AFGHANISTAN

Background

Afghanistan was occupied (largely unsuccessfully) by the Soviet Union from 1979. Soviet intervention lasted ten years and sparked a bitter civil war with anti-Soviet mujahideen forces, supported by considerable outside aid. The departure of Soviet troops in 1989 did not bring an end to the conflict, as mujahideen groups began to struggle among themselves. By 1994 the Pashtun Taliban began to emerge as the dominant power in Afghanistan, taking Kabul in October 1996 and controlling most of the country by 1998. They were opposed by mujahideen commanders Massoud, Dostum and others in the predominantly Tajik and Uzbek United Front (previously the Northern Alliance).

The attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 was a pivotal point for Afghanistan as it soon emerged that Al Qaeda the Islamic terrorist group led by Osama Bin Laden was being sheltered there.

The 9/11 attacks led to the United States air strikes on Afghanistan and the toppling of the Taliban regime in November 2001.

After the fall of the Taliban

After the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, the United Nations brought together leaders of Afghan ethnic groups in Germany. The Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions (known as the Bonn Agreement (PDF)), signed on 5 December 2001, set out a road map for the restoration of representative government in Afghanistan.

In June 2002 an Emergency Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) established a Transitional Administration to govern until elections could be held. The Loya Jirga marked the first opportunity for decades for the people of Afghanistan to play a decisive role in their future.

A new Afghan Constitution (PDF) was agreed on 4 January 2004 during the Constitutional Loya Jirga, establishing a presidential system of government with all Afghans equal before the law. It enshrined human rights and gender equality within the Afghan political system, and guaranteed a number of seats for women in both Houses of the National Assembly (Parliament). There are also provisions for minority languages and the rights of the Shia minority.

It concluded with the election of Hamid Karzai as President of the Transitional State of Afghanistan. The Transitional Administration came to an end with the Presidential election of October 2004. On 3 November 2004, Hamid Karzai was officially confirmed as the

winner with 55.4% of the vote (a 70% turnout was recorded)\(^2\). Karzai was re-elected in 2009.

On 18 September 2005 the Afghan population took part in the first Parliamentary elections for 36 years. These elections were more complex and a greater logistical challenge than the Presidential elections of 2004. 12.5 million Afghan voters registered, and 2735 candidates stood for election. 51.5% of eligible voters turned out on polling day. Parliamentary elections were again held on 18 September 2010. These were held under difficult circumstances and were by no means free of malpractice. However, the Afghan electoral authorities overcame considerable logistical and security challenges to deliver a broadly satisfactory process on Polling Day. The current Afghan Parliament convened for the first time on 26 January 2011.

The Security Situation

Following the fall of the Taliban, the United Nations Security Council agreed to send an International Security Force to Afghanistan\(^3\). This force is led by NATO and has been present in Afghanistan since 2001. Despite the presence of the international force, the security situation in Afghanistan is difficult with regular suicide bombings taking place across the country including in the capital Kabul. In addition, attacks on foreign troops have also been regular occurrences. The attacks and suicide bombings have been coordinated by Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Whilst the Taliban is no longer in power, it still has strongholds across the country.

The announcement by the US President that US troops will leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014 has not done anything to reduce the violence and despite training of the Afghan police and military, it is not clear whether they will be able to keep the country secure when foreign troops leave.

In 2011 civilian casualties in Afghanistan were the highest they've been since the invasion, according to the latest statistics from the United Nations creating the highest total since 2006 for civilian deaths - the continued annual rises has seen over 12,793 killed in the past six years\(^4\). According to the Guardian:

"The Taliban and other anti-government elements have been blamed for 2,332 of the 3,021 civilians who were killed in Afghanistan last year - a rise of 8% on 2010. In 2011, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 2,332 civilian deaths and 3,649 injuries by the Taliban for a total 5,981 civilian casualties, an increase of 10% in deaths and injuries attributed to anti-government forces compared to 2010. This accounted for 77% of all deaths whereas NATO and government forces totalled 410 civilian killings and 335 injuries."

The total number of British troops killed in Afghanistan is currently 414\(^5\) whilst up to the start of 2012, 889 US soldiers had been killed\(^6\).

The Future and the re-emergence of the Taliban


\(^6\) [http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/us-afghanistan-idUSTRE8100E520120201](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/us-afghanistan-idUSTRE8100E520120201)
On 1 May 2012 the US President and President of Afghanistan signed the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America.

The United States’ goal in negotiating such an agreement has been to define with the Afghan Government what’s on the other side of Transition and the completed drawdown of U.S. forces. The agreement the President signed will detail how the partnership between the United States and Afghanistan will be normalized and bring a responsible end to the war.

When it comes to an enduring U.S. presence, President Obama has been clear: we do not seek permanent military bases in Afghanistan. Instead, the Strategic Partnership Agreement commits Afghanistan to provide U.S. personnel access to and use of Afghan facilities through 2014 and beyond. The Agreement provides for the possibility of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after 2014, for the purposes of training Afghan Forces and targeting the remnants of al-Qaeda, and commits the United States and Afghanistan to initiate negotiations on a Bilateral Security Agreement to supersede our current Status of Forces Agreement. The United States will also designate Afghanistan a “Major Non-NATO Ally” to provide a long-term framework for security and defense cooperation.

Despite the Taliban’s removal from power, they have never been defeated. As the international community downscales its commitments in Afghanistan the Taliban continue to launch regular attacks and bombings and in addition control large sections of Afghanistan out with the capital Kabul.

According to Reuters, a NATO report suggested that the Taliban are confident of re-taking control of Afghanistan when international forces leave.

"Taliban commanders, along with rank and file members, increasingly believe their control of Afghanistan is inevitable. Though the Taliban suffered severely in 2011, its strength, motivation, funding and tactical proficiency remains intact," according to an excerpt of the report,

"While they are weary of war, they see little hope for a negotiated peace. Despite numerous tactical setbacks, surrender is far from their collective mindset. For the moment, they believe that continuing the fight and expanding Taliban governance are their only viable courses of action," the published excerpts said.

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7 http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/fact-sheet-us-afghanistan-strategic-partnership-agreement
8 http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/us-afghanistan-idUSTRE8100E520120201