade were the Taliban, who were able to generate substantial revenues from it, providing the financial backing for insurgencies and rebellions. (britannica.com, 2022)

As for the Taliban insurgency, it increased in intensity in 2009, during which the occupation troops began to realize that Afghan military forces were proving ineffective against the Taliban. However, US commanders argued that the primary task of Afghan soldiers should not have been to fight the Taliban, but to rebuild the country. This led to the decision in Washington in December by the Obama administration to send another 30 000 troops to Afghanistan. (nytimes.com, 2009)

The following year, 2010, saw the highest number of NATO troops deployed in Afghanistan, with nearly 150 000. However, the significant military presence has not only resulted in successful NATO operations; despite the Taliban being weakened, the insurgents have continued to launch numerous attacks. To prevent the Taliban from completely disappearing from the Afghan political and military scene, it was necessary to rely on the unpopularity of NATO and the Afghan military forces, as well as the safe haven for the Taliban in Pakistan. It took almost a decade for the warring parties to realise that an end to the crisis in Afghanistan could not be achieved through an armed solution, which led NATO to decide to withdraw in November 2010. Not only NATO but also the US realised this, and both were willing to use more diplomatic means to resolve the crisis and bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. These

initial attempts have clearly not yet resulted in a more lasting diplomatic relationship between the US and the Taliban, as this was only achieved for a transitional period, and no serious progress has been made. The first such attempts were made in 2011 and 2012, after which the transfer of Afghan internal security responsibilities to the Afghan authorities began, albeit slowly. This facilitated the aforementioned NATO withdrawal from the country, which was planned for 2014. (theguardian.com, 2014)

Despite the apparent steps forward, the Afghan central government was still not sufficiently stable. This was mainly because the average Afghan had little confidence in the government and its agencies and institutions, which were subject to serious allegations of corruption. In addition, the parliamentary elections were influenced by the Taliban, who sought to keep turnout low by forcibly keeping citizens away from some polling stations. This was exacerbated by the spread of reports of electoral fraud and last-minute changes to some voting rules.

To sum up Hamid Karzai's presidency in Afghanistan, it was openly a western friendly government cooperating with US and NATO forces and administrations to keep the Taliban at bay, or at least tried to. It lasted from 2004 (not counting his previous years as the head of the interim government) when he got first elected to 2014, when a new government was inaugurated, with the leadership of president Ashraf Ghani.

Ashraf Ghani and his presidency

Mohammad Ashraf Ghani was not a newcomer in the Afghan politics, since he used to serve as the special adviser to the UN Secretary General's special envoy to Afghanistan, who was at that time Lakhdar Brahimi. Ghani was also much involved in the country's reconstruction plans in the Bonn Agreement. After the interim government was established with the leadership of Hamid Karzai, Ghani was appointed to be the chief adviser. In Karzai's transitional government Ghani served as finance minister of Afghanistan. He proved to be a good fit for the role, as he implemented generally accepted reforms, especially in those desperate time that Afghanistan had to face after the ousting of the Taliban. Among a variety of implementations and reforms he started to computerize treasury operations, he switched to another currency, implemented no-deficit financing policy, etc. He has gained even more sympathy in the eyes of Western, especially US officials when he started to take the fight against corruption so seriously that he got rid of corrupt officials who were working in the finance ministry, not caring about voices of threats. He kept this type of political image throughout his political career. His first attempt at the presidential elections was unsuccessful in 2009, but when he ran again in 2014, he won. (worldleaders.columbia.edu, 2019)

In the early stages of the year 2014 there was a tense atmosphere in the country because of the elections. The first round of the elections in June brought a great unrest between runners Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Ghani was announced winner while Abdullah urged the recount of the votes, as he was sure the count was fraudulent. As the figure shows there was a very low percentage of voter turnout in the Afghan presidential election in 2014. The results of the first election made it necessary to hold a second round which Ashraf Ghani won with 56.44% of the votes. On the opposition side was Abdullah Abdullah who gained 43.56% of the votes. (electionguide.org, 2014)

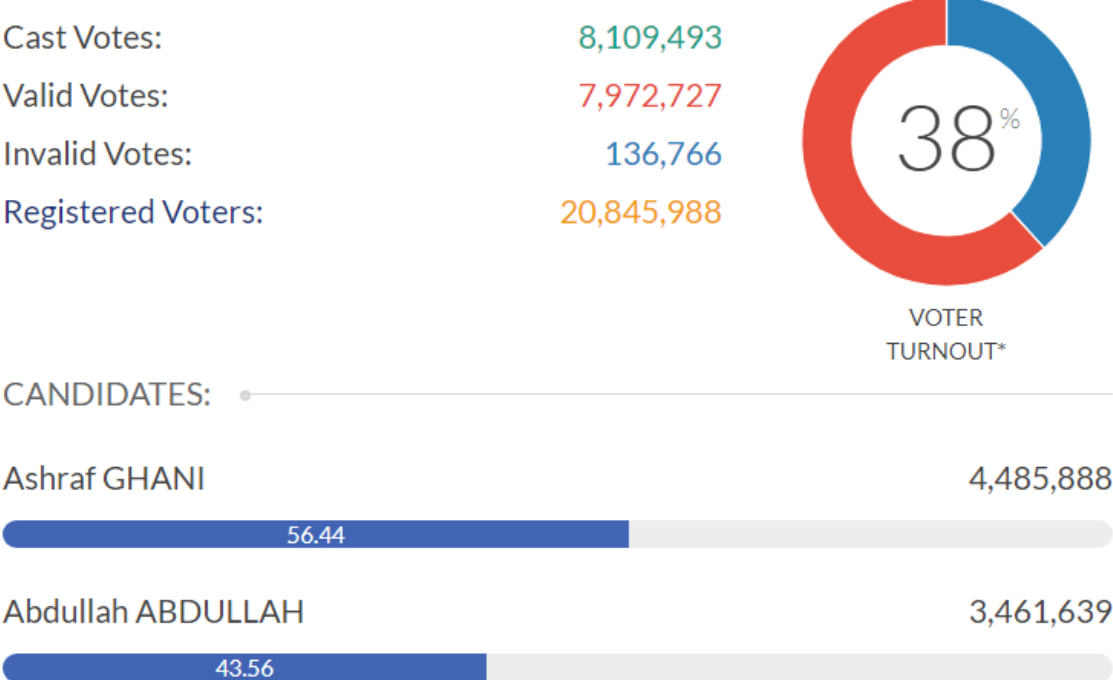


Figure 4: Presidential election in Afghanistan, 2014

After this political standoff between the candidates has emerged, US President Barack Obama briefed the Afghan elite that he has no intention of supporting a government which came to power by implementing illegal tools. This urged the candidates of the Afghan presidential election to agree on a deal for which the Obama Administration sent former Secretary of State John Kerry whose task was to help the two sides work out a deal agreeable for both of them. Thus the Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) was formed, after several weeks of negotiations. According to this agreement Ghani held the position of presidency and Abdullah

was chief executive officer (CEO). (dw.com, 2014)

The main intention of President Ghani was to advance the domestic situation of Afghanistan in order to drive the country out of the status of a failed state. Obviously, he could not count on the different Afghan groups and factions, because he had numerous enemies, starting with the Taliban. The reforms the Afghan president implemented turned out to be helpful, they contributed a lot to help advance the export of Afghanistan, plus the domestic revenue grew significantly. However, the NATO pullout of Afghanistan in 2014 brought yet another challenge to the country, there was a significant decrease in the labor force, especially among the young and educated people, and a massive migration to Europe began. President Ghani proved to be efficient in terms of the development of the regional ties of Afghanistan. He managed to strengthen the relationship with Pakistan by offer free passage for land trade. It was going on under the auspices of the formation of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and India, which helped the four countries, especially Pakistan to participate more actively in the trade of Central Asia. Other instances of regional cooperation were also carried out with the participation of Afghanistan, involving Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey. (Barnett, 2020)

The location of Afghanistan has a geostrategic importance in terms of linking Central Asian countries with the Southern part of Asia, mainly Pakistan and India. Afghanistan was a member of a number of organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which consisted of 8 countries, and was established in 1985. Despite all these memberships and effort, Afghanistan still ranks as “weak” according to an analysis on the internet. (atlas.bti-project.org, 2022)

The difficulties in the period following Ghani's rise to power have been greatly contributed to by the withdrawal of NATO troops. However, US troops have not left the country and have placed even greater emphasis on high-level training of Afghan soldiers, thus contributing to the fight against terrorism. However, these efforts have not deterred the Taliban, who have not given up their desire to regain full control of Afghanistan. Seeing the threat of a possible Taliban advance, President Ghani initiated negotiations with the extremist groups in 2015. Later that year, he managed to sit down at the table with the Taliban leaders. The first substantive success of these efforts came in June that year, when Hezb-i Islam adopted the Afghan constitution. Some experts say this was a major step towards a common understanding with the Taliban. Despite this, however, the US government has sent more troops to Afghanistan, increasing the 8,400 US military personnel there to 14,000. It was a consequence of the events in the White

House, where the term of President Barack Obama expired, and a new president got elected in 2016 and inaugurated next year. It was the new president in office Donald Trump who decided to increase the military presence of the United States in Afghanistan. However, the increase in numbers has not been a resounding success, as it has failed to contain a threatening Taliban presence and advance. (aljazeera.com, 2021)

Voices about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan has surfaced already in 2017, but the context was far different. President Trump first spoke about the withdrawal in the context of warning about it, saying it could cause a lot of damage. This announcement took place right before the decision of sending more troops to Afghanistan. (apnews.com, 2019)

In 2018, new parliamentary elections were called, in which the Taliban sought to use their influence to turn the outcome of events in their favor. They tried to do this by appearing in two places and by intimidating those who came to the polls. However, influencing the outcome of the election was not enough for the Taliban, who killed a police captain serving in Kandahar two days before the election. The resulting problems delayed the elections in Kandahar by a week, slowing down the counting of votes and thus the announcement of results. A few months later, a polling commission ruled that the votes cast in Kabul were invalid on charges of misappropriation and fraud. In a sense, this called into question the legitimacy of the institution of voting, but given the high turnout, a final decision was reached in January. As a result, the electoral commission that was operating during the presidential election at the time was replaced and new officials were appointed. The final, official results of the election were published in May 2019. (britannica.com, n.a.)

While the counting of the electoral votes was under process the peace negotiations have surfaced again at the end of 2018. There was a group of countries, consisting of the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia set at the table with the Taliban in the United Arab Emirates in order to achieve a solution of the current situation and get closer to peace. It occurred a couple of days after these talks when the United States brought up the idea of pulling out its forces from Afghanistan, which many deemed as a good step towards the peace. This decision of the White House surprised the Afghan government as they were not briefed about it. Even though President Trump started thinking about the withdrawal, he did not want to call back home a single soldier without a thorough plan, so the amount of US soldiers remained for the duration of the peace talks in 2019 as well. (cfr.org, 2020)

In the meantime, there was a presidential election coming up in Afghanistan, however, it had to be postponed twice due to hardships caused by the difficulties of the peace talks with the Taliban. The presidential election was finally held on 28 September, but the Taliban threatened

the voters this time as well, so there was a very low level of voter turnout. After the election, the two presidential candidates (Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah) both claimed victory again, but the official count proved Ghani right, announcing him the true winner receiving more than 50% of the votes, while Abdullah gained only less than 40%. However, a new deal of a power-sharing solution has been worked out again, which both candidates agreed upon. (bbc.com, 2020)

Shortly after these events the US and the Taliban finally worked out a deal which stated that the US will call all his troops back home in the following 14 months if the Taliban agree to conduct peace talks with the central government of Afghanistan and to stop all its own and all the other groups' (ISIL/ISIS) terrorist operations in Afghanistan. The parties signed this agreement on 29 February, 2020 which has come to pass after a week of minimal use of violent actions from both the US and the Taliban. (law.stanford.edu, 2020)

These events were the precursors of what happened on 15 August, 2021. We can see that President Biden was not the first president to consider the withdrawal of US forces, and also not the first one to acknowledge that democracy cannot just be exported into another country, let alone an entirely different culture. In my opinion there were factors that the Bush administration was not prepared for when it decided to invade Afghanistan, and there were consequences of the withdrawal that the Biden administration did not see either. Experts say that the withdrawal could have been done in a lot of other different ways in order to leave less chance for the Taliban to regain power, which I personally agree with. I think the withdrawal went down to fast and as if there was no responsibility for president Biden.

In the next chapter, I am going to touch base on what happened in Afghanistan directly prior to the Taliban takeover on 15 August, what consequences it had and what is going on in Afghanistan today.

4. The second takeover of the Taliban

Before I get into analyzing the Taliban’s rise to power I would like to discuss some details and data about the military presence of the United States particularly in Afghanistan, and in all the other countries they have troops deployed. Even though the withdrawal from Afghanistan got the biggest attention in terms of the US withdrawing its forces from overseas, there were and are other bases where the military presence of the US is active to this day. The US has basically troops on each continent, and I am going to examine its military presence by region.

US troop levels in Afghanistan
2002 - 2020

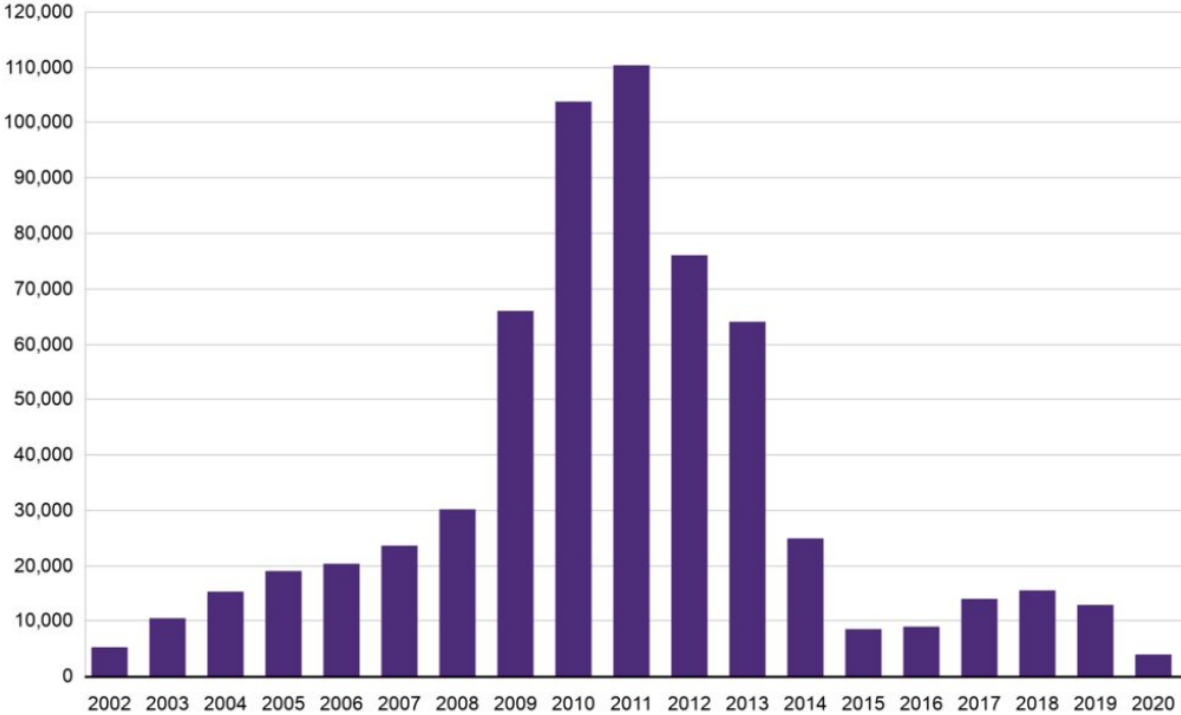


Figure 5: US troop levels in Afghanistan

The Middle East

Since there are different interpretations of the Middle East, to make it clear I involve Afghanistan in the region. The two Middle Eastern countries where the US military presence were the highest are Iraq and Afghanistan. To put it in numbers there were 1.9 and 3 million soldiers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to the total withdrawal of forces. (watson.brown.edu, 2022) However, there are other countries where the US showed strong military presence, for example in Doha, Qatar. That is where the biggest American military installation is located. It is the Al Udeid Air Base which was established in 1996 and has a

military staff of 11,000 soldiers, consisting not only of US soldiers but also of soldiers from allied countries, accommodating around 100 aircrafts. Other parts of the region also host more or less US soldiers, especially countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, etc. (aljazeera.com, 2021)

Latin America, Guantanamo Bay

When it comes to the US military presence in Latin America there is a well-known place in Cuba which got a lot of attention especially after the invasion of Afghanistan. In January 2002, the Pentagon decided to set up a detention center in Guantanamo which is located at the Southeast corner of Cuba. Cuba gained its independence with the end of the Spanish-American war in 1898. However, the part of the deal that made the Cuban independence legal was that the US can keep Guantanamo. The legal formality of it was under a perpetual lease, so it is like the US is leasing Guantanamo, but only they can cancel the lease. The Pentagon was trying to create a place where no law applied, of course they wanted to do it unnoticed. The treatment of the prisoners was anything but humane, there were transferred in the air chained and hooded. (hrw.org, 2004)



Figure 6: Guantanamo Bay

From the beginning of the Guantanamo prison the word from Pentagon was not to call the detainees “prisoners”, because if they were called prisoners they should have been treated under the Geneva Convention that protects prisoners of war. However, this loophole that the Bush Administration tried to use was not entirely legal and right. The detainees, in fact did have rights

that they could have exercised, and the legal proof of that was the specific part of the Geneva Convention called “Common Article three”. These detainees were denied basic human rights, access to lawyers and access to habeas corpus. According to Britannica habeas corpus is “an ancient common-law writ, issued by a court or judge directing one who holds another in custody to produce the person before the court for some specified purpose”. (britannica.com, n.a.)

Africa

The African continent is home for not only one country that is a failed state or collapsing. As I mentioned earlier, these types of countries serve as prosperous soil for terrorist groups, which can only further damage the collapsed states. Most endangered countries of these cases are Somalia, Libya, Djibouti, Uganda, Kenya, etc. In North Africa, the US Special Forces are officially tasked with assisting local forces by providing advice and assistance without combat deployments. In practice, this means directing local forces to advance US interests in the region on their behalf. US troops in Somalia, Tunisia, Kenya and Niger are officially only "advising and supporting" military operations, training local soldiers and police. This is to avoid American soldiers being killed in combat, which always raises awkward questions at home. This is the method used to fight Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, with varying degrees of success. But the fact is that they can act relatively quickly against terrorists without sending their own troops into the field, saving US troops and considerable sums of money. But it is also true that these terrorist organizations do not pose a direct threat to the US from Africa, yet US soldiers are giving orders to local forces across the continent - while their real activities remain secret. America's strategy for Africa started to be talked about more in 2017. An incident in Niger, which resulted in several US casualties and is now known as Tongo Tongo, highlighted the US presence in the region. In October 2017, Islamist radicals ambushed a US military convoy near the village of Tongo Tongo, but it was only a technical unit, the vehicles were only equipped with light armor. The case has raised a lot of sensitive questions in Washington, and the press and politicians have begun to trace the "responsible parties" back up the chain of command. Of course, in America, such cases can also be used to weaken Donald Trump - not that a more serious tragedy could not have occurred during Hillary Clinton's time as Secretary of State. Top-secret operations in Africa receive a lot of funding from home, thanks to which African countries have 'leased' their own soldiers to the US. For the most part, these local forces have eliminated targets considered potential threats to the US. It is not even clear how many African countries the US is present in. There is a clear US presence in eight states: for example, in conflict-affected areas of Somalia, Libya and the relatively quiet Kenyan states

of Tunisia, Cameroon, Mauritania, Mali, Niger - the latter with a significant number of French forces. (korkep.sk, 2018)

Europe

Today the military presence of the US in Europe is highly depending on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The United States has put 8,500 troops on standby to be deployed to Europe at very short notice in case NATO activates its rapid reaction force amid tensions in Ukraine, US Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said on Monday. (time.com, 2022)

The post-2014 geostrategic shifts in Iraq and especially in Eastern Europe (the Crimea crisis) do not fundamentally affect the shift in Washington's foreign policy focus, but it can be seen that the visibility of the US presence on the European continent increased significantly in 2014-2015. At the same time, however, there is still no talk of a "return" of the United States, since the permanent presence is only marginally affected by the measures presented to deploy a military equipment pool capable of serving a US contingent of 5,000 troops and the necessary logistical support on the territory of the eastern NATO member states, which would significantly facilitate the logistical movement of forces if necessary. In addition to the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria are also concerned by the proposal and negotiations are underway with several Central European states to host small numbers of indicative forces and assets. But the fact remains that Washington's long-term interests are not centered in Europe. This is confirmed by the speech of Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, appointed in February this year, on 6 April, in which he reiterated that the strategy of turning to Asia will continue. (real.mtak.hu, 2015)

There are currently approximately 60 000 US troops deployed in Europe, most of whom are in Germany (34 000), Italy (12 000) and the UK (9 300). Even though the current number of US troops are highest in Germany among European countries, it has been much more in the period between 2006 and 2020, when there were more than 70 000 US soldiers in the country. The largest US military installation in Europe is the German Ramstein Air Base. Plus, the biggest US military hospital outside of the US is also in Germany called the Landstuhl Regional Medical Centre. These installations were used often while the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were going on. (dw.com, 2020)

4.1. The takeover of the Taliban

In my opinion the strong military presence of the United States over the past several decades shows that the US has managed to fight back terrorism in the most critical places, and that includes Afghanistan. During the 20 years in Afghanistan (2001-2021) the Taliban did not have any chance to rise to power again, because they were not strong enough to achieve that. Even though the Trump Administration tried to start a process that would have attempted to deliver a smoother withdrawal from Afghanistan, it could not be carried out entirely as imagined, because the mandate of Donald Trump as president expired, and he did not get reelected. Shortly after President Joe Biden was elected and inaugurated, he announced the total withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. He even delivered his promise earlier, as the last US soldier left Afghanistan on 30 August, 2021. (telex.hu, 2021) While the evacuation and the withdrawal was going on the Taliban seized the opportunity and started to advance and take over Afghanistan region by region. The US intelligence officials anticipated the Taliban takeover would happen six months after the US finished withdrawing its troops from the country. Instead, it took just over a week. On 6 August after months of expansion throughout Afghanistan's countryside the Taliban seized the capital of the province along the Iranian and Pakistani borders. It was the first of the country's 34 provincial capitals to fall, and indication of what was to come. The seizure of the city happened quickly and it has been taken without much of a fight. (nationalgeographic.com, 2021)

In the neighboring Helmand province Afghan and US airstrikes sought to blunt the Taliban's advances and hold control over key cities, but the Taliban's takeover continued. It claimed four more provincial capitals over the next 2 days, on 8 August the strategic hub of Kunduz was seized all but eliminating the government's presence in large swaths of the Northern part of the country. The pace of the group's expansion concerned Afghan and Western officials who feared that without a forceful international response the total collapse of the Afghan government could happen this fall - earlier than initially warned. Meanwhile citizens in Kunduz and other provinces claimed by the Taliban began fleeing seeking safety in the nation's capital. (bbc.com, 2021)

Then, on 10 August President Biden defended his decision to pull US forces out of the country saying Afghan forces were trained and equipped to fight. But, by 13 August the Afghan government had lost about half of the country's provincial capitals including its second and third largest cities, Kandahar and Herat. (theguardian.com, 2021)

After 20 years of war much of what the US sought to accomplish in Afghanistan crumbled in

just one week and many of the cities were taken without a fight with Afghan soldiers surrendering to the Taliban taking advantage of the group's promises of amnesty. Focus then turned to Kabul as the US began to deploy thousands of troops to the capital for a diplomatic evacuation. Then Afghan president Ashraf Ghani addressed the nation for the first time since the Taliban's takeover of the provincial capitals began saying his priority is to re-mobilize Afghan security forces and defend Kabul.

But the next day, on 15 August Taliban fighters seized Kabul and President Ghani fled to Pakistan leaving the government in collapse, the Taliban proclaimed the Taliban Islamic Emirate. By the evening insurgents took the palace where they filmed removing the Afghan flag. With Kabul's capture 9 days after the first provincial capital fell the Taliban looked to have control over nearly all of Afghanistan. As the Taliban moved on Kabul US troops airlifted Western diplomats and civilians from the US embassy to the military side of Kabul's airport. It's a scene that drew comparisons to the rush exit from the US embassy in Vietnam in 1975, a parallel that US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken rejected on CNN. By the next day thousands of Afghans flocked to Kabul's international airport looking to escape. The airport then became the center of the chaos in the capital as people were seen clinging to a US air force plane leaving the city and Taliban gunmen roamed the streets outside. At least 8 Afghans were killed that day at the airport. Amid the violence President Biden addressed the US again defending his decision of the withdrawal. (indianexpress.com, 2021)

As the Taliban swept through Afghanistan after the US military withdrawal the collapse of President Ashraf Ghani's government was inevitable. Most of the former government's top officials including Ghani himself fled the country triggering chaos and uncertainty among Afghans. (reuters.com, 2021) However, not all of them had the opportunity or the will to leave Kabul: Ghani's deputy minister of finance Nazir Kabiri stayed home. The US-educated technocrat anticipated the financial challenges such a political change could bring to Afghanistan, and the Taliban kept Kabiri at his post. The Biden administration freed up seven billion dollars the Afghan central bank had in US banks, and it was Kabiri's task to work out a plan about how to distribute that money. (dw.com, 2022)

As an outcome a long war there has been a lot of casualties reported in Afghanistan, and there might have been even more deaths than reported. In addition, many have suffered serious injuries, ones they might never be able to heal from. In a BBC report, there is a chart that shows the number of deaths and sever injuries during the 20 years of war, to which it is important to note, that these are only the civilians, not counting the soldiers who died in battle or in an attack. However, official numbers are only referring to the period between 2009 and 2020.

Total civilian casualties in Afghanistan

2009-2020

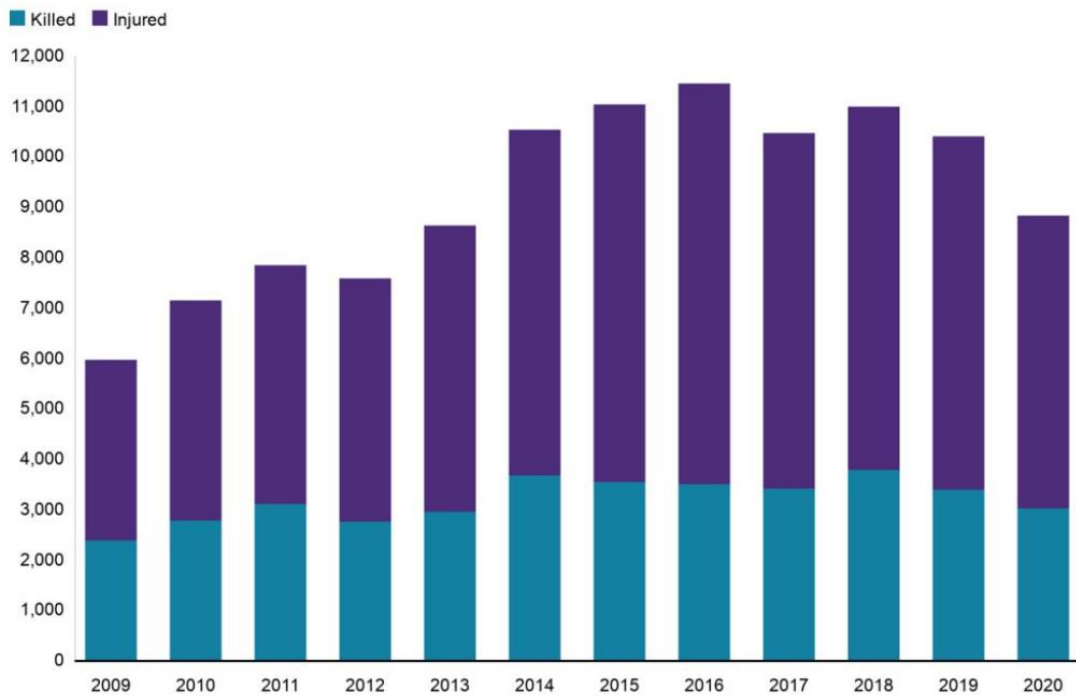


Figure 7: Total civilian casualties in Afghanistan

Afghanistan today

Ashraf Ghani fled to the United Arab Emirates on 15 August as Taliban fighters advanced towards the Afghan capital. Ashraf Ghani fled to the United Arab Emirates on 15 August as Taliban gunmen advanced towards the Afghan capital. The escaped Afghan politician has denied allegations that he took \$169 million to the UAE. The former president defended his action by stating that he had no choice but to leave the country to avoid an escalation of violence in the country. He said he had no intention of leaving his people, but it was the only solution. (euronews.com, 2021)

What experts were most concerned about was how the Taliban could achieve so much if the Afghan army was much bigger in number than the Taliban, and why did not the Afghan soldiers use the high-technology weapons that the US army left for them against the Taliban. The Afghan army proved to be inefficient against the Taliban after their collapse when the rebel militia advanced. Most of them fled the country when they were informed about the intensive rise of the Taliban. It is no surprise that the Afghan civilians were afraid when they saw the Afghan army collapse, and how can they be at comfort when they see such events.

So the Taliban took the whole country without much fight, the only province that held the

Taliban back was Panjshir, where the followers of the former Northern Alliance were staying. However, Panjshir valley also fell to the Taliban in early September. (aljazeera.com, 2021) As of the social aspects of the situation in Afghanistan, there is an immense problem of supplying the population with basic needs like food, medicine, etc. Almost everybody in Afghanistan, 95% of the population do not have enough food to eat. More than half the population are at risk of starvation - that is 23 million people - and it includes 3 million children under the age of 5. (wfp.org, 2022) Poverty, hunger and tough winters are nothing new in Afghanistan, but right now two things are making the food crisis much worse. First, there was a terrible drought. Under such conditions, there is no drinking water for people, nor for the livestock. Secondly, there is the state of the economy. The whole financial system collapsed, since the assets were frozen and the aid money was cut. So what happened was, when the Taliban took over, the US froze more than 9 billion USD of Afghan assets which is basically money and investments held in the US. (aljazeera.com, 2021) At the same time foreign financial aid was also cut immediately, and since under the old government 75% of its budget was foreign aid. So, the US' intention was to avoid the Taliban to get their hands on that money, but the dark side of this is that it crippled the economy of Afghanistan. One of the big problems is a major shortage of cash in a country that runs on cash. The banks do not have enough and they have set limits on cash withdrawal, so people could not withdraw all of their money from their bank accounts. (abc.net.au, 2021) Imports like fuel became more expensive, because the currency, the Afghani has dropped to an all-time low against the USD. From civil servants to construction workers, people are not getting paid. (tolonews.com, 2022)

Even though today the Taliban government is still not recognized by any country, it is trying to find ways to establish diplomatic relations with as many country as possible. As far as these relations are concerned, 4 countries - China, Pakistan, Russia and Turkmenistan has already certified diplomats appointed by the Taliban government. The latest country that establish relations with the Taliban was Russia, whose Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova said: "We regard this as a step towards the resumption of full-fledged diplomatic contacts." (voanews.com, 2022)

There is also confusion among the Afghan people about what the new social codes are, which so many people were worried about when the Taliban came to power. The leadership have said that people's rights will be protected in accordance with Islamic law. The problem is the Taliban have not really specified what their interpretation of Islamic law is. In Herat, Taliban officials killed four alleged kidnappers and hung their bodies up in public, and in Kabul two journalists were beaten when covering a protest led by women. (aljazeera.com, 2021)

About the situation of women, there has definitely been changes compared to the Taliban leadership that was in office from 1996 to 2001. However, there are still obstacles for women, they are even forbidden to do many things or go to some places. Female aid workers have been restricted from doing their jobs in more than 30 provinces. Women are mostly back at university, but they have to study separately from men. There are even fewer answers for teenage girls. In most provinces they have not been allowed to return to school under 6th grade. The Taliban say that that is temporary, but there is wide skepticism. (theprint.in, 2022)

As for the security in Afghanistan, the Taliban said they can handle that problem. They promised that when they rise to power peace will rule in Afghanistan, violence will end and bombings will stop. However, they have not quite been able to deliver on that, because an affiliate of ISIL (a group known as ISKP- Islamic State Khorasan Province) has stepped up attacks since the Taliban took over. On 16 August there was a suicide bombing at Kabul's international airport that killed more than 180 people. (edition.cnn.com, 2022) Another attack at a military hospital killed 25 on 25 October, and ISKP have claimed responsibility for at least two attacks on Shia mosques. (hrw.org, 2021)

After examining what is the life under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan is like there is another aspect that I find important in Afghanistan's case. Looking at its present and past there is a question that has to be asked when we are talking about Afghanistan: is it a failed state? In the next chapter, I would like to find an answer to that.

5. Is Afghanistan a failed state?

Ever since its independence, Afghanistan was facing serious challenges and hardships, which it more or less overcame in its first couple of decades. Those issues were mostly domestic problems, political games. At the end of the 1970's Afghanistan's face was shaped by the Soviet invasion and its consequences. During those years it was hard for the country to achieve economic growth and prosperity for its people, moreover a lot of obstacles surfaced in the country. After the Soviet invasion there was a civil war in Afghanistan, which made it even harder to rebuild from the ruins of the 10-year war. As a result of the civil war that started in 1992 the first Taliban regime rose, which led Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Then came the US invasion after the 9/11 attacks, after which the Taliban were ousted from power and fled to the mountains. The 20-year period that followed the 9/11 attacks on the US brought slight changes in Afghanistan, the lives of the Afghans became better. However, in 2021 after the US withdrew all its forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban started to advance, and rapidly took over Kabul, thus the whole country. This second takeover of the Taliban brought great chaos throughout all Afghanistan, not only civilians, but also Afghan soldiers and politicians started to flee the country. With the Taliban holding power in Afghanistan the majority of the international actors (mainly states) condemned the Taliban takeover, and do not recognize the Taliban regime. Most of these countries cut diplomatic, and other kinds of relations with Afghanistan, which put a lot of Afghans in desperate need for food, medication, etc.

After all these challenges, there is a question that has to be asked: is Afghanistan a failed state? The phenomenon of failed states is not a new one, there have been many examples throughout history, but in the 21st century more and more states are finding themselves in this situation. However, the impact of this phenomenon is certainly different from the past, as all states are interconnected and interdependent as a by-product of globalization, and the failure or failure of one state has a major impact and pressure on the international community as a whole. There is no clear, universally accepted definition to determine whether a state is failed. Thus there are several definitions: economic, social, political and historical. In addition to these, different international organizations or even researchers use their own definitions, but these definitions are created for their own purposes and are not necessarily objective. These definitions have many elements in common, so the following definition could be applied to failed states: a state whose political or economic system has become so weak that its government is no longer able to maintain control over it. As a result, the state is unable to control its own territory or to take decisions. (Csirmaz, 2019)

As for the case study of Afghanistan, the country was always exposed to the interests of global players, especially great powers (formerly super powers) like the Soviet Union and the United States. The Afghan government was always unable to resist the external influence, plus there were the Taliban who always meant danger and threat ever since the civil war in 1992.

The Geneva Conventions only set out the criterion by which a state can be considered failed, but this criterion is rather vague: under the Conventions, a state becomes failed when the conflict in that state reaches a certain level, a threshold. (ihl-databases.icrc.org, 2020) It is important to highlight the US operations after the September 11 attacks, which stimulated academic and foreign policy interests in creating a universal concept of failed states. Thus, the US interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Iraq and Afghanistan are linked at some level to the phenomenon of failed states. Failed states are mainly caused by internal, endogenous problems, which may have cross-border effects. Internal problems may include poverty, economic hardship, corruption, ineffective governance, crime, violence, ethnic or other internal conflicts, civil war, and destabilization caused by foreign interventions and foreign aggression. The phenomenon of failed states is usually linked to drug trafficking, arms smuggling, organised crime, terrorism, sea piracy, civil wars or armed conflicts, warlords vying for control, serious deterioration or virtual disappearance of health and education, epidemics or dangerous diseases (e.g. AIDS/HIV, malaria, Ebola, West Nile fever, etc.), serious human rights violations, the collapse of the justice system, the economy, trade and banking. Some of these features can be seen not only throughout the history of Afghanistan, but also in its present. As I found throughout my research, the country used to struggle to maintain economic growth and financial stability in certain periods, the trade of opium was more or less active from time to time, terrorist groups like the Taliban and al-Qaeda never ceased to show active presence, armed conflicts were almost permanent in the past couple of decades, civil (especially women's) rights were never fully granted, and after the Taliban took over Afghanistan for the second time in 15 August 2021 the economy of the country faced serious damage. These are the features that undoubtedly show that Afghanistan is a country that is facing serious difficulties in emerging from its ruins.

After all what I found in my research, I can state that in my opinion Afghanistan is a failed state, and aside from the factors mentioned above, there is another feature that proves that status. Ever since the Taliban took over, every country started to cut their diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, and called all their diplomats home. With the cutting of diplomatic ties, other relations, like trade was cut off as well, meaning that there was a massive shortage of essential supplies for the Afghans immediately. Plus, there was the decision of the US to freeze all

Afghan assets, which made it impossible for the Taliban to distribute money to any sectors. As for the second research question I would like to focus more on the decision of the Biden administration, what mistakes have been made to create such chaos in a country, that was feared the Taliban would take over. As far as I am concerned, the chaos that has been created in Afghanistan last year was because of the lack of communication and preparedness of the Biden administration. It did not focus on negotiating with either the Afghan government or the Taliban. After watching the Afghan soldiers fleeing the country we can think that they were not prepared for such a swift withdraw of US forces and such a rapid advance from the Taliban. As we know, no previous deal or negotiation has been reached between the US and the Taliban during the Biden administration, which can mean a lot of things. First that can come to one's mind, is that Joe Biden had no further intentions other than quickly summon all of US forces back home and end a war that has been going on for too long. He made it very clear and emphasized it a couple of times, that that was the longest and most expensive war of the US, but in my point of view this is not enough to let a country and a society fall into deep desperation and damage. The Biden administration has also claimed that US military officers have done a great job in teaching Afghan soldiers how to use high-tech weapons (supplied by the US to the Afghan army) and how to repel Taliban attacks. After what has happened in Afghanistan, with the resurgence of the Taliban, these statements may seem somewhat questionable. (hrw.org, 2022)

6. Conclusion

Throughout my research, I learnt a lot about history of Afghanistan, how it was shaped and what impacts it got. At the end of the study I would like to shed a light on a number of issues accordingly to my findings.

When we are studying a country, it is very important to examine and understand its past, because we have to understand how we got here, and what were the main events in the country's history that led to its current shape. In the case of Afghanistan, one of these historical features was its independence in the first place. When a country is born, it has its initial difficulties that it has to overcome, and for a country like Afghanistan there were a lot of obstacles. To begin with it was right at the border of the Soviet Union, which always tried to control Afghanistan, and maintain a Soviet-friendly government there. There were a series of serious political games among candidates and political players for running the country. Then came the Soviet army that tried to invade Afghanistan in 1979. That became a 10-year war, at the end of which the Soviets agreed to leave the country in 1989. In that war the mujahidin rose up against the Soviet Union and they remained active after that and even started a civil war in Afghanistan in 1992. That lasted for four years until the rebels who were called the Taliban reached the capital Kabul and started to build out their own regime. The Taliban government ruled until 2001, when the US, another great power went to invade Afghanistan, after a serious terrorist attack in New York city and Washington D.C. With that move the US started its most expensive and longest war in its history, and stationed its troops for twenty years, when the last US troop left Afghanistan in August 2021. Ever since that event, the Taliban took over the capital for the second time, and established their second government, ruling Afghanistan ever since.

The examining and studying Afghanistan's history is important in order to know who the Taliban are, and who is Ashraf Ghani, the former president of the country that fled from the rebels.

For the past two decades, the history of Afghanistan was largely shaped by the interests of the US. Many American would say, that the war in Afghanistan was justified, compared to the Iraqi invasion which they think was uncalled for. There were spoken-out purposes of the US to invade Afghanistan: to kill bin Laden and to defeat the Taliban. After the bombing campaign started the Taliban fell quickly. And by April 2002 it was apparent to the Americans that they could not just sweep in overthrow a regime and walk away. They needed to take care of the reconstructions which also meant to build a new government. Thus began the nation-building program that really prioritized counterterrorism. So we can see, that through the consequences

of the defeating the Taliban brought up purposes to stay in Afghanistan. Now, that the US achieved one of its goals coming to Afghanistan, the aftermath of it created other purposes for staying there. The second purpose of the invasion was also crossed off the list when president Barack Obama announced on television that a US special operation assassinated Osama bin Laden in 2011. Then the US army had to train and recruit more and more Afghan soldiers, because after Osama bin Laden was killed the US decrease its military presence in Afghanistan. At the same time, the US sent billions of dollars for reconstruction pouring money into a country without the kind of infrastructure to really handle that kind of money. This support meant building health clinics, schools, bridges, roads, etc.

What we can see after all these years of war, that even if the US defeated the Taliban back in 2002, it brought them be from the dead when they withdrew their forces from Afghanistan in 15 August 2021.

The events that have been going on in Afghanistan in this couple of months, show us a lot of things to learn from. It showed that a great power like the United States cannot do anything without consequences with a regional or global impact. This should have been known by the Bush administration when it decided to invade a sovereign and independent country, but now, when the impacts are irreversible there is not much to do even for a great power. For many country, especially for the rivals this withdrawal might show that the military strength of the US has somewhat decreased in this war. In the 20th century the Americans tried to conduct war in many country (Angola, Vietnam, Cambodia, etc.).

Conflicts and crises are one of the reasons why I would like to become a diplomat one day. Because I believe that there is no conflict that cannot be solved with the tool of negotiation. If we put enough time, energy and work into solving a problem than we can be victorious. That is the purpose behind my ambition to become a diplomat: to solve conflicts. This was also the driving factor behind both my theses. My first one was about the crisis in Yemen, and now, I decided to study the situation in Afghanistan.

In the case of Afghanistan, the tools of negotiation could also be the best and most humane way of handling the conflict. I believe that if there would be a group of special experts and diplomats just for that purpose, it could reach a deal or at least a step forward in order to normalize the situation in Afghanistan. President Donald Trump tried to step on a path, that could have led to normalizing ties between the Taliban and the former Afghan political elite. However, that initiation was not successful, but it still could be revived, if world leaders wanted to. That could start a helpful cooperation that would worth the struggle and the energy to put in. Even more

so, after seeing the achievements of diplomacy and international negotiation all around the world. It is unquestionable that the after the II. World War the role of diplomacy and international negotiations have increased and its value became higher. Countries were more prone to sit down together and talk about possible outcomes of their conflicts and misunderstandings. This could be seen throughout the Cold War as well, when the United States and the Soviet Union were racing for more and more influence. Today, it is time again for great powers to set an example for the whole international community.

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NYILATKOZAT

AlulírottHoós Gergő..... büntetőjogi felelősségem tudatában nyilatkozom, hogy a szakdolgozatomban foglalt tények és adatok a valóságnak megfelelnek, és az abban leírtak a saját, önálló munkám eredményei.

A szakdolgozatban felhasznált adatokat a szerzői jogvédelem figyelembevételével alkalmaztam.

Ezen szakdolgozat semmilyen része nem került felhasználásra korábban oktatási intézmény más képzésén diplomaszerzés során.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a szakdolgozatomat az intézmény plágiumellenőrzésnek veti alá.

Budapest, 2022. év május hónap 4. nap

..........

hallgató aláírása