

Scenari



Report for decision makers

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**CONSEQUENCES OF A
TALIBAN-LED AFGHANISTAN**

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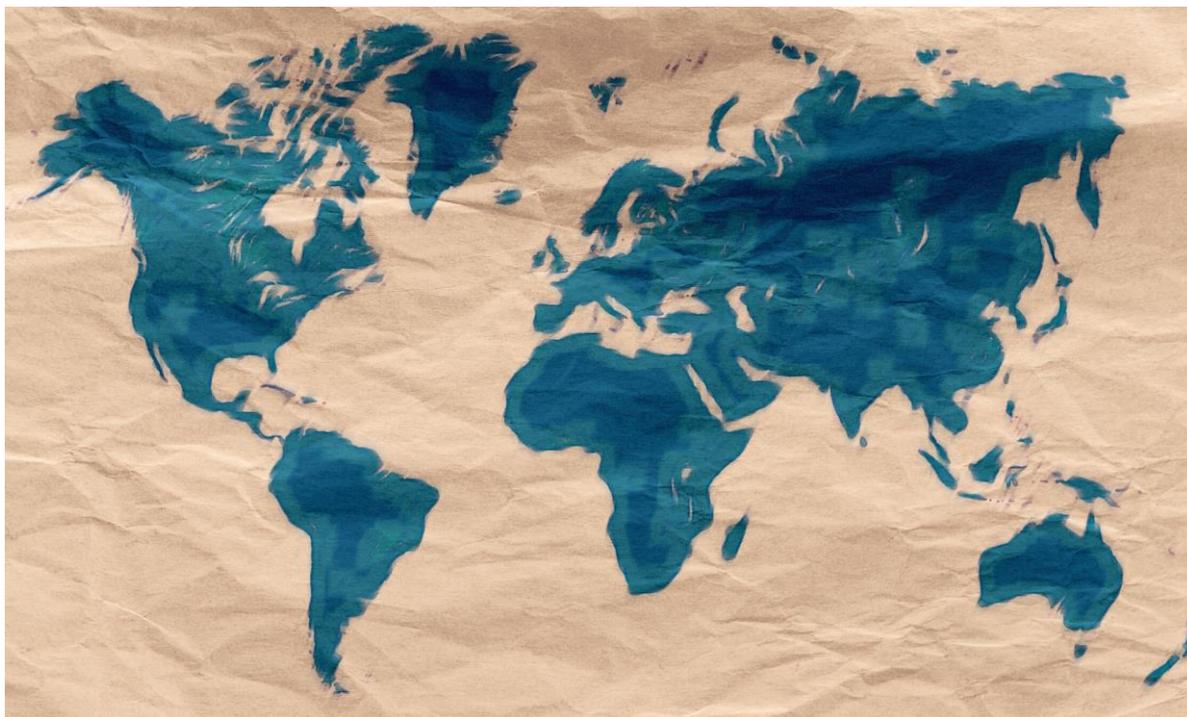
Consequences of a Taliban-led Afghanistan

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INTRODUCTION

by Giusy Musarò

After 20 years and around \$145 billion spent on military operations and reconstruction activities, and \$837 billion spent on military operations¹, the rapid fall of the Afghan government, formed after the **Bonn Agreement** in 2001 and supported by the international community, raised significant doubts about the actual impact of this intervention over the years. The system put in place in 2001 failed to create an inclusive, democratic and stable Afghanistan. For years, the Taliban continued to control various areas of the country, financially supporting themselves through the production and export of opium, illegal mining and extortion at the expense of the population living in the territories under their control.

The return of a Taliban Afghanistan will undoubtedly have both **global and regional consequences**. This report aims at identifying potential scenarios concerning several topics, such as the relationship with neighbouring

countries, the migration issue, the impact on the various actors of the so-called “Western world” – the United States of America and the European Union above all – as well as on the spread of international terrorism.

Historical and Geographical Context

The country, which is surrounded by mountains and deserts and is situated in a **strategic position** bordering Iran to the west, Central Asia to the north and South Asia to the east, has been shaped over the centuries by various ethnic groups, empires, dynasties and armies that have made up its history², until the birth of the modern Afghan state in 1747, when a group of Pashtun tribes led by General Ahmad Durrani created the Durrani Empire, encompassing the territories of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan.³

¹ SIGAR. Quarterly Report to Congress, 30 July 2021, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-07-30qr-section2-funding.pdf>

² From the Persian empire to the Arab conquests, from the Samanid empire to first the Ghaznavid and Ghoriid dynasties and then the Mongols, from the Timurid empire to the Safavids.

³ A brief history of Afghanistan (2008), The New Internationalist, <https://newint.org/features/2008/11/01/afghanistan-history>



Aside from its past as a cultural and trade centre, Afghanistan's history has been characterised by infighting and foreign invasions over the past three centuries, beginning with the two Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42; 1878-80), followed by the Soviet invasion (1979-1989) and the American invasion in 2001. However, none of these powers has ever managed to effectively control or establish a central power in the country⁴. In particular, the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 – which had to face strong internal

opposition from the *Mujabideen*, in turn, supported and armed by the United States – resulted in 1.5 million casualties and five million refugees. The internal struggles that followed the overthrow of the communist-dominated government in 1992 led to the rise of the Taliban group in 1994⁵. In 1996, with the seizure of Kabul, an Islamic Emirate was established in Afghanistan, led by Mullah Mohammed Omar, a cleric and veteran of the anti-Soviet resistance, who through a strict application of Islamic law,

⁴ Following the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the British had succeeded in gaining control over the country's foreign affairs; in 1919 the withdrawal of their troops marked the beginning of Afghan independence. After years of government changes and coups, in 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), led by Noor Mohammed Taraki, overthrew the secular government of General Mohammed Daoud Khan in the so-

called Saur Revolution. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded the Country to defend the new socialist-style government.
⁵ The name of the group derives from the word 'Talib', "student" in Pashto. Indeed, the group was originally formed by some *Mujabidin* and some students belonging to Sunni Islamic schools in Pakistan. <https://www.cfr.org/background/taliban-afghanistan>

the *Shari'a*, managed to control about 90% of the Afghan territory until 2001. That year, the US, following the 11 September attacks and the subsequent launch of **Operation Enduring Freedom**, put an end to the Taliban regime. Their recapture of Kabul on 15 August 2021 and the final withdrawal of US troops on 30 August⁶ marked the end of the longest and most expensive war ever waged by the United States.

What questions does a Taliban Afghanistan pose?

Although President Biden stated in his address to the nation that the intent of the US intervention over the past 20 years had never been to create an Afghan nation⁷, the military and non-military operations funded and carried out over these years have been guided and justified by approaches based on the concepts of “Statebuilding”, **'nation-building'** and 'peacebuilding', deemed as necessary processes to prevent the country from falling into the hands of the Taliban or some terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. This approach has its origin in a model of a global system organised around the principle of state sovereignty, which, however, has not taken into account or understood the specificities of a country whose governance is rather based on local and decentralised power depending on ethnicity or clan membership.

With the appointment of 33 new ministers on 7 September, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid announced the birth of the new **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**.⁸ Although no country has officially recognised it yet, the new Taliban government has managed to open a dialogue with representatives of the United States, the European Union, various European states, as well as with the Turkish government, Russia and the main Central Asian states in several meetings held in Qatar, Ankara and Moscow last October. At the regional level, the question is whether common concerns related to regional security, cross-border crime, energy resources and migration management will lead the countries of the region to also adopt a common strategy. Furthermore, will Turkey succeed in obtaining the coveted role of privileged interlocutor with the new regime?

Although the Taliban have communicated their will to create a more inclusive government in order to gain international recognition, doubts remain as to whether international standards of human and civil rights will be respected, especially with regard to women and ethnic minorities in the country. Will the new government be pragmatic enough to adopt a political strategy aimed at achieving national security and international inclusion? The attacks on the Shia minority in Kunduz and Kandahar

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/last-us-forces-leave-afghanistan-after-nearly-20-years-2021-08-30/>

⁷ 'US mission was never supposed to be nation building': Biden stands 'squarely behind' Afghan decision - The Economic Times Video | ET Now ([indiatimes.com](https://www.indiatimes.com))

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58479750>

(8 and 15 October 2021),⁹ ¹⁰ carried out by the ISKP (Islamic State of the Khorasan Province) terrorist group and culminated with the attack on the Kabul airport on 26 August, in which 13 Americans and 150 Afghan citizens were killed, raised doubts about the new government's ability and willingness to deal with the terrorist threat posed by the various radical Islamic groups operating in and around Afghanistan and, above all, about future relations between them.

In addition, questions remain about the regime financing methods, through the opium and drug trade: will the new government continue to use this source or will it seek other ways in exchange for international recognition and support?

On the global stage, in addition to the pragmatic approach that Russia and China are taking towards the new Taliban government, what impact will the events in Afghanistan have on the Biden administration, both in terms of foreign policy and internal stability? Can the return of the Taliban following the hasty withdrawal of troops be considered a debacle for the Atlantic Alliance, weakening it on the European front and thus leaving space for the adoption of a common defence strategy for the European Union? And could the latter eventuality be accelerated by the Biden presidency's failure to involve European countries in the decision to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan? Finally, it is necessary to

consider what new dynamics will be put in place to cope with the new political and humanitarian situation. How will migratory flows from Afghanistan to neighbouring and European countries change? What are the scenarios for what is expected to become a new 'migration crisis'?

This paper will try to answer these questions by presenting likely and less likely future scenarios, bearing in mind the complexity of the issue and the internal and external dynamics influencing it but confident that a better understanding of the past and present Afghan situation could offer food for thought to guide better actions in the future.

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blast-hits-mosque-afghan-city-kandahar-heavy-casualties-officials-2021-10-15/>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58842793>

Part I

Regional Level



1.1 The New Taliban Government and the Role of Neighboring Countries

by Massimiliano Nima Lacerra

Abstract

The withdrawal of the international NATO coalition from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the consequent resurgence of the Taliban certainly determined a change of pace in Kabul's bilateral relations with neighboring countries and a shift in the regional balance. The possible future scenarios concerning the relations between neighboring states and the Taliban government will be analyzed taking into consideration the interests of the countries with the greatest influence in Afghan internal politics.

Methodological approach

This paper is the result of the research, evaluation, analysis of open sources and unclassified documents. Among the huge amount of documents analyzed, the main sources used were publications by NATO-linked think tanks. These sources were chosen due to the reliability of the information disclosed, in line with the news analyzed and the authoritativeness of the authors.

Context analysis

Afghanistan's geographical position – a landlocked country in the heart of Eurasia – and its former function as a buffer state between the Russian and British empires explain why its neighbors and other great powers have always played a role in the internal politics of the country.

Afghanistan's position as a connection between Southern and Western Asia and Central Asia is crucial since the overpopulated territories of Southern and Western Asia lead to great energy needs while Central Asia has vast energy resources. In addition, the Afghan territory is the pivot of three major security scenarios: Central Asia, Russia's sphere of influence; South Asia, theater of the rivalry between India and Pakistan,

and the Persian Gulf, the stage of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Consequently, there are many actors who seek to impose their influence in this context following the withdrawal of the international coalition, in which neighboring countries are the most active entities. Pakistan and Iran are the most influential countries in this arena, thanks to the long borders they share with Afghanistan, but they are not the only ones. The struggle for interference includes Central Asian countries – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan –, China, Russia, India and the Persian Gulf countries.

Regional Dynamics after NATO Withdrawal: Influential State Entities (Neighboring and Non-Neighboring)

Although in recent years the Taliban have developed their own foreign policy agenda, with official visits to Islamabad, Moscow, Beijing, Tashkent and Tehran between 2018 and 2020 in search of regional support and international legitimacy, the recently evolved political-institutional structure of Afghanistan raises many doubts and uncertainties in neighboring countries. Worries concern border security, cross-border crimes, trade and, last but not least, environmental issues such as water resources.

Iran: it is an historical opponent of the Taliban both for security and ideological reasons, but the geographical position and the 921 km-long shared border calls for a compromise from Tehran. The security driver remains the primary motivation for Iran, which opposes any government with a Taliban majority that could undermine its own stability and the safety of the Shiite communities living in the Afghan territory. Tehran's main goals in Afghanistan are: ensuring the security of the extensive and porous border mainly endangered by the Sunni *Takfiri* factions and other anti-Shia groups such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) – deemed as the main threat to safety –; further strengthen the already vigorous economic ties (\$ 2.5 billion in trades in 2021); avoid the

interference of competitors such as the United States and Saudi Arabia in national interests. To this end, Iran supports an inclusive and multipolar Afghan government, also formed by pro-Iranian factions in order to balance Taliban's influence.



Pakistan: its influence over the Taliban probably decreased as the movement formed ties with other countries, diversifying its funding. However, Pakistan's main objective in Afghanistan remains to install a government that includes the Taliban but is not wholly run by them, as a Taliban-only government would go against its own national interests, linked primarily to the recognition of the Durand Line as an international border between Pakistan and

Afghanistan. Furthermore, Islamabad aims to gain the greatest achievable influence over Afghanistan in order to alienate India from the country or at least reduce the important role of New Delhi. As a result, Pakistan adopts a combined strategy: on the one hand, it maintains its close cooperation with the Taliban through political, diplomatic and military means, while on the other hand it dialogues with other political and military entities in Afghanistan, such as non-*Pashtun* tribes.

China: as a regional power, it has impressive geopolitical objectives in the region, namely to consolidate its vital partnership with Pakistan, finalize the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), discuss a possible Afghan extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The *condicio sine qua non* for the achievement of

these objectives remains regional security and stability, hence it is crucial for Beijing to prevent by any means the achievement of common goals between the Islamist militant groups present in the Afghan territory and those inhabiting the Chinese region of Xinjiang. In fact, Uighur militant groups remain the main threat to China, although the extent of their activities and capacity is not entirely clear. Beijing's strategy for achieving its geopolitical and security goals is the use of a highly pragmatic approach, as confirmed by the fact that China was among the first countries to offer foreign aid to Kabul after the withdrawal of NATO, donating 31 millions of dollars in wheat, winter supplies, vaccines and medicines.

India: the refusal to dialogue with the Taliban makes India an exception among other regional



powers. Indeed, New Delhi maintains an inflexible approach towards the Taliban that are perceived as a direct emanation of Pakistan. India's strategy under the Ghani government was to alienate Pakistan from the country by making large investments and helping reconstruction: with \$ 3 billion of resources invested in Afghanistan in projects and infrastructures, India remains the most generous regional donor. Nonetheless, it has not been able to convert its soft power into a real influence over the country and indeed, with the return of the Taliban, New Delhi has seen long-term projects in the Afghan territory vanish into thin air. Like the other regional actors, it aspires to an inclusive and representative political solution, with the Taliban as members, preferably a minority, of a pluralist government.

Russia: it publicly supported the Doha agreements as the best way to ensure stability following the US / NATO withdrawal. However, in order to avoid the emergence of a security vacuum, it has in parallel promoted its own platform for intra-Afghan diplomatic negotiations and regional talks, with the aim of strengthening Russian influence throughout the region as well as encouraging Taliban to restrict the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is considered more dangerous and less controllable than the Taliban. Russia aims

to acquire the greatest possible influence in the country's politics. Functional to this aim is the pragmatic approach it has already used through the dialogue with the Taliban. .

Central Asia: guaranteeing the security and stability of Afghanistan is also a priority for the states of Central Asia, given the economic interests at stake. Any deterioration in security along the northern border of Afghanistan would pose a potential threat to the borders of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that would expose them to Russian military dependency. Furthermore, instability in the region would jeopardize cross-border energy projects, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline.

TAPI NATURAL GAS PIPELINE



Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Data Processing

Three potential scenarios can be outlined based on the context analysis carried out:

	A Multipolar but not Cohesive Government
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	An inclusive and representative system of government is initially established, at the proposal of the Taliban themselves, eager for international recognition and financial aid. Each political grouping is supported by external state entities to try to influence the institutional course of Afghanistan. However, inclusiveness causes factional fractures and political instability. The resulting deterioration of regional security would cause clashes between the Taliban and uncontrollable minor groups. By resuming the firefights between factions, each external state entity involved would support their proxy with funding and weapons. The establishment of a pluralist government initially met with the approval of all the countries involved; however, the creation of long-term political fractures is inevitable in which the flare-up of armed clashes is plausible, above all between allied political factions within the government in an opposition between the Taliban and the Haqqani network (see contribution 1.2 below). The ethnic heterogeneity of the social fabric ignites sectarian clashes: violence between Shiites and Sunnis explodes. The former are financed and trained by Iran, an expert in the use of armed proxies throughout the region; the latter supported by Pakistan. Possible re-establishment of an alliance on the model of Ahmad Shah Massud's 1996 Northern Alliance, supported by Iran, Russia, India and Central Asian states. China seeks a pragmatic approach to safeguard investments and projects, but at the same time increases security measures in the Wakhan corridor to prevent contacts between Afghan Islamist groups and the Uyghurs.
	A Multipolar and Pragmatic Government
Scenario 2 Probability level: mid-low	While remaining faithful to its Islamic ideals, the new administration governs in a sufficiently representative and inclusive manner by including significant non-Taliban representation in order to gain growing legitimacy from the international community, while also pursuing ISKP. The commitments made after the fall of the Ghani government are maintained: responsible management of power and national security, also in defense of minorities; cessation of opium cultivation for self-financing; respect for human and gender rights are the first issues resolved. Minimum security standards are established in order to attract foreign investors. Neighboring countries recognize the government's official status by resuming bilateral relations and providing financial and technical support to the new government. All the countries involved partially achieve their objectives: the TAPI gas pipeline wanted by Central Asian countries, the Afghan arm of the CPEC and large mining projects supported by China are put in place. Iran, seeing that the security of Shiite communities in Afghan territory is guaranteed, is consolidating relations in order to expand cross-border projects by defining new financing and collaborations. Russia, not feeling threatened by <i>Takfiri</i> fundamentalism, consolidates its military position in the Region by providing assistance and military mentoring services to the new government, which reciprocates by setting up advanced Russian military posts in the Afghan territory. Pakistan finally sees the ratification of the Durand Line. The confrontation between India and Pakistan over the Afghan territory remains open..
	A Taliban-only Government
Scenario 3 Probability level: very low	This scenario would make the fears of all the surrounding countries real. Regional security and stability are seriously compromised, as are all strategic projects. Iran has a Taliban Emirate on the doorstep, resulting in high risk for the security of Shiites throughout the area. Pakistan sees the efforts to recognize the Afghanistan-Pakistan border along the Durand Line vanish. China must face possible interactions between the Uyghurs and the Taliban, and it might miss the opportunity to build the Afghan arm of the CPEC. Russia and Central Asian countries are affected in terms of security due to the spread of <i>Takfiri</i> fundamentalist movements and consequently also ISKP. Financial support from the international community fails along with all possible investments from surrounding countries. Illegal cultivation and export of opium are on the rise, human and gender rights are systematically violated, the civilian population is harassed, attacks increase, a legal system based on the literal interpretation of the Shari'a is put in place, migratory flows continue to rise.

1.2 Armed and Terrorist Groups Operating in Afghanistan

by Eleonora Corsale and Nicki Anastasio

Abstract

Twenty years after 9/11, Afghanistan still represents a big concern in international politics due to the risk of a new terrorist threat that could arise from its territory and expand on a global scale. In this regard, the data on terrorist attacks in recent years are not comforting [see image 1] and show a growing activity of armed groups operating in Kabul and neighboring territories. To date, the global jihadist scenario is more diversified and this is mirrored in Afghanistan where various groups cooperate and compete, due to their different political agendas and objectives.

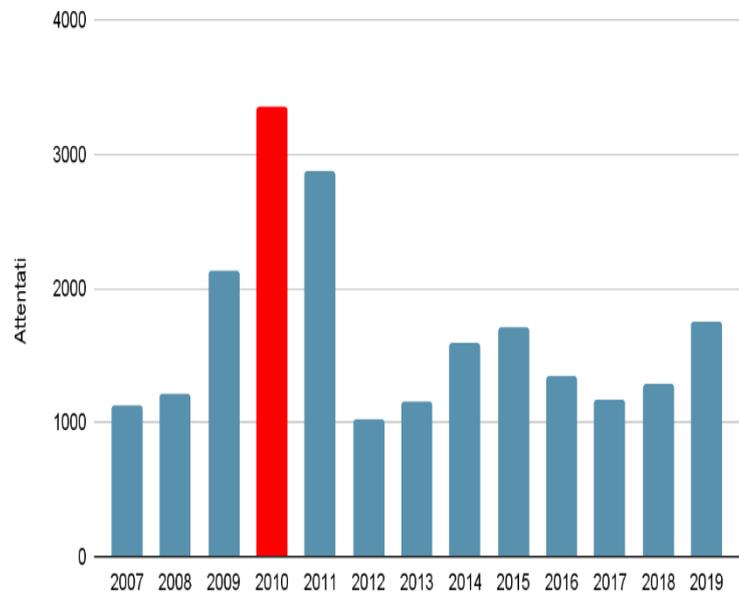


Image 1 - Source: www.statista.com/statistics/250566/number-of-terrorist-attacks-in-afghanistan

Methodological Approach

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the extent of terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. The paper adopts at first an historical approach, aimed at describing the socio-cultural context, cradle of Islamist terrorism, then it uses a geopolitical perspective aimed at highlighting the interactions at local and regional level between the various groups active in the area. For this purpose, the data used come from government and security sources, as well as reports from well-known research institutes and investigations conducted by recognized pro-Western and non-Western newspapers.

Context analysis

a) *The Link between Ethnicity and Religion in the Afghan Context*

In Afghanistan, religion and ethnicity define the socio-political status of its different local communities [see image 2]. Almost the entire population professes Sunni Islam¹¹, the religion

of the ethnic group of Pashtuns, who have historically held the political and religious power of the country. In the 19th century, the Pashtun ethnic group linked itself to the Kandahar madrasa¹² by bringing together Tajiks, Uzbeks and other mujahedeen from different parts of

¹¹ [Afghanistan, Religion And Social Profile | National Profiles | International Data | TheARDA](#)

¹² The school, located in southern Afghanistan in the homonymous province, is the most important religious institute in the country.

the world to fight first against the Soviet occupation (1979-1990) and then the American one (2001-2021). This is how the first operational nucleus of the Taliban was

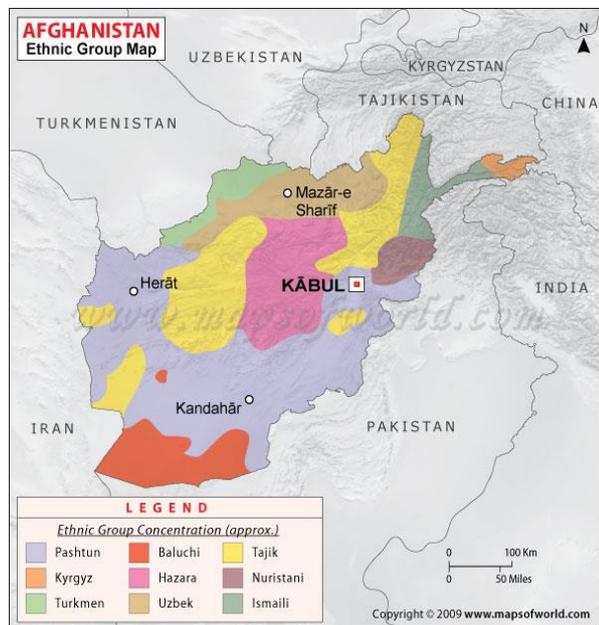
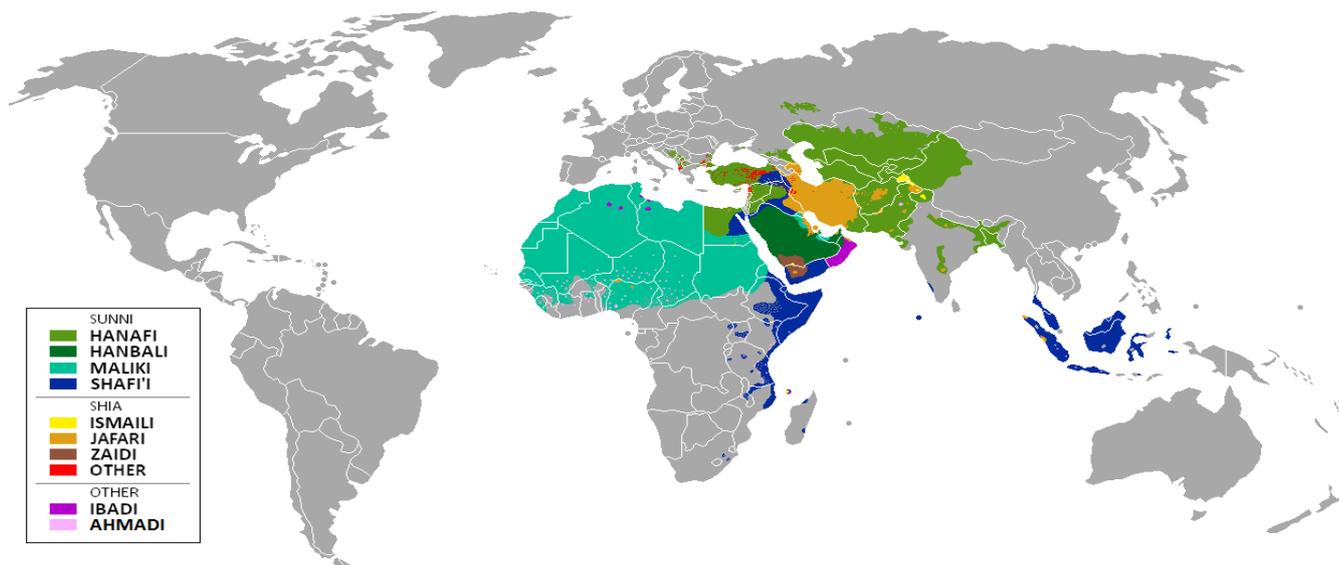


Image 2

The rest of the population, on the other hand, follows minority Islamic currents, Sufism¹³ or Shiism, or other minor cults. Among which, the Hazaras ethnic minority, largely Shiite, which has been the subject of violent attacks and massacres over the centuries at the hands of the Pashtun tribes.¹⁴

b) The raising of Salafist Islam as a mean of political insurgency

Salafi Islam is a revivalist religious movement whose goal is to re-establish the ancient Muslim glory within a great Islamic State, extending from Morocco up to the Philippines¹⁵ [see image 3]. Salafist thinking is the ideological substrate that justifies the "brutality" of jihadist actions against foreign forces, political entities and religious minorities and is characterized by the erosion of



established, which announced the birth of the Islamic Emirate of Kabul in 1996.

the bonds of traditional Islam that limit the use

¹³ A mystical current of Islam well established in Afghanistan, where important religious brotherhoods have sprung up and there are shrines and tombs of numerous Sufi sages.

¹⁴ For example, in the 18th century, about 62 percent of the original Hazara communities were massacred at the hands of Pashtun tribal leader Abdur Rahman.

¹⁵For further details: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, State University of New York Press, 2001, cap.IV; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004

of violence and resort to war.¹⁶ Although Salafists agree on the need to restore the Islamic State, discrepancies arise over how to achieve this objective and the geographical scope of the political project.¹⁷

Armed groups in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Interaction with the Taliban

The geography of Afghanistan with its porous borders, complex ethnic composition and long history of conflicts made the country a fertile ground for the establishment of armed Islamist groups, some of which are engaged in transnational terrorist activities [see image 4]. In this context, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a watershed for global jihadism, determining over the years a progressive pluralization and differentiation of terrorist groups, which makes it impossible today to conceive the jihadist galaxy as a monolithic bloc. In addition to the differences between the two main poles, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, there are fractures even within these two organizations; this led to the formation of entities with local objectives over time. In the Afghan context, terrorism and armed insurrection go hand in hand, shaping the strategic aspirations and objectives of individuals, groups and their interactions. .

How many Jihadist Groups are Operating in Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries? What are they? An Overview

The table below is a comprehensive overview of the wide range of jihadist groups operating in Afghanistan. Each one has its area of action, its political agenda and different interactions with the Taliban. In order to facilitate understanding, these entities have been classified as follows:

- a) *Groups with global aims*: those realities extending beyond their national borders with the aim of exporting jihad worldwide
- b) *Groups targeting Afghanistan*: those realities whose focus of action is mainly the liberation of Afghanistan and the establishment of an Afghan Islamic State.
- c) *Groups targeting India and Pakistan*: : those groups whose operations center resides in one of the two countries and whose main purpose is the liberation of the province of Kashmir from the Indian control.
- d) *Groups with local aspirations*: groups whose efforts are focused on internal jihad and have above all of a sectarian character

¹⁶ Cfr. Quintan Wiktorowicz, A Genealogy of Radical Islam, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 13 September 2004, cit. p. 75.

¹⁷ Cfr. J.Burke, Al-Qaeda Casting a Shadow of terror, London, IB Tauris 2003.

Category	Group	Interaction with the Taliban
Groups with global aims:	<p>Al Qaeda. Established by Osama bin Laden in 1988 on Afghan soil, today it is led by Ayman al Zawahiri. Its primary purpose is the union of all Muslims under the aegis of sharia and the dismantling of apostate regimes as well as the fight against the occupation of the infidels. Al Qaeda is present in at least 15 Afghan provinces and in the Indian subcontinent where it acts with Taliban approval under the name of AQIS (Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent) under the leadership of Asim Umar. Founded in 2014, AQIS aims to spread jihad in the subcontinent by standing as the champion of Muslim recriminations in India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and a part of Pakistan.</p>	<p>In 1990, Al-Qaeda sworn allegiance (ba'ya) to the Taliban and from that moment the two organizations have carried out joint attacks on the Afghan territory¹⁸. Although in the Doha talks (2019-2020)¹⁹, the Taliban made a commitment to prevent any terrorist group from operating in Afghanistan²⁰, the ties between the two organizations look steadfast: advisors to al Qaeda collaborate with Taliban units; the branches of the organization - present in the Arabian Peninsula²¹, in North Africa and the Sahel - welcomed with enthusiasm the news about the takeover of Kabul²².</p>
	<p>The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP)) is an affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria led by former Qaedist Shahab al-Mujari. Founded in 2015 by two ISIS emissaries and a group of disgruntled Taliban. Over time, ISIS-KP has expanded its area of operations, thanks to its involvement in drug trafficking in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, Badakhshan. The priority of the group is to destroy the influence of the Taliban in eastern Afghanistan and from there build a new large base of anti-Western global jihadism.</p>	<p>Relations between ISIS-KP and the Afghan Taliban are tense. ISIS-KP considers the Taliban as infidels in the same manner as Shiites²³ and the Taliban, in turn, ISIS-KP as an outsider group in the Afghan context²⁴. The latter attacks the Afghan Taliban almost every day²⁵. Some Taliban and al-Qaeda's extremist factions have joined ISIS-KP to undermine the authority of new Kabul's government²⁶.</p>
Groups targeting Afghanistan	<p>Haqqani Network (HN), was founded in the late 1980s by Jalaluddin Haqqani and now is led by his son, Sirajuddin Haqqani. It's strategic base is in the North of Waziristan in Pakistan from where it conducts cross border attacks in eastern Afghanistan and Kabul. Haqqani is considered the deadliest and most sophisticated group operating against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and is also described as the main point of contact between the Taliban and al Qaeda.</p>	<p>HN has a strong influence on the government in Kabul and serves as a link between Al Qaeda and the Taliban²⁷</p>

¹⁸ GOVERNMENT EXHIBIT 421 10-CR-019(S-4)(RJD), <https://www.longwarjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/EXHIBIT-421-ENG-TRANS-EX-420-76C5764D-1.pdf>

¹⁹ Peace negotiations taken place within Afghanistan led by Qatar with the involvement of the United States that led to the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan

²⁰ "Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18 year war, BBC News, 29 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51689443>

²¹ AQAP Optimistic of Afghan Taliban Victory Ushering New Conquests, Marking Turning Point in Muslim History", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 18 August 2021 <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/aqap-optimistic-of-afghan-taliban-victory-ushering-new-conquests-marking-turning-point-in-muslim-history.html>

²² Jihad Gillon, "Sahel: The Taliban are seen as a model of patience for al-Qaeda", The Africa Report, 24 August 2021

<https://www.theafricareport.com/119267/sahel-the-taliban-are-seen-as-a-model-of-patience-for-al-qaeda/>

²³ The latest attack on Shia communities is the October 15 attack against the mosque of Kandahar [Deadly explosion hits Shia mosque in Afghanistan's Kandahar](#)

²⁴ [Can the Taliban defeat ISIS in Afghanistan on its own?](#)

²⁵ [Can the Taliban defeat ISIS in Afghanistan on its own?](#)

²⁶ [ISIS-K is trying to undermine Afghanistan's Taliban regime, from inside and out. That's America's problem, too.](#)

²⁷ "The Haqqani History: Bin Ladin's Advocate Inside the Taliban", National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 389. 11 September 2012,

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB389/>:

Nirupama Subramanian, "Explained: Who are the Haqqani Network, the most powerful group in Taliban government?", 14 September 2021,

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-who-are-the-haqqani-network-the-most-powerful-group-in-the-taliban-government-7497369/>

Groups targeting India and Pakistan	<p>Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), is an anti-Shia group formed in Punjab in the mid-1980s. Nowadays it is known as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat and it operates primarily in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Punjab, Balochistan, and Karachi.</p> <p>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) was formed in 1996 by splitting off from Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). Its aim is to establish a Sunni Islamic state in Pakistan through violence and by declaring Shiites infidels. The group is based in eastern Afghanistan and is under the leadership of Muhammad Ajmal aka Akram Lahori. LJ is described as one of the most violent groups operating in Pakistan.</p>	<p>LeJ and SSP have very close ties with the Taliban to whom they have offered support both in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance and in Pakistan. All three groups are closely linked in their fight against the Shiites²⁸.</p>
	<p>Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) also known as Jama'at-ud-Da'awa, was founded in the late 1980s in Pakistan and is now led by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed. Its headquarters are located in the Pakistani province of Punjab and Pakistani Kashmir. LeT's ideology goes beyond the simple challenge posed to India's sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir in that the purpose of jihad is to fight for the dominance of Islam in the world. India, Israel, and the United States are its first enemies. Because of its network of training camps in Pakistan LeT poses a threat to U.S. security</p>	<p>LeT has infiltrated into Taliban, al-Qaeda and HN. Taliban and al-Qaeda are in doubt about LeT's allegiance due to its historical ties to ISIS-KP members. Anyway, this has not prevented the emergence of local rivalries that have turned into violent conflicts²⁹.</p>
	<p>Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), was formed in the 2000s by Kashmiri militant Masood Azhar and its headquarters in both Punjab and Azad Kashmir. JEM has several thousand armed militants active in India, Afghanistan and Pakistan whose aim is to annex Indian Kashmir to Pakistan.</p>	<p>JEM recognized the legitimacy of the Taliban-led government and asked for its support in the operation in Kashmir³⁰.</p>
	<p>Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HUJI), was formed in 1980 in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet army. After 1989, it shifted its attention to India and today it is active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, with the aim of annexing Indian Kashmir to Pakistan.</p>	<p>HUJI has peaceful relations with the Taliban and it's more oriented towards the east. Some of its members joined the Taliban after the victory of Kabul³¹.</p>
	<p>Hizbul-Mujahideen (HM) was founded in 1989 and is known as the armed wing of the major Pakistani Islamist party as well as the largest and oldest militant group operating in Indian Kashmir.</p>	<p>From 2005 to 2011, HM leader Mohammad Ilyas Kashmiri coordinated activities with members of the Taliban³² and al Qaeda in Waziristan³³.</p>

²⁸ [Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Terrorist Group of Pakistan](#)

²⁹ [Lashkar-e-Taiba in Perspective](#)

³⁰ [JeM chief Masood Azhar meets Taliban leadership, seeks 'help' in Kashmir](#)

³¹ [Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan Stokes Bangladesh's Terrorist Fears](#)

³² [HARAKAT-UL JIHAD ISLAMI | United Nations Security Council](#)

³³ [Hizbul Mujahideen's chief, Syed Salahuddin, seeks support from Taliban to attack India](#)

Groups with local aims	Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) , better known as the Pakistan Taliban, is one of the bloodiest armed groups operating in the region. Founded in 2007 by Baitullah Mehsud, it is now led by Maulana Fazlullah, "Mullah Radio" and has its operational headquarters in South Waziristan Agency, one of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). TTP has expanded its power to all four provinces of Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. Its objectives are overtly anti-Pakistan i.e unifying under Sharia law all anti-NATO military formations to practice defensive jihad.	After 11/09, Pakistani militaries and intelligence's factions have offered material and logistic support to the Taliban ³⁴ allowing the emergence of the cross-border TTP. Due to infighting within the TTP, in 2020 the Amjad Farooqi group, a faction of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi merged with TTP ³⁵ leading to an increase in attacks Pakistani officials and security forces ³⁶
	The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was formed between 1992 and 1997 in Central Asia. It operates in northern Afghanistan and Pakistan.	IMU boasts close ties with the Taliban, as a function of countering the Northern Alliance ³⁷ and ISIS-KP ³⁸ .
	The Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) , also known as the Islamic Party of Turkestan, aims to establish an independent Islamic state for the Uighurs who are Muslim Turkish speaking living in North China. ETIM has an active presence in Afghanistan, Syria, and North China.	ETIM has used Afghanistan as a training base for years. The Afghan Taliban has offered funding to ETIM leaders. Recently, following the support shown by China to the Taliban, the Taliban have forbidden ETIM to use Afghanistan as a launching ground for their attacks. ³⁹ .

Data Processing

The table above outlines a very complex picture, which is not confined to the Afghan soil alone and is not limited to the simple understanding of the two-way relations between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS-K and lastly al-Qaeda and ISIS-K. The political situation in Afghanistan is at the same time a centripetal and centrifugal force. Afghanistan remains an important center of aggregation and training for future aspiring jihadists, who in the future will

enrich the ranks of one of the groups active in the region and even those of more distant groups.

³⁴ [Pakistan's Islamic parties push for Taliban recognition in Afghanistan](#)

³⁵ [Taliban continue to enjoy safe haven, supply and logistic line extended to their war machine from Pakistan: Afghan UN envoy](#)

³⁶ [The Pakistani Taliban is Back – The Diplomat](#)

³⁷ When back in 1996, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan took over Kabul, the Northern United Front, originally formed by Afghan leaders and over the years joined by northern ethnic

communities, was established to counter the Taliban-led government. After the fall of Kabul in 2021, former leaders of the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban representatives reestablished the organization under the name “United Islamic Front for Salvation of Afghanistan”

³⁸ [The Northern Alliance \(or United Islamic Front for Salvation of Afghanistan - UIFSA\) Narrative | START.umd.edu](#)

³⁹ [Will Afghan Taliban honor its promise to China to make clean break with ETIM?](#)

	Raising of intra-jihadist tensions between ISIS-KP and the Taliban
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	The existing tensions between the Taliban and ISIS-KP were further exacerbated by the Doha agreement, which paved the way for the removal of the government of Ashraf Ghani and his seizure of power this summer. In light of international pressure exerted on the new government in Kabul, the Taliban will increasingly have to give up their more radical positions in order to gain more diplomatic legitimacy, which would lead to further defections from the organization for the benefit of the ISIS-KP. In this context, the risk of attacks by the ISIS-KP towards the government of Kabul would increase, this would be in turn an opportunity for the Taliban to gain greater credibility by obtaining support from regional and international actors to counter the threat.
	Strengthening of an Intra-Jihadist Cooperation against the ISIS-KP
Scenario 2 Probability level: mid-low	Growing rivalries between ISIS-K and the Taliban could exert a propulsive push towards greater cooperation among armed groups on Afghan soil and in neighboring countries for countering ISIS-K. Not only the majority of jihadist entities in the area do not support ISIS-K brutalities and its political agenda, but this would also be an opportunity for smaller groups to extend their reach and strengthen their effective capacities on the ground benefitting from the collaboration with the Taliban. They remain the strongest group in the area in terms of military, economic and political capabilities.
	Fragmentation in the Taliban front and reinforcement of the Haqqani Network
Scenario 3 Probability level: very low	The multiplicity of jihadist groups and their interactions in Afghanistan and neighboring countries is counterbalanced by an equal variety of divisions in the Taliban front itself, both in terms of the inclusive nature of the new government and of relations with Pakistan and Iran . In the medium-long run, these differences, combined with the power acquired by the Haqqani Network in the new government, could lead to increased discrepancies between the intransigent front and the more moderate one and, consequently, to the weakening of the political credibility of the organization in the eyes of the Afghan people but also of its regional and international sponsors.

1.3 The financing of the Taliban government through the opium and drug trade

by Alessio Briguglio

Abstract

Understanding the reasons why criminal actors and states resort to drug trafficking to finance their activities is an essential tool for understanding and combating the phenomenon. This activity has become the main source of revenue before the Taliban resistance and, now most likely, of the newborn Afghan government.

Methodological Approach

The rise and fall of the Taliban's asset holdings in proportion to the intensity of Afghan opium exports was the opening of this analysis. A starting point suggested by the predominantly numerical and financial nature of the topic, "excluding" the threat to national and international public order. Part of the data was then collected from research institutes belonging to the Eurozone, appearing to be a more reasonable choice than data from the US, one of the subjects involved in the exhibition. The similarities proposed with the South American experience with drug trafficking and narco-state have instead required a purely historical approach, given the events occurred in that area during the '90s.

Context Analysis

In Afghanistan, wars fuel opium harvests. In 1980, just a few months after the start of the Soviet invasion of the country (December 1979), production was around 200 tons. When, nine years later, the Red Army withdrew, it had increased sixfold, reaching 1,200 tons. More than 90% of the heroin consumed worldwide is produced in Afghanistan; this allows to deduce the volume of business, the profit and the power able to guarantee the producers. In 2001, at the beginning of the U.S. "War on Terror", the Taliban banned the cultivation of poppy - also in order not to offer easy rhetorical and propagandistic appeals - and this caused the

harvest to collapse, the following year, from 3,200 to 185 tons. With the arrival of the NATO contingent (ISAF), the Taliban hierarchy changed its mind: 365 days were enough for the unsustainable loss of income guaranteed by poppy exports to become evident. Six years later, in 2007, the absolute record of 7,400 tons of exported product was reached. The Taliban were not the only ones. Terrorism of Islamic fundamentalist matrix has cleared customs of drug trafficking to finance its own jihad, often going so far as to consider the assumption of drugs compatible with its own radicalization

path⁴⁰. An unprecedented use in the contemporary Islamic history, though anything but new to the medieval experience of armed nuclei coming from the same geographical areas. Today, Afghanistan is considered the World Opium Bank. Plantations are concentrated in the southern regions of the country, from Helmand via Kandahar to Uruzgan and Zabul. The latest report released by the UNODC (UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention), draws an alarming scenario: after 2016, opium plantations have expanded to 201 thousand hectares (+10%), while production has seen an increase of 43%, reaching 4,800 tons, the fourth highest harvest of all time.

The poppy represents a fundamental business not only for the Taliban who profit from taxes on crops, production and transit, but also for the police and corrupt institutions. As for the peasants, the poorest in this chain, with opium they avoid risky transportation and with a kilo they earn 400 times more than with a kilo of beans, for example.

Narcoterrorism from Narcos to Terrorists - From Latin America to the Middle East

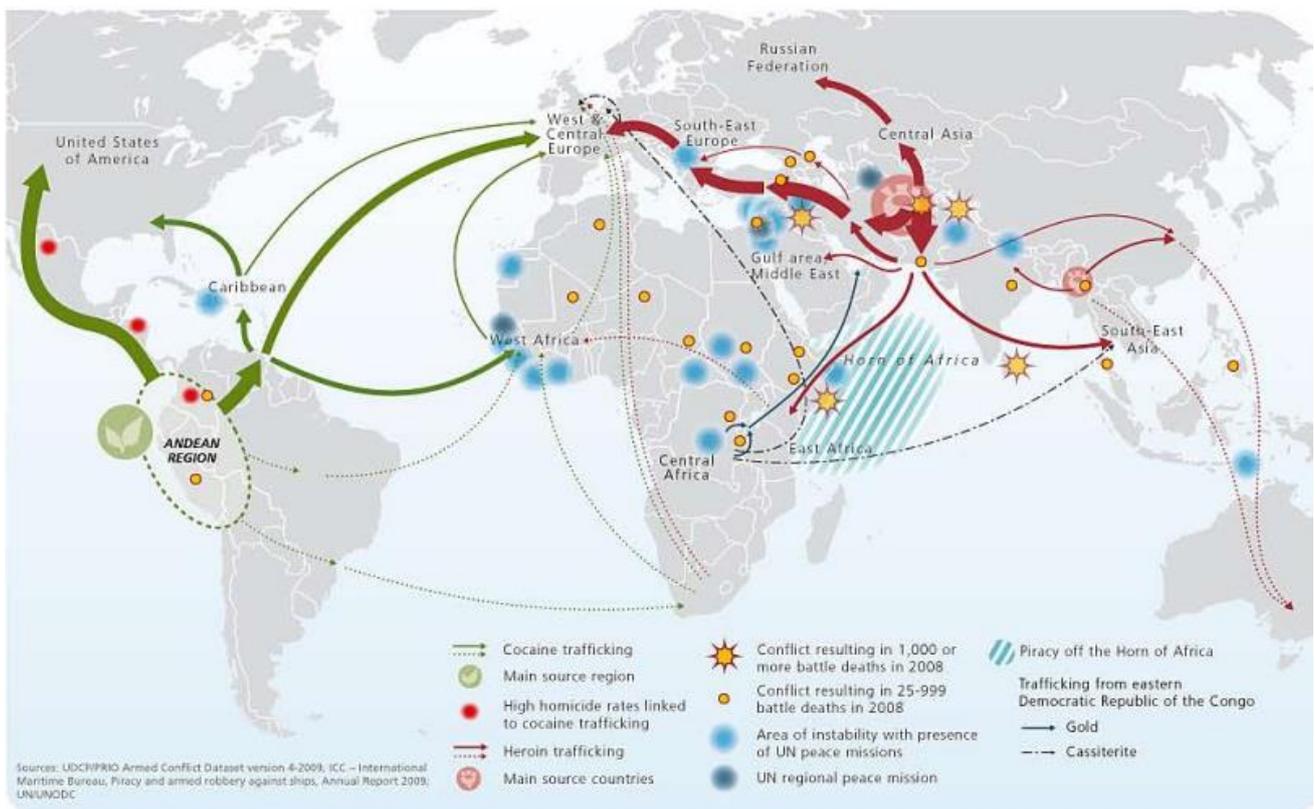
Exactly like mafias all over the world, the Taliban have learned that drug trafficking works

well to finance their organizational structure and establish strong friendships.

The phenomenon of narcoterrorism originated in Latin America, where the guerrillas and the various independence movements, in order to sustain their armed struggles against the various governments, have privileged relations with drug traffickers, sometimes replacing them, in order to guarantee adequate financial resources. To date, there is no doctrinal definition of "narcoterrorism". The U.S. DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), however, highlighting the main link between illicit for-profit activities and subversive organizations, has defined it as: "*subset of terrorism, in which terrorist groups, or associated individuals, participate directly or indirectly in the cultivation, manufacture, transportation, or distribution of controlled substances and the monies derived from these activities. Further, narco-terrorism may be characterized by the participation of groups or associated individuals in taxing, providing security for, or otherwise aiding or abetting drug trafficking endeavors in an effort to further, or fund, terrorist activities*".⁴¹

⁴⁰ According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs, in many cases, toxicological examinations made on the bodies of those responsible for suicide attacks in Europe have revealed the use of substances in the hours and days preceding the attacks, probably in a "preparatory" function.

⁴¹ International Drug Trafficking and Terrorism - Asa Hutchinson, DEA Administrator -Testimony Before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information - Washington, DC - March 13, 2002



The existing link at the base of this relationship is essentially economic: the narco groups pay the terrorist groups to let drug loads pass through their areas, while the guerrillas and the terrorist formations, providing them with essential logistic "services" such as the transit of the "goods" through the controlled territories, the surveillance of illegal cultivations, the availability of clandestine runways where small planes with drug loads land, finance their activities. The Taliban have deepened their knowledge of the market. In a period of over-supply and therefore of decreasing prices, in 2008 they understood how much more profitable it was to sell the finished product - heroin - instead of just

controlling the export of raw material, or semi-finished product.

Since then, the Afghan province of Helmand is no longer the largest producer of opium (over 40%), but also a refiner, from whose 190 refineries the Taliban collect monthly tributes.

According to a SIGAR report (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction⁴²), U.S. defence spending between 2002 and 2017 would amount to \$8.6 billion. A figure used, also, to stifle drug trafficking in Afghanistan in order to deny Taliban funds. In addition to poppy eradication, the U.S. and allies have supported alternative crop programs (e.g., olive trees), air raids on suspected heroin labs, and other measures.

⁴² SIGAR Quarterly Reports - July 30, 2021 Quarterly Report to Congress - Friday, July 30, 2021

Data processing

	The Taliban will establish itself, for all intents and purposes, as the undisputed overlords of the Middle Eastern drug trade
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	<p>As in the case of armed nuclei, narcos and South American revolutionaries, the Taliban have understood the importance and the economic and relational capacity guaranteed by drug trafficking, also considering the total guarantee represented by their absolute territorial control. The revenue guaranteed by the poppy trade is too high to expect an effective cessation of poppy activities by the newly installed Taliban government. According to the World Drug Report, , between 2010 and 2019 the number of opioid users worldwide nearly doubled: from just over 31 million to just under 62 million estimated users last year. With demand like that, it's implausible that supply would suddenly cease, not even for religious reasons. It should be added that even the confessional boundary appears to have been destroyed: in fact, as mentioned, fundamentalism has willingly accepted the assumption of drugs, above all within its own armed groups. On the basis of these considerations we can only conclude in the sense of a total restoration of the apparatus of drug trafficking, the same structure that has provided the main source of state subsidy to the Taliban apparatus before and during the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan.</p>
	The need to establish strong political alliances with neighboring nations will force Afghanistan to scale back its opium trade
Scenario 2 Probability level: medium	<p>Even if for purely political purposes of getting closer to Iran, the Taliban government will not, in fact, pick up exactly "where it left off". A façade operation that, with high probability, will change very little in practice despite certain symbolic measures (see the declared intention to abandon the use of the burqa, by now an incontrovertible synonym of total submission, in favor of the much more traditional hijab). Nevertheless, just as has happened in certain historical phases of Latin American governments, the government, alongside a utilitarian repression of the phenomenon, will welcome the corruption that allows it to develop. In this way, a scenario would be created in which a front government would apply a hysterical repression against certain categories considered guilty of preparation and consumption of drugs, while organized crime would ensure the satisfaction of the world demand for opium under a corrupt and conniving State.</p>
	More conservative religious bangs will prohibit a return to massive trafficking of raw material for narcotics
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	<p>Since the total prohibition of poppy cultivation and trade has a strong precedent in Afghan history and especially in Taliban history, it is likely, although residual, that one of the internal currents, political and/or religious, gaining the upper hand over the others, will re-establish the ban imposed in the early 2000s in order to discourage, if not prohibit, poppy cultivation and trade.</p> <p>Such a hypothesis would bring modern Afghanistan (only from the point of view of criminal repression of drug trafficking) closer to what happened in Cuba after Fidel's revolution. Banning the cultivation, processing and export of narcotics was constantly on the agenda of the Castro government. It is not, in fact, to underestimate the political importance of such a measure that would represent, for the Afghan government, the perfect break with the past to be constantly flaunted considering the high propaganda power.</p> <p>However, it is equally evident that renouncing the income from drug trafficking, a robust and effective financial channel, would not be an option for organized crime. This would most likely cause years of harsh internal conflicts.</p> <p>Again, as happened in South America or Russia with the Soviet regime, the harshest repression would meet with the opposite result. Local criminal groups would wage war on institutions in order to defend their own market. A conflict without quarter that would further destabilize the area.</p>

1.4 The role of Pan-Turkist countries and Turkey

by Alessio Frugiuele

Abstract

The quick occupation of Kabul by the Taliban represented an unexpected event and resulted in much turmoil in an historically unstable area. In this context, the Pan-Turkist countries are the most affected by the destabilisation associated with the comeback of the Taliban, but they can also play a crucial role towards the normalisation process. To this end, Turkey is definitely the country most actively involved in crisis management. In fact, it intends to act as a chosen speaker of the new regime, but also assert its influence in the region, open up new business opportunities and find a new position within NATO, all at once. Meanwhile, Turkey is also bound to face the plans of the major players in the area: Russia and China.

Methodological approach

This work deals with the approach of Turkey and Pan-Turkist countries vis-à-vis the shock caused by the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. As this is an evolving situation, the sources selected to conduct the analysis mainly include press agencies, documents issued by humanitarian organisations regarding the internal situation in Afghanistan and declarations released during bilateral or multilateral meetings by political leaders directly involved in the crisis management.

Context analysis

Historically, Afghanistan has been a crucial country, both at a regional level and for Europe-Asia relationships, thanks to its position as a natural corridor between East and West, and also for its being rich in resources, especially those minerals that are critical for the high-tech industry, such as lithium, bauxite, copper and iron. Immediately after the US withdrawal, Turkey has come into action together with Pan-Turkist countries including mainly Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – members of the international organisation established on October 3rd, 2009, in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, and also known as Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States or Turkic

Council. Currently, they represent the countries most committed to managing the transition. The crisis in Afghanistan, an Observer State of the Council since May 3rd, 2021, raises great concern for both humanitarian (increased migration flows) and security reasons (increase in terrorism), but can also represent an opportunity for Pan-Turkist countries to act as chosen speakers of the new Taliban regime.

Reactions to the Afghan crisis: the ambitions of Turkey and the Turkic Council

In the aftermath of US troops withdrawal, Turkey focused on establishing a dialogue with the new Taliban leadership, to guarantee regional stability and prevent a new wave of refugees. Indeed, Afghanistan finds itself in an extremely delicate situation. Currently, except for the areas with a Pashtun majority, the new regime does not seem to have full control over the Afghan territory. From the humanitarian standpoint, then, according to the Italian Red Cross, [approximately 18 million Afghans](#) are facing hunger and poverty as a consequence of the recent war, drought and the pandemic, too. The destabilisation due to the Islamic State (IS) adds up to an already unstable situation. Specific reference is made to Isis-k (Islamic State Khorasan Province), a group linked to the Isis and responsible for the attack of October 15th, 2021, to the Shiite minority at Kandahar Mosque.

In this context, Erdogan's strategy for normalisation runs along two tracks: the first is within the Turkic Council, the second one is outside the Council and is linked to Turkey membership to NATO. On September 27th, 2021, an extraordinary meeting of the Turkic Council was held in Istanbul, Turkey, to discuss the Afghan situation. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan attended the

meeting together with Viktor Mátis, Hungarian Ambassador to Turkey. The meeting was a very important event, highlighting the unity within the Council. The countries have in fact reaffirmed their commitment to further developing a mutual collaboration and have taken a clear position on the Afghan situation, releasing a [joint statement](#) at the end of the meeting.

In addition to reaffirming the provisions of the UN Charter, the document expresses the willingness to support the humanitarian and stabilisation efforts made by the international community to assist the Afghan people in their endeavour to achieve lasting peace, national reconciliation, stability and development. The topics featured during the meeting include the wish for the new Afghan Government to establish an Administration that is united, inclusive and representative, reflecting the rich diversity of the Afghan nation, as well as the need for Afghanistan to take effective measures to prevent and combat terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State and Al Qaida, preventing them from moving to neighbouring states. For its part, the international community should coordinate an effective and sustainable response to prevent increasing displacement of Afghans.

The policy carried out within the Turkic Council adds up to the regional strategy pursued by Turkey, as the last NATO outpost in the region. Back in June 2021, during the meeting held just outside Bruxelles NATO summit, Erdogan and

Biden had already reached an agreement about the role of Turkey in the management of Kabul Airport and had also agreed that [NATO would provide a huge financial support](#) to Turkish security mission. In August, then, the worsening situation and the occupation of Kabul by the Taliban led Erdogan to speed up and intensify the dialogue with the new Afghan leadership, also entering into a cooperation agreement with Qatar to secure the airport.

Erdogan's moves ended up crediting Turkey with the new Taliban governance, which led to the meeting held on October 14th, 2021, in Ankara between the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and a high-level delegation of the Afghan Taliban. The summit took place after the talks held between the Taliban and a delegation of representatives from the US, EU and several European countries in Doha, Qatar, on October 9th, 2021. After the summit,

Cavusoglu declared he had conveyed the Turkish expectations concerning security for the resumption of regular flights from Kabul and had also suggested the Taliban to adopt a more liberal policy on female education and employment. On the very same day, at the G20, President Erdogan maintained that the international community should keep the channel of dialogue with the Taliban open to “patiently and gradually steer” them towards a more inclusive government.

Turkey's position during the Afghan crisis stresses its tendency to diversify and expand Turkish external relations, with the aim of increasing not only its political but also its economic influence in the region. The pandemic has in fact put Turkish economy to the test and maintaining good relations with the new Taliban leadership might put Turkey and Turkish companies in the front line for the

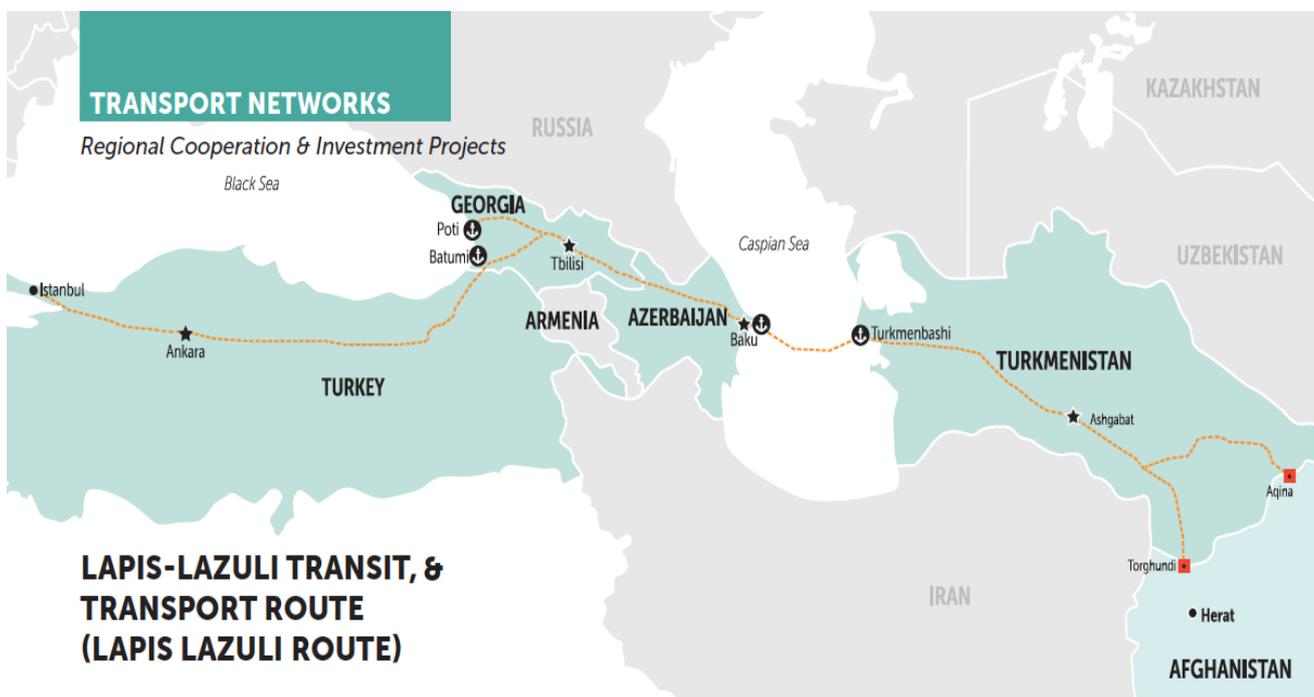


Image 1 Lapis Lazuli Corridor

reconstruction of the country. Moreover, at the regional level, the Afghan situation might hinder the transit through the [Lapis Lazuli Corridor](#), an agreement on the creation of new infrastructures signed back in 2007 by Turkey, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and an important driver of both economic growth and foreign trade for the signatories.

Economic stability and continuity in regional cooperation, mainly on infrastructural projects in Central Asia, certainly constitute critical issues in the Afghan crisis. In this context, Turkmenistan stands out: as of the occupation of Kabul, in fact, Ashgabat's approach has always been quite practical. On one side Afghan [refugees were rejected](#), instead, from the political and diplomatic standpoint, Turkmen authorities

proved open, and hastened to start talks with the new Taliban government to be reassured especially about the feasibility of the **TAPI** (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) project. The pipeline, also referred to as the "Peace pipeline", is an infrastructure of paramount importance, which should deliver up to 33 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year from Turkmenistan to India, via Afghanistan and Pakistan. In an interview released to Sky News on August 17th, 2021 Muhammad Suhail Shaheen, representative of the Taliban, reassured the neighbouring countries about the intentions of the new government to [implement not only the TAPI, but also other road and railway construction projects](#).

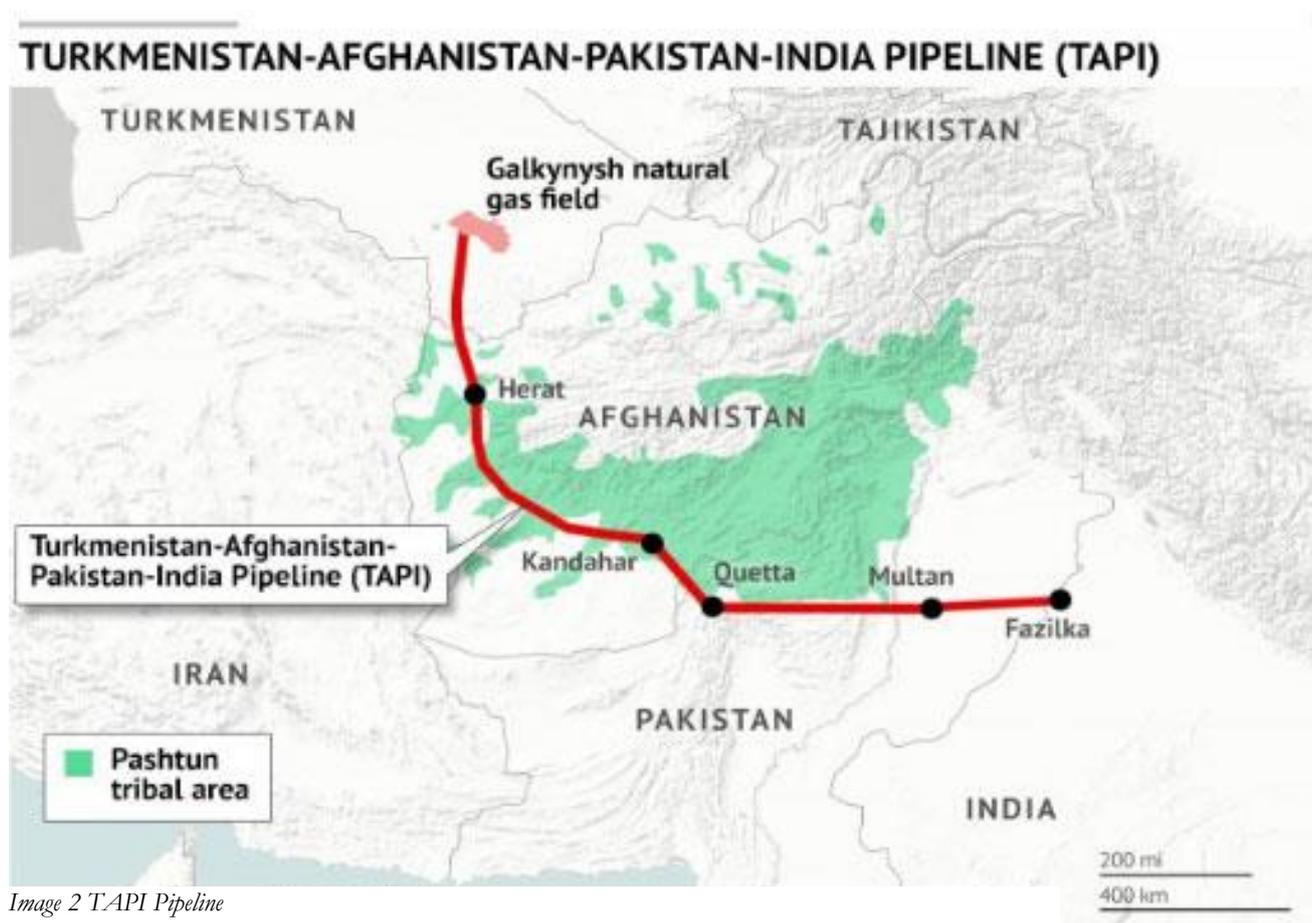


Image 2 TAPI Pipeline

The relationship with Moscow and Beijing

The Turkish design will necessarily have to find a way to coexist with the interests of the two superpowers in the area, namely Russia and China. Moscow and Beijing, in fact, are following closely the developments of the Afghan situation. For both of them, the greatest dangers deriving from the return to power of the Taliban are connected with the risk of a Pan-Islamist drift and increased terrorism. Such a scenario might cause high instability in all Central Asia, especially in the former Soviet Republics. In this case, Moscow might be forced to intervene under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These are the reasons why, unlike Erdogan, Putin is behaving quite cautiously, stressing the need to engage in talks with the new regime, but at the same time inviting the countries [not to rush in officially recognising](#) the Taliban's rule, as it is not representative of the entire Afghan population. On the other side, Afghan instability and the Pan-Islamist drift would affect the extremely critical Chinese region of Xinjiang: a Muslim area with Turkish-speaking majority, that has long been a source of tensions in China's relationships with Western countries. Alarming signs for Beijing have already been reported, though. In fact, according to [Isis-K declarations](#), some Uyghur separatists seem to have been involved in the recent terrorist attack in Kandahar. Should the news be confirmed,

there would be a concrete risk that Afghanistan could become a training base for Uyghurs, who might in turn carry out attacks in China, threatening Chinese territorial integrity. Such concerns also steered Beijing to strive for the stabilisation of the Afghan political situation, leveraging on economic cooperation and the increased involvement of Kabul in the Belt and Road Initiative projects. From this perspective, the common interest in the stabilisation of the new, but shaky, Afghan governance might mark a rapprochement between Beijing and Ankara and create the conditions for an unexpected cooperation, overcoming – at least in the short term – the tensions about the question of the Uyghurs, a Muslim ethnic group under Turkey's protection.

Data processing

The analysis conducted highlights three elements: the fragility of the new Taliban government, the crucial role played by Turkey, and the waiting position of Russia and China. Based on the data collected, the following three future scenarios can be envisaged – from the least to the most likely

	Increased cooperation among Turkish-speaking countries and among the latter and Afghanistan, to handle the transition and migration flows towards Europe
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	In this scenario, Turkey would play a key mediation role and would enhance its influence within NATO. Such a balanced situation would see Turkey counterweight the inevitable economic penetration of Afghanistan by Moscow and Beijing with the support of the North Atlantic Alliance, Europe and the Pan-Turkist countries.
	Failure of Turkish mediation, increased migration flows and Pan-Islamist drift
Scenario 2 Probability level: medium	Crisis of the Taliban government and high regional instability due to increased terrorism in neighbouring countries. In this second scenario, the fragility of the new Afghan government, migration flows and terrorist threats would trigger internal crises in Central Asian countries. Political instability and security issues would thus give Moscow the opportunity to resume its connections dating back to the Soviet period and act as the power guaranteeing regional security. At the same time, the growing tensions in Xinjiang would increase international pressures on Beijing, but also Chinese engagement in the area. In this sense, China would leverage on its economic power to strengthen Afghan governance.
	Failure of Turkish actions and collapse of the Taliban regime
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	In this context, economic constraints, internal conflicts and the advance of Isis-related groups would put Afghanistan in a situation similar to that of the so-called “failed states”, with its institutions collapsed. In this situation, the possible contrasts between permanent members of the UN Security Council might lead Russia and China to deploy peace-keeping forces, initiating a State-building operation and dividing Afghanistan in two influence areas. The augmented regional engagement of Moscow and Beijing would result in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, but would also increase the conflicts with the USA and its allies. In such a scenario, Turkey’s position could go in two directions, namely NATO and EU. Ankara would end up playing a strategic role, being the only joining link between the North Atlantic Alliance and Central Asia. At the same time, thanks to the progress in the Russian-Chinese partnership, Ankara and the EU might stabilise their bilateral relations, renewing Turkey’s accession negotiations to join the European Union.

Part II

Global level



2.1 The European Union after Afghanistan. New momentum for European common defense?

by Francesco Bortoletto and Marco D'Amato

Abstract

With the recent disengagement of the United States in Afghanistan, discussions have resumed in Europe on the role that the European Union (EU) should also have in terms of defense and security. The accusation that is often levelled at Brussels is that the EU has a weak positioning in the international arena, even due to the low inclination of European member countries to transfer their sovereignty from the national to the European level in a strategic field such as the one of the defense and foreign policy.

Methodological Approach

The following paper outlines the stages – analyzing official sources and declarations – that led to the current framework of the common European defense, underlining the difficulties in achieving greater integration in this field and describing the possible future scenarios. Although the declarations of several representatives of the European institutions suggest there is the political will to pursue this path, multiple factors could hinder its success.

Context Analysis

a) Attempts of Integration in the Defense Sector: from the EDC to the EDA

The concept of a common European defense mechanism dates back to the end of World War II. In October 1950, the French Prime Minister René Pleven presented to the National Assembly the proposal for the so-called **European Defense Community** (EDC), which envisaged the creation of a European army controlled by a supranational authority and financed by a common budget⁴³. In the following decades, the

European integration in the defense sector took place mainly in the context of NATO, especially starting from 1954 when the German Federal Republic formally joined the Organization. In those years, there were another two attempts in the same direction: firstly, the **Western European Union** (WEU), an international regional organization of military security and political cooperation, born with the amendment

⁴³In this scenario, a European weapons and equipment program would also be launched under the authority of a European defense minister, who in turn, would operate under a European Defense Council. The ambitious idea was supported by most Western countries. In the initial plan, Pleven envisaged the integration of France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux

countries into the EDC, but the initiative also received support from the United Kingdom and the United States. The EDC Treaty was signed in May 1952 but, as early as August 1954, the French National Assembly rejected it, refusing even to discuss the matter in court.

of the Brussels Treaty of 1948⁴⁴; second – after trying to achieve bilateral cooperation in the field of weapons – in February 1976, European NATO members founded the Independent European Program Group (IEPG) to promote cooperation in the procurement of weapons⁴⁵. The fall of the Soviet Union and the European rapprochement with the Warsaw Pact countries as well as the Balkan crisis in the early 1990s raised new questions about the purpose and direction of the defense policy in Europe.

In 2004, the **European Defense Agency** (EDA) was established with the task of promoting collaboration, new initiatives and solutions to improve the defense capabilities of European members that in May 2017 wanted to strengthen their mission, transforming the EDA into the lead operator for EU-funded defense-related activities.

What does the EDA do?

It is in charge of:

- 1) Harmonizing requirements to provide operational capacities;
- 2) Doing research and innovation to develop technological demonstrators;
- 3) Carrying out training and retention exercises to support common security and defense policy operations.

It also works to strengthen the European defense industry and it facilitates integration between national military actors and EU policies in the field of defense..

⁴⁴Involvement in the debates between the late 1950s and early 1960s on the presence of nuclear weapons on European soil, the WEU also played the role of liaison between the United Kingdom and the European institutions until its accession to the European Community in 1973.

b) *The PESCO and the Most Recent Initiatives*

A further drive for integration in this field certainly came from the birth of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (**PESCO**) launched in 2018. It is a permanent structured cooperation, formed by 25 Member States, currently engaged in 47 projects in various sectors: training facilities, land training systems, maritime and air systems, cyber defense, multiple joint support services and space.

The official document "The strategic review of PESCO 2020" drawing the programmatic lines for the period 2021-2025 show the willingness of Member States to embark on a new phase of the European integration in the security and defense sector. This will result in the establishment of the [European defense fund](#) (EDF) officially launched in June 2021, following numerous negotiations inevitably delayed by the SARS Cov-2 pandemic. This fund provides an

What is the permanent structured cooperation?

It is an institutionalized decision-making procedure, provided by Article 42.6 and Protocol 10 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), which allows a series of member countries to be able to collaborate on specific issues, or areas, without the full support of all members.

⁴⁵Their objectives were threefold: to strengthen the contribution of European allies to the common defense of the NATO alliance; improve the European technological base and balance the US-Europe defense trade.

investment of € 7.9 billion until 2027 split into two parts: one allocated for research, worth €2.6 billion, and one for development programs, worth €5.3 billion, which follow the line of two projects preceding the [Edidp](#) (the European defense industry development program) and the [Padr](#), the preparatory action in the field of research.

European Common Defense in Light of the US Debacle in Afghanistan

a) EU Institutions' Role

The rapid deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan and its potential security implications have revived the debate about the collective defense capabilities of the European Union, currently existing more in form than in substance. In the aftermath of the 26 August terrorist attack, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commission vice-president (HR/VP), Josep Borrell Fontelles, urged all Member States to create a joint defense force.

Now, with the United States no longer willing to engage in “other peoples’ wars”, there is a need for a modest-sized European ‘first strike force’ (around 5-6,000 troops) to be rapidly deployed in conflict areas around the globe, and especially close to the bloc’s borders. The Commission is working on a proposal, the so-called “Strategic

compass”, whose first draft was discussed at a Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 15 November 2021 and which the European Council has committed to approve by March 2022.

According to Internal Market commissioner Thierry Breton, “it is time (for the EU) to come of age” and achieve the much touted “strategic autonomy”, i.e., independence from US military protection. The question, he argued, “is not ‘if’ but ‘when’” the Union will equip itself with defence capabilities. For this to happen, Europe needs to elaborate a ‘security and defence doctrine’, based on a ‘projection, operational, flexible and rapidly deployable military force’ as well as a ‘new European institutional and political framework’, centred on the much-vaunted European Security Council.⁴⁶

b) Member States' Priorities

The convening of a European defense summit in March, during the French presidency of the Council (January-June 2022), is not a mere coincidence: Paris has long been actively promoting a joint European defense effort, even if reactions from other member states have been relatively cold⁴⁷. However, it will probably not be easy neither to agree on the path to follow nor to bring everyone to the table in the first place. Berlin, for instance, seems to have different strategic and economic interests than Paris, at

⁴⁶ Charles Michel, head of the European Council, seems to share this view, having called for an “honest reflection on European defence” that would lead to a “convergence” between the Member States and even “unity on issues that are often a matter of national competence”.

⁴⁷ It is also clear that Emmanuel Macron (who famously defined NATO as ‘brain dead’ in 2019) is trying to take over the scepter of EU master from Angela Merkel. Next spring, French voters will be called to the polls and Monsieur Le Président is aiming for re-election to the Elysée.

least in the Eastern Mediterranean. While France signed a deal to supply vessels to Greece in the context of a mutual aid commitment against Turkey's militaristic expansionism, Germany sold submarines to Ankara, thus effectively altering the power relations in that strategic area. The latter is indeed crucial not only in terms of security but also of energy supply, due to the rich natural gas deposits discovered in those disputed waters.

Italian Defence Minister Lorenzo Guerini argued for the EU to think of its own defense in terms of strategic autonomy, not as an alternative to NATO, the EU should rather aim at "strengthening the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance". Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who chaired last year's G20, also seems to be backing Macron on the issue.

However, countries such as the Baltics and other Central and Eastern EU members are generally opposed to any project that would make Europeans autonomous from NATO, amid fears that this could push Washington to neglect its allies on the Alliance's Eastern flank. The United Kingdom, too, has traditionally opposed projects of a European army for similar reasons. Support for EU military adventures is also rather low in Austria and Denmark.

Nevertheless, even in the absence of unanimity at the Council (required for any foreign policy decision), some alternatives can be resorted to avoiding blocking any joint actions. Some examples include "traditional" international agreements outside the framework of the

Treaties (as experienced during the Euro crisis), as well as enhanced cooperation under Article 44 TEU, which would circumvent opposition by the most reluctant States (even though it should be noted that they require unanimity to be launched). President Draghi and German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, among others, have recently backed these solutions.

"What we need is the European defence union" (Ursula von der Leyen)

The key points singled out by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are (i) the creation of a 'situational awareness' to enhance intelligence cooperation, (ii) enhanced interoperability to better exploit synergies between all Member States through 'common European platforms' and to reduce dependence on external aid and, finally, (iii) the development of EU capabilities in the cybersphere ('cyber security', 'cyber defence' and 'cyber resilience' being the key words)).

Data Processing

	Greater European integration on common defense but unlikely creation of an army
Scenario 1 Level of probability: high	<p>If what has been lacking so is the widespread political will for greater integration on the issue, recent developments in Afghanistan may be the first useful window for European representatives to take that step forward that many have long expected. In recent years, France, Germany, Italy and Spain have worked to give impetus to the project, these efforts resulted in the development of various instruments: the PESCO, the annual coordinated review (Card) and the EDF fund (7.9 billion euros for seven years) preceded by the two pilot programs Edidp and Padr. However, the issue seems to depend more on a political rather than a military vision, especially concerning the relations with the United States and NATO, and in turn, is part of the wider debate on European strategic autonomy. For some time, a radical vision (French), which think of the EU strategic autonomy as complete independence, and a more moderate (Italian and German), which understands it as a “European strengthening of the Atlantic alliance” have been confronting each other. For several years, Emmanuel Macron has been dusting off the proposal for "a true European army", which was however recently held back by the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who reiterated that the European Union will never be a military alliance, as the Atlantic alliance already guarantees European defense. Furthermore, an element that must be taken into consideration is the unanimity required to launch the EU military missions. However, one should bear in mind, concerning the interposition force advocated by Borrell, that already back in 1999, the European chancelleries agreed on the creation of the so-called “<i>EU battalions</i>”, which, however, were never used.</p>
	Complete European integration on the issue and creation of a common army
Scenario 2 Level of probability: medium	<p>In this second scenario, the creation of a common army would have a double historical meaning. The first is above all symbolic: after Brexit, an event that questioned the stability of the Union, it would be a huge step towards an ever-closer Union, the ultimate goal enshrined in the treaties of the EU, a process on hold since the (failed) 2004 attempt at drafting a European Constitution. On the other hand, a military integration would in turn mean greater cooperation on various fronts, i.e. logistics, intelligence and above all, of involvement – not any more at a national level – at a European level in international events. Moreover, this would be the "natural" evolution of the European project, if it is conceived as a process of gradual sharing of sovereignty by its member states (however that sharing does not necessarily mean surrendering: in the context of foreign policy, for example, national governments could remain the main players, despite enjoying the benefits of enhanced cooperation. However, rather than the creation of a European army, which would also face problems such as language barriers and the need for highly efficient logistical coordination, the creation of special departments or restricted battalions with specific purposes seems more feasible. An example is the European naval program Patrol Corvette, carried out jointly – under PESCO – by Italy, France, Spain and Greece (with Portugal as an observer) and which should allow the construction of European corvettes to patrol the Mediterranean by 2027. Strengthening cooperation at the intelligence level to face hybrid threats is also another good example.</p>
	Complete European integration on the issue, creation of a common army and European "interventionism" in hotspots of the world
Scenario 3 Level of probability: low	<p>The idea of full integration in a pivotal area of national sovereignty currently seems to be ruled out of the possible scenarios for the EU. It is clear that the main obstacle to this outcome is mainly political: the knot of sovereignty, to be surrendered or shared, is still crucial for the European policy, namely on the issues where unanimity is needed to make key decisions – which is precisely the case of the defense policy. For now, a real European army, perhaps detached from the logic of national contingents (a step even further than NATO) and ready to intervene in conflict zones all over the world, will hardly see the day. Surely, it is not impossible that it will be implemented in the future, but in the current political situation, the premises are not solid enough to embark on a journey in this direction.</p>

Afghanistan: What will the Consequences for the Biden Administration be?

by Federico Pani

Abstract

The Afghan critical affair has overwhelmed the Biden administration, criticized not only by most of the American public opinion but also by its European allies. However, previous US administrations are not exempt from liability, indeed they did not manage to increase the country's level of democratization and eradicate the rampant corruption. Probably, domestic issues are the biggest threat for the Biden administration: the resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic, protests against the abortion law and social malcontent risk jeopardizing the smooth course of the Democratic administration, especially in view of the mid-term elections

Methodological Approach

The main sources used for this paper were analyses from research institutes and think tanks, especially for the part concerning the Afghan issue. Research for the paper also relied on articles found in magazines. For the part concerning national policies, the main sources consulted were articles and essays found in American and Italian national newspapers and magazines.

Context Analysis

The United States remained in Afghanistan for twenty years: the American government has allocated \$145 billion in an attempt to rebuild the country, while the Department of Defense (DOD) spent \$837 billion for the conflict⁴⁸ to prevent Kabul from becoming a safe haven for terrorists⁴⁹. In December 2009, worried about the prospect of having to start everything from scratch eight years later⁵⁰, President Obama announced the dispatch from West Point

Academy of an additional thirty thousand American soldiers in Afghanistan⁵¹, to allow the

During the conflict, 2443 American soldiers, 1144 allies and approximately 111000 civilians lost their lives

(Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update 2021, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, July 2021)

Afghan army and government to continue

⁴⁸*“What we need to learn: lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction”*, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, August 2021.

⁴⁹*“The Cost of Debt-financed War: Public Debt and Rising Interest for Post-9/11 War Spending”*, di Heidi Peltier, Watson Institute International & Public Affairs, Brown University, January 2020.

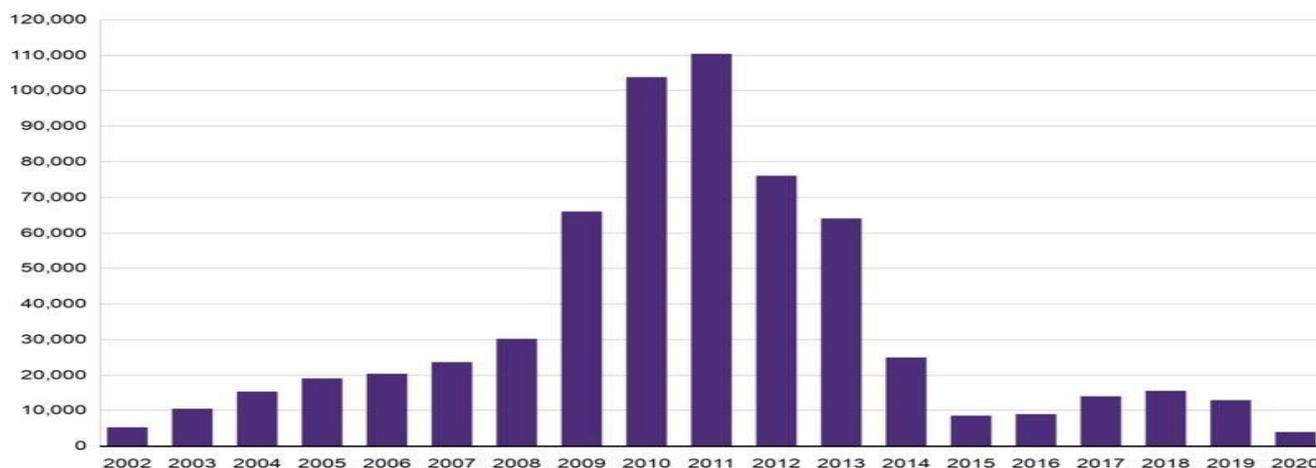
⁴⁹*“Country Brief: Afghanistan”*, Third Way, 2019.

⁵⁰Anne E. Kornblut, Scot Wilson, Karen De Young, *“Obama pressed for faster surge”*, The Washington Post, December 6, 2009.

⁵¹*“Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan”*, December 1, 2009.

US troop levels in Afghanistan

2002 - 2020



2020 figure as of December

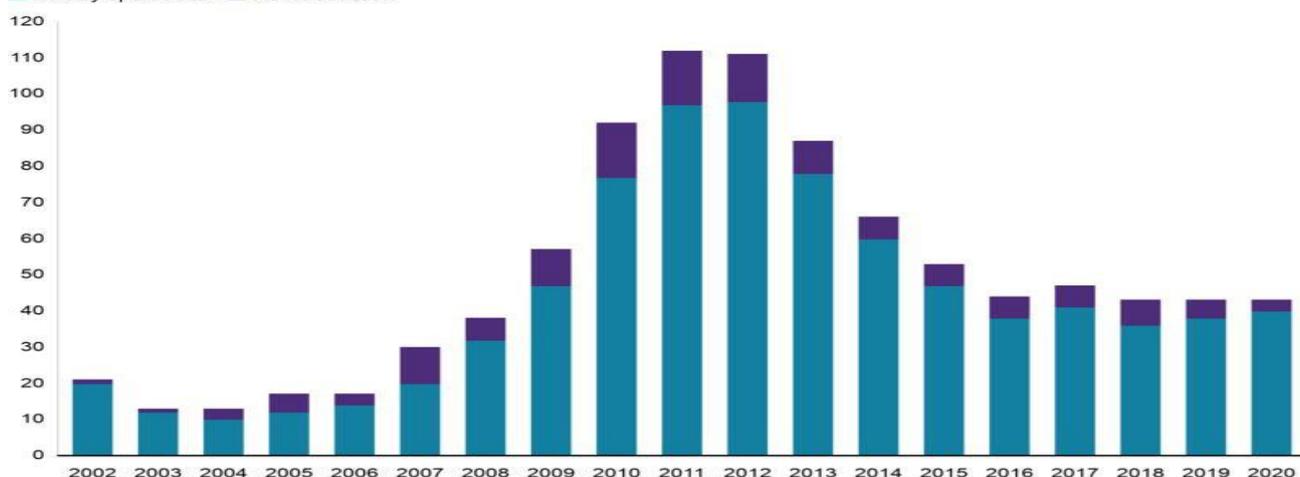
Source: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Congressional Research Service

BBC

US spending in Afghanistan peaked in 2011

Cost in billions of dollars

■ Military operations ■ Reconstruction



Source: US Department of Defense

BBC

Fonte dei grafici: [Reality Check Team, Afghanistan: What has the conflict cost the US and its allies?](#), BBC News, 29 August 2021

extending its sphere of action⁵². Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, coined the definition of “indispensable nation”⁵³ but from that moment on, the United States has made an increasingly narrow selection of its national interests. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have turned out to be “American wars”⁵⁴,

though the original commitment towards the promotion of nation-building.

Obama, Trump, and then Biden confirmed the message that America was withdrawing from the battlefields where the U.S. had supposedly achieved their original goal: capture Bin Laden and destroy Al Qaeda⁵⁵.

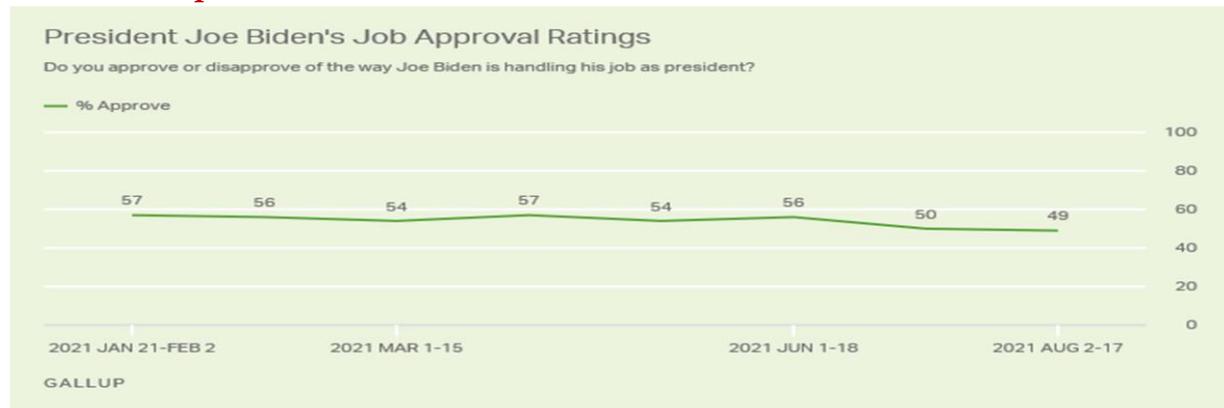
⁵²Debalina Chatterjee, “Obama’s Afghanistan policy: a review of literature”, IPCS, 2010.

⁵³ “Interview on NBC-TV ‘The Today Show’ with Matt Lauer”, U.S. Department of State, Columbus, Ohio, February 19, 1998. <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>

⁵⁴ Antonio Polito, “I sintomi del declino americano”, Corriere della Sera, September 9, 2021.

⁵⁵ George Friedman, “La sconfitta afghana e una nuova strategia per l’America”, in Limes 8/2021.

As of August 2021, Biden's overall approval rate was at 49 percent, the lowest since he has been president



(Jeffrey M. Jones, [Mostly Pre-Afghanistan Turmoil, Biden Job Approval 49%](#), Gallup, 20 August 2021)

However, most Americans believe that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was poorly planned and Biden himself was highly criticized for the way he handled the situation: according to an investigation conducted by the NBC, only one in four Americans approves of the way Biden handled the situation in Afghanistan⁵⁶. On the other hand, a survey conducted by Gallup shows that one out of 4 Americans believes that the pandemic – not Afghanistan – is the real emergency the White House will have to face over the next few months⁵⁷.

Twenty Years of Illogical Presence in Afghanistan?

The United States has likely made some errors in judgement during the so-called “Forever war”. Firstly, Washington did not consider the

fact that Bin Laden had a more efficient intelligence network than the American one and, after having failed in his catch, he did not choose the most logical path i.e. moving the fighting elsewhere⁵⁸. Furthermore, although the results of an investigation of the Special Inspector General for the Afghanistan Reconstruction give credit to the White House for having made important progress in Afghanistan⁵⁹ the true problem turned out to be the U.S. inability to support the implementation of real changes and reforms⁶⁰. Afterwards, President Biden clearly stated that

⁵⁶A.Salvanto, J.De Pinto, K.Khanna, F.Backus “Biden job approval falls; handling of troop removal is negative but support for withdrawal remains-CBS News poll”, CBS News, August 22, 2021.

⁵⁷Megan Brennan, U.S Satisfaction Drops; Covid-19 Resurges as Top Problem, Gallup, August 24, 2021.

⁵⁸ George Friedman, “La sconfitta afghana e una nuova strategia per l’America”, in Limes 8/2021.

⁵⁹Federico Rampini, “Debate storica degli Stati Uniti. Biden sotto accusa anche in casa”, La Repubblica, August 18, 2021.

⁶⁰Anthony H. Cordesman, “Looking at First (and Continuing) Causes: Blundering into the Wrong Kind of “Nation Building””, CSIS, 2021.

nation-building was not the goal behind the American mission in Afghanistan⁶¹.

Although the U.S. had managed to achieve their goal of invading Afghanistan⁶², American soldiers remained for twenty years in a place with limited strategic interests, which most voters

According to Eliot Cohen, Condoleezza Rice's adviser from 2007 to 2009, Biden will have a hard time erasing the negative image of the poorly managed withdrawal from Afghanistan

(Anna Lombardi, L'America davanti a un test morale: salvi i civili bloccati in aeroporto, La Repubblica, 18 August 2021)

stopped caring about a long time ago. After the killing of Bin Laden, the U.S. decade-long presence in Afghanistan was completely illogical, and as Vice President during the Obama Administration, Biden always handled the dossier with extreme caution⁶³. It was later Donald Trump who defined the modes of withdrawal from the conflict in Doha, putting down in writing an agreement with the unrecognized Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan⁶⁴ and accepting – according to former commander of the American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq David Petraeus – some controversial terms⁶⁵.

However, Biden is not blameless: according to some authors, he should have reviewed the Doha agreements, since not involving the Afghan government in the negotiations with the Taliban was not the best choice⁶⁶.

The clumsy withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan can still be considered the first real foreign policy crisis the Biden administration had to face⁶⁷.

Indeed, the U.S.' European allies fear that after the retreat from Kabul, Washington might also “abandon” the Old Continent and focus all its energies on the main challenges of the current administration i.e.

countering Beijing and implementing the project of reforms for America's workers⁶⁸. The Afghan crisis could therefore weaken the hopes of relaunching the transatlantic relations – the leitmotif of Biden's election campaign.

Beyond Afghanistan: National Issues Testing the Biden Administration

A survey conducted on August 24, 2021, by U.S.A. Today/Suffolk University observed a 10 points decline in approval rating for the democratic administration compared to the previous month. Although Americans generally

⁶¹ “*Lexington. Remnants of a policy*”, The Economist, August 21, 2021.

⁶² “*Biden's debacle*”, The Economist, August 21, 2021.

⁶³ Paolo Mieli, “*La serietà della crisi afghana e i bizzarri sberleffi a Biden*”, Corriere della Sera, August 26, 2021.

⁶⁴ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (...) and the United States of America.

⁶⁵ Viviana Mazza “*È come Dunkerque. Imperativo salvare chi era al nostro fianco. Poi si parlerà di colpe*”, Corriere della Sera, August 17, 2021.

⁶⁶ Marilisa Palumbo, “*Il ritiro era inevitabile ma gli accordi di Trump andavano ridiscusi?*”, Corriere della Sera, August 26, 2021.

⁶⁷ Ian Bremmer, “*Gli errori americani e i nuovi disastri da evitare*”, Corriere della Sera, August 19, 2021.

⁶⁸ “*Remarks by President Biden in Address to a Joint Session of Congress*”, WH.GOV, U.S. Capitol, April 28, 2021.

show relatively little interest in the country's foreign affairs, the chaotic scenes that occurred during the retreat from Afghanistan will likely further weaken Joe Biden's image, guilty of poorly managing the end of the operations⁶⁹.

However, the Biden-Harris administration is mainly worried about national policy issues. On the one hand, the new abortion law, which came into force in Texas on September 1, could lead to social unrest; on the other hand, the reaffirmation of teenagers' rights is a positive note for the White House⁷⁰. Furthermore, though in July Biden's commitment to achieving "the greatest decrease in child poverty in history" seemed an overstatement, data show that child poverty was 41% lower than average last July⁷¹.

At the same time, the resurgence of the wave of the pandemic forced Biden to impose stricter measures. After assessing the risks linked to a "monster" variant, resistant to vaccines⁷², Biden's administration decided to put in place restrictive measures on September 9⁷³; consequently, many fully vaccinated Americans started questioning the vaccines efficacy against the Delta variant⁷⁴, which led to a harsh slowdown in the economic recovery. The drive of the last economic boom seems to have subsided: this is the framework where lies the bill

on social spending aiming at putting more money into the pockets of the middle class. According to the White House economists, a fairer income distribution will be a driving force for economic growth⁷⁵.

⁶⁹"Polling realpolitik, How damaging has the Afghanistan withdrawal been to Joe Biden's presidency?", *The Economist*, September 4, 2021.

⁷⁰"Roses on the ropes- The justices green-light a near total abortion ban in Texas", *The Economist*, September 4, 2021.

⁷¹"When policy works- America is substantially reducing poverty among children", *The Economist*, September 18, 2021.

⁷²Massimo Gaggi, "Virus, l'incubo in fondo al tunnel", *Corriere della Sera*, September 10, 2021.

⁷³"Biden's bidding- The vaccination mandate is both ordinary and controversial", *The Economist*, September 18, 2021.

⁷⁴"Ahead of science- Biden's Booster plan has created confusion and concern" *The Economist*, September 25, 2021.

⁷⁵"From whatever source derived- New taxes will hit America's rich. Old loopholes will protect them", *The Economist*, October 2, 2021.

Data Processing

The Afghan Issue will not Negatively Affect the Democratic Administration	
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	The withdrawal from Afghanistan may actually even strengthen the Biden administration. Since American citizens have long lost their interest in Afghanistan, they might perceive their President as more attentive to national issues, such as social wellbeing and health care. Americans are increasingly convinced that the war was not “lost in the last 20 days” but “during the entire twenty years of occupation”. Furthermore, internationally, despite the initial doubts of other countries, the international community may decide in the future to intervene in a context like the Afghan one only to promote development aid instead of starting military operations. It is therefore likely that the Washington-Brussels axis will become stronger and will mainly focus on providing humanitarian aid to the Afghan population. The United States and Europe also announced a new trade and technology partnership; “occasional disagreements” should not undermine the strategic alliance between these two players.
Weakening of the Biden’s Administration in Terms of Foreign Policy but not of Domestic Policy	
Scenario 2 Probability level: medium	While American citizens might perceive their president as more attentive to domestic issues, the influence of the United States on foreign policy might be weakened: the withdrawal from Afghanistan was somehow a demonstration of the weakness of the U.S. and the relations with its allies seems to have soured. The Afghan issue pushed some European leaders to reconsider their views on President Biden, envisaging a future apart from the U.S. The withdrawal itself did not bother European countries, the main problem was the lack of coordination of the United States with its allies. All the more so because the chaos in Afghanistan could cause another migration crisis along the lines of what happened in 2015 when more than a million people fleeing Syria arrived in Europe
The Biden Administration Loses Credibility both on the Domestic and International Front	
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	The withdrawal from Afghanistan undermined the credibility of the Biden administration even at the national level. Therefore, social and health issues could become real social bombs. The path towards the approval of the “Build Back Better” plan (BBB) (the bipartisan bill on infrastructures and the “security package” under discussion within the Democratic Party) seems to be full of pitfalls to the point that Biden had to change his proposals and reduce the plan’s budget from \$3.5 trillion to \$1.75 trillion after months of negotiations. Progressive Democrats in the House remain sceptical about the approval of the BBB ⁷⁶ : all fifty Democratic senators will have to support the bill for it to pass, a figure that should not be given for granted since no Republican supports the bill ⁷⁷ . Should the Head of the White House fail to persuade Congress to approve most of the program, Biden’s credibility on the international stage will be affected ⁷⁸ . Probably most of Biden’s credibility, already undermined by the American attack carried out in Kabul on August 29 that killed ten civilians, will depend on the success of the double intertwined challenge the U.S. has to face, i.e. the vaccine campaign and the economic recovery ⁷⁹ ⁸⁰ . At the same time, the United States might be faced again with the concern of having to avert the danger that Afghanistan will once again become a cradle for terrorists.

⁷⁶ Mark Lowen, “Afghanistan crisis: How Europe’s relationship with Joe Biden turned sour”, BBC News, September 3, 2021, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58416848

⁷⁷ Anne Linsky, Sean Sullivan, Matt Viser, “Biden abruptly accelerates his involvement in agenda talks”, The Washington Post, October 21, 2021.

⁷⁸ Federico Rampini, “Vaccini, la spinta di Biden”, La Repubblica, September 11, 2021.

⁷⁹ Oliver Knox, “Top Democrat Says Biden failed to take “clear-eyed look” at Afghanistan”, The Washington Post, September 30, 2021.

⁸⁰ Richard D. Hooker, “The Us can’t fix Afghanistan, but it can still fix Nato”, Atlantic Council, September 23, 2021, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-us-cant-fix-afghanistan-but-it-can-still-fix-nato/

2.3 After the Afghan debacle, what future for NATO?

by Laura Santilli

Abstract

Since the beginning of the U.S.-declared war on Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, four multilateral peacekeeping operations have been deployed in Afghanistan. Two of these operations have involved NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) between 2002 and 2021: the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF 3) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). What were the purposes of these missions, what military force was deployed, and what were the results?

Methodological Approach

Sources from international research centres were preferred and, to a lesser extent, recourse was made to the NATO database. In particular, concerning the number and categories of international personnel deployed in each operation, the figures come from the SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database. Please note that all references to personnel deployment refer only to international personnel and exclude deployed contractors.

Context analysis

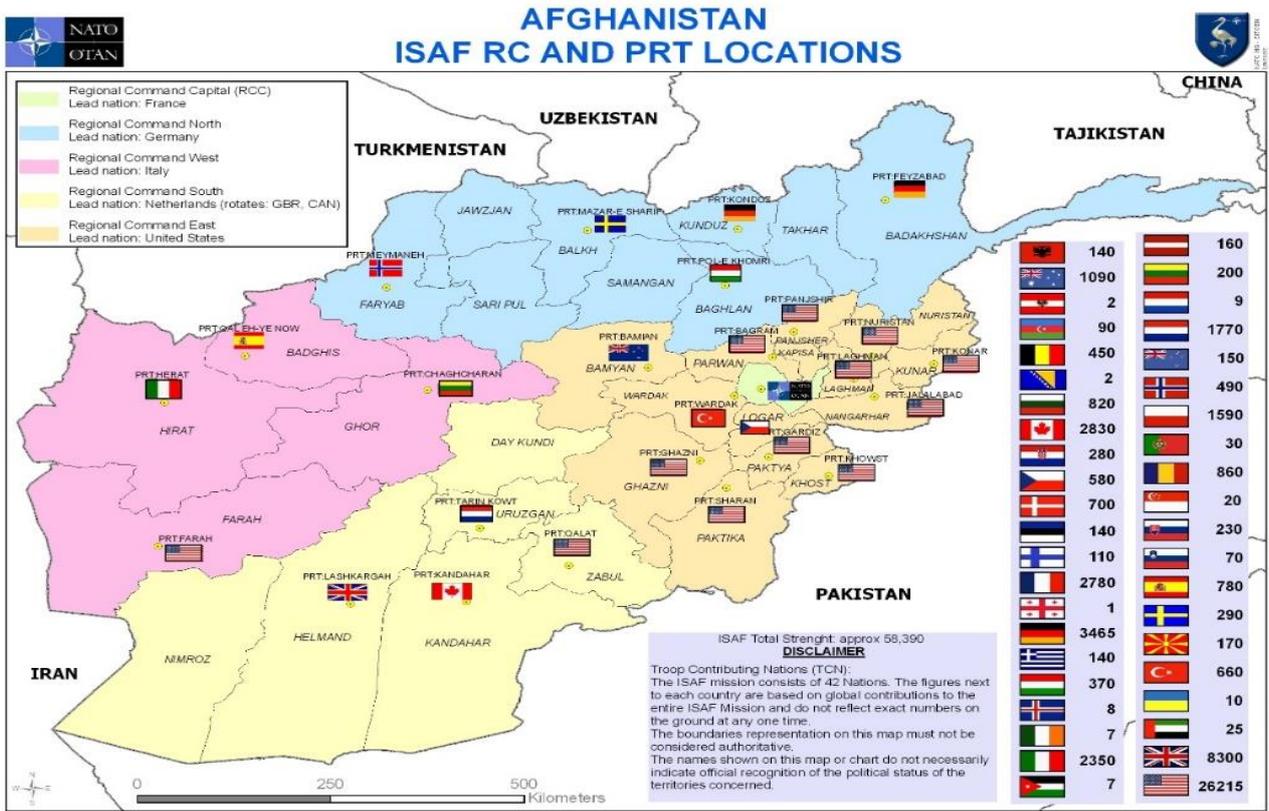
NATO's involvement in Afghanistan has shaped the Alliance over the course of nearly two decades, engaging it in the longest war in its history. From the first and only invocation of Article 5 of the Atlantic Alliance Treaty to the assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Forces in 2004 and the beginning of the *Resolute Support* mission, NATO's operations in Afghanistan have gone through several periods of adjustment.

Regarding the presence of troops on the ground, in the first mission, ISAF 3, NATO countries operated in the country in four different areas. During the first phase of the mission (2004), Germany, Sweden, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, the United States operated

What is provided in Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty?

“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-defence recognised 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.

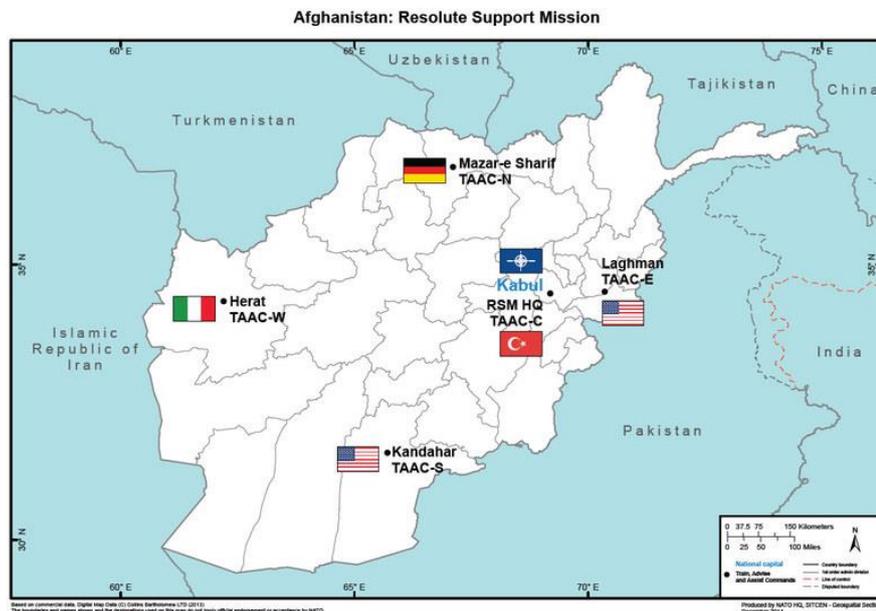
Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.”



in the north.

The second phase (2005) engaged Italian, Lithuanian, Spanish, Norwegian and New Zealand troops in the west of the country. July 2006 marked the beginning of the third phase, with the presence of the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Holland in the south. The United States together with France and Turkey were largely involved during the last phase of the mission, in October 2006. In the *Resolute Support* mission, instead, NATO presence is distributed with a similar division of troops on the ground, but with fewer operational forces in the field. The headquarters of the Atlantic Alliance is located in the capital, Kabul, and there are five NATO operational bases. Two are operated by the United States, one is

located in the south of the country, in the Kandahar province, and the other in the northeast, in the Laghman. In the province of Mazar e-Sharif, Germany controls the base in the north-west, while Italy controls the one in the south-west, the base of Herat. Finally, Turkey operates a base in the province of Kabul.



2001 - 2014: *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission*

While militarily conquering Afghanistan may have been easy for the United States, ensuring control and stability in the country required the involvement of about fifty countries and an average annual presence of 50,000 troops⁸¹. The largest troop contribution came from allies and NATO partners. On December 20, 2001, the United Nations Security Council responded to the UK request by mandating the creation of ISAF with Resolution 1386. The primary purpose of ISAF was to train Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and assist Afghanistan in rebuilding vital government institutions, but it was also meant to be a firm response to the insurgency of Taliban forces. Initially, the mission did not envisage any involvement of NATO, and four individual countries took turns leading the operational control centre of the mission: the United Kingdom, Turkey, the Netherlands and Germany. On November 6, 2002, Germany and the Netherlands asked NATO to support the binational command of ISAF-3 by coordinating the force generation process, granting the use of NATO's *intelligence* capability, and disseminating routine information to non-NATO countries. During the 2002 NATO summit in Prague, the Alliance agreed to support ISAF-3. In October 2003, UN

Security Council Resolution 1510 extended ISAF's mandate to cover all of Afghanistan "as resources permit," providing security support for "reconstruction and humanitarian efforts" and "the execution of other tasks in support of the Bonn Agreement."

Over the next four years, the number of military personnel deployed by ISAF grew steadily, reaching about 9,000 by the end of 2005⁸². A year later, ISAF's presence covered all of Afghanistan with more than 30,000 troops on the ground.

ISAF troop numbers continued to grow from 2009 as Taliban resistance fighting intensified, peaking at over 130,000.

From 2012, NATO then began transitioning security responsibilities to Afghan National Security Forces. This process culminated in the closure of ISAF in late 2014.

2014 - 2021: *Resolute Support (RSM) mission*

In early 2015, at the invitation of the Afghan government and in accordance with Resolution 2189 of the UN Security Council, NATO launched a follow-on operation, RSM. The goal of this non-combat operation was to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces and the country's institutions in building their capabilities. RSM deployed approximately 15,000-17,000 military⁸³ personnel until 2020. The RSM began the final withdrawal of its

⁸¹ J. Jacobs, *18 Years of NATO in Afghanistan*, Atlantic Forum, September 2, 2019

⁸² C. Pfeifer, J. van der Lijn, *Multilateral Peace Operations in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 16 September 2021

⁸³ Ibid

troops in May 2021, the operation ended in early September 2021. NATO countries and allies participating in the RSM mission were the same as those participating in ISAF-3, but Ireland and Iceland withdrew earlier, in March 2016 and October 2019, respectively. With the *Resolute Support* mission, as of December 31, 2014, full responsibility for Afghanistan's internal security shifted to the country's authorities and their military.

Western forces are very small in numbers and are in charge of training and advising Afghan troops. As the years go by, from 2014 to 2021, the involvement of Western military forces is progressively reduced also due to the increasing insecurity in the country. Only a few military personnel travel by helicopter to reach Afghan units and train them, then return to base safely.

Data processing and analysis

When President Biden announced in April 2021 his intention to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, many European countries felt confronted with a fait accompli, having more forces on the ground than the United States, but still being dependent on them. In the short term, the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan will have destabilizing effects that will, according to some European countries, directly affect their security interests and in terms of preventing terrorism, a potential increase in illegal drug trafficking, or a

resurgence of populism in Europe due to migration pressure. Although the United States will be dealing with these same effects, geographic context puts Europe at the forefront. So what will be the future of the Atlantic Alliance and what are its prospects in terms of cohesion and projection?

The U.S. decision undermined NATO's "in together, out together" mantra and left European countries without any alternative, but to leave together with the United States

	Future downsizing of NATO commitments
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	The Afghan experience could accelerate NATO's shift in focus from out-of-area crisis management to a collective defence that focuses instead on the national situation of each member country. Even before the Afghan crisis, the political willingness of allies to participate in expensive and open-ended missions outside NATO's area of responsibility was waning. Since 2014, NATO has refocused on collective defence and several allies have simultaneously doubled down on national security priorities (e.g., France on terrorism and Italy on migration consequence management). Therefore, any future out-of-area missions such as President Biden's desired mission to China could have a smaller footprint and be low-intensity. It is also likely that allies will become more selective about when and under what conditions to join operations, as demonstrated at the NATO summit in July 2021, where both President Macron and former Chancellor Merkel expressed opposition to a NATO engagement on the Asian side. Even if they were inclined to get involved, after the bitter defeat in Afghanistan, allies might demand more specifics on the duration, commitment, and exit plan of a mission; seek assurances in terms of support, or ask to have more say in defining or conducting the mission. A sense of obligation or loyalty to the United States will no longer be sufficient to guarantee an unconditional commitment to NATO.

	Future weak NATO cohesion and strengthening European defence initiative
Scenario 2 Probability level: mid - low	<p>The Afghanistan crisis revealed several uncomfortable truths for the transatlantic relationship. From the point of view of the European countries, it has exposed both their inability to influence the decision-making calculus of the United States and their powerlessness to defend their own interests (e.g., evacuating their own citizens and allies) without Washington's support. For the United States, this war has demonstrated that while in the future Europe is expected to take on more responsibility for its defence and security, most European countries still lack the political will and capabilities to do so.</p> <p>However, support for a more autonomous security and defense capability is gradually increasing among Europeans. According to a poll ⁸⁴released after President Biden's election, at least 60 per cent of respondents in every European country believe they "cannot always rely on the United States for their defence." Interestingly, this figure reaches 66% in Denmark, 69% in Poland, and 74% in the United Kingdom, countries that have traditionally opposed a more autonomous European security and defence capability. Although the Afghan crisis will likely reinforce Europe's desire for more independence of action, EU countries have a long way to go before they will be able to act autonomously at any time and in a variety of scenarios.</p>
	Renewed and increased NATO political and strategic cohesion
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	<p>NATO has both short- and long-term priorities ahead of it. The first is to recognize the general failure of intelligence services. Indeed, every national security strategy begins with strategic anticipation. Biden and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg have all expressed surprise at how the situation in Afghanistan has developed since the withdrawal, and this is troubling since NATO has been in Afghanistan for 20 years. Anticipation is crucial, especially for a defence organization.</p> <p>A second priority concerns strategic issues. French President Emmanuel Macron's infamous definition about NATO and its "dead brain" struck a nerve and Afghanistan proved it. A third priority and point of future improvement concerns training. As part of Stoltenberg's NATO2030 program and his idea of a new strategic alliance concept, NATO's capability as a super trainer for local forces (Ukraine, Georgia, Jordan, Iraq and perhaps the Sahel in the future) is emphasized. However, the conclusion of the Afghan experience exposes NATO to at least a weakened level of credibility.</p> <p>With 30 member countries, there will be a need for an in-depth strategic discussion, which will reveal the priorities, uncertainties and security needs of each country. For NATO, acting with a forward planning approach, following a precise strategy of intervention for future crises, will not be easy at all.</p>

⁸⁴ See: Rachel Ellehuus, Pierre Morcos, "[Fall of Kabul: Inconvenient Truths for NATO.](#)"

Part III

Focus



3.1 Al-Jazeera's discourse on Taliban

by Nicki Anastasio

Abstract

Qatar has made Al-Jazeera a powerful tool of public diplomacy and soft power that serves, indirectly or directly, as an instrument to legitimize its foreign policy in the MENA region⁸⁵. Nowadays, the so-called "Al-Jazeera effect"⁸⁶ leads to a perception of the Taliban that differs from Western media's narrative and is instead in line with Doha's foreign policy interests.

Methodological Approach

The history of Al-Jazeera began in 1996 when Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani founded the newspaper network to offer an 'Arab alternative' to global media such as the CNN and the BBC⁸⁷, adopting a "detached objectivity"⁸⁸ and offering the point of view of the "victims"⁸⁹. From its early days, Al Jazeera has portrayed the atrocities of the wars in the Middle East⁹⁰ criticizing Western powers' actions and reporting the statements of the leaders of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The aim is to give its readers a complete overview of the events and "demonise the enemy"⁹¹.

Context Analysis

a) *The Birth of a Pan-Arab Media*

The history of Al-Jazeera began in 1996 when Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani founded the newspaper network to offer an alternative to the CNN and the BBC. From its early days, Al Jazeera has portrayed the atrocities of the wars in the Middle East⁹²

criticizing Western powers' actions and reporting the statements of the leaders of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The aim is to give its readers a complete overview of the events and "demonise the enemy"⁹³.

⁸⁵ Al-Jazeera's managers enjoy great freedom in day-to-day operations at the headquarters, which has offices scattered all over the world. However, this net mainly relies on funding coming from Qatar making the newspaper position rather ambiguous.

⁸⁶ "The Al-Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S.", Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 101, 2003

⁸⁷ Shawn Powers & Eytan Gilboa, "The Public Diplomacy of Al Jazeera" in Seib P. (ed) "New Media and the New Middle East", 2007, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p.67

⁸⁸ Mohammed el-Nawawy & Leo A. Gher, "Al Jazeera: Bridging the East-West Gap through Public Discourse and Media Diplomacy," 2003, Transnational Broadcasting Studies (TBS) Journal, no. 10; Mohammed El-Nawawy & Adel Iskandar, "Al-

Jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism, 2003, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, p.56.

⁸⁹ Amy E. Jasperon & Mansour O.El-Kikhia, "CNN and al Jazeera's Media Coverage of America's War in Afghanistan" in? (ed) "Framing Terrorism", 2003, Routledge, p.127

⁹⁰ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Paul Frosh, Maurice T. Awabdy, "Covering Death in Conflicts: Coverage of the Second Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian Television, 2008

⁹¹ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Paul Frosh, Maurice T. Awabdy (2008)

⁹² Gadi Wolfsfeld, Paul Frosh, Maurice T. Awabdy, "Covering Death in Conflicts: Coverage of the Second Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian Television, 2008

⁹³ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Paul Frosh, Maurice T. Awabdy (2008)

Al-Jazeera immediately positioned itself as an "Arab alternative"* to global media adopting a "detached objectivity" ** and offering the point of view of the "victims" ***

* S. Powers, E. Gilboa, *The Public Diplomacy of Al Jazeera* in Seib P. (ed) *New Media and the New Middle East*, 2007, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 67; ** M. El-Nawawy, L. A. Gher, *Al Jazeera: Bridging the East-West Gap through Public Discourse and Media Diplomacy*, 2003, Transnational Broadcasting Studies (TBS) Journal, no. 10; M. El-Nawawy, A. Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*, 2003, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, p.56; *** A. E. Jasperon, M. O.El-Kikhia, *CNN and al Jazeera's Media Coverage of America's War in Afghanistan* in (ed) "Framing Terrorism", 2003, Routledge, p.127.

b) Accusations Against the Network

Although Al-Jazeera is widely recognised as the most independent Arab media⁹⁴, it has been accused of anti-US propaganda and of supporting global terrorism since September 11, 2001⁹⁵. Moreover, during the "Arab Springs," it has been accused of sustaining Islamist militant groups due to Qatar's proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood⁹⁶. This pushed Gulf monarchies and Egypt to demand the closure of Al-Jazeera's offices operating in their countries and it led to the outbreak of the Gulf diplomatic crisis⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Al Jenaibi, B. (2010). New age of press democracy in the Middle East. Arabic news channels: Al-Jazeera. *International Journal of Academic Research*, n.2/4, p.385-394.

⁹⁵ Both for its coverage of the war in Iraq – when the Americans and the British started to dismantle the facilities where Saddam Hussein was allegedly manufacturing weapons of mass destruction - Al Jazeera was the only news reporter a television crew on-site in Iraq – and for its coverage of the second Palestinian intifada

The Narrative of the Afghan Crisis

a) 2001-2018

Even before the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, Al-Jazeera had its staff in major cities of the country such as Kabul and Kandahar. Three years before the American intervention (2001), Al Jazeera broadcasted several messages in which Bin Laden invited Muslims to take up arms against Western enemies. In the years to come, Al-Jazeera documented the crimes committed by US forces in Afghanistan – killing of civilians and targeting infrastructure – presenting a narration of the Afghan crisis which is different from the one offered by Western media.

b) 2019-oggi

In the last three years, Al-Jazeera Afghanistan talked about the Doha agreements, the terrorist attacks and American troops' withdrawal. Since the capture of Kabul by the Taliban, Al-Jazeera has offered in-depth coverage and exclusive reportages based on interviews with the leaders of the new Taliban government. Nowadays, the Qatari network is presenting a narrative of the Taliban government based on Al-Jazeera's discursive strategies i.e. detached objectivity, 'demonization of the enemies' and focus on the

⁹⁶ The governments of Egypt and Algeria accused Al-Jazeera of supporting Islamic extremists providing their leaders with access to its programs. Iraq closed Al Jazeera headquarter in Baghdad because according to interim President Ayad Allawi, the network supported violence "hate, racial tensions and turmoil".

⁹⁷ Joseph M Fernandez, The Qatar-Gulf crisis: The attack on media freedom and the West's loss of moral authority, *Pacific Journalism Review*, n.2/24

victims' perspective. This serves directly or indirectly to give credibility to Doha's foreign policy in Afghanistan.

In the table below, these elements are put together to give evidence for this.

*“When we entered Kabul [...] we wanted to achieve a **political solution** and create a **common and inclusive government**”*

*“The Taliban won because of **their religious and social weight in the Afghan society**. Former president Ashraf Ghani and his allies did not enjoy such sort of popular support.”*

*“It should be clear that **today the Taliban are very different from those of 1996-2001**. In the 1990s TV channels were banned and women were not allowed to work. On the contrary, since the arrival of the Taliban in Kabul, the media continues to work [...]. Women are allowed to work as journalists and they are **even** conducting interviews with Taliban leaders.”*

*“The diplomatic isolation of the Taliban is in contrast to the last ten years of **peace efforts and dialogue** with the US administration and regional powers.”*
 (Abdul Qahar Balkhi, head of the Taliban Cultural Commission)

Discourse Analysis	Discourse strategies	Doha's interests
Legitimation of the new Taliban government is based on the consent given by the Afghan population, their more democratic attitude and their efforts towards international dialogue	Recurring to detached objectivity to offer a counter-narrative to Western media.	Pushing the international community to communicate with the Taliban and recognise Kabul's government as a political actor.

*“Very unfortunate that people rush to the airport in such a manner [...] **This fear, this hysteria** that has taken place is illogical”*

*“Although Afghans have fought three superpowers in the past three centuries, they have never attacked others. They have just fought to defend **their Country**, which is their **legitimate and legal right**”*

*“I don't think people believe we are **terrorists**. I think the **'war on terror'** is just an expression coined by the United States to label as a terrorist anyone who does not agree with them”*

Abdul Qahar Balkhi, head of the Taliban Cultural Commission)

*“ISIS does not exist here but some of **our Afghan people** have adopted the ideology of this organisation, something that **public opinion** does not tolerate”* (Afghan citizen)

*“Afghan citizens have welcomed the **end of the war** and they are **optimistic** about a **better future** for the country [...] The Taliban organization should not change its position and its treatment of women because the Western countries could take the opportunity to attack them from this point of view”* (student at University of Kabul)

Discourse Analysis	Discourse strategies	Doha's interests
Self-re-evaluation of the Taliban by dissociating from other terrorist organisations, appealing to Afghan nationalism and reclaiming their historical rights over the country.	Focus on the point of view of the victims, criticism towards the United States actions in the Middle East ('demonization of the West').	Qatar wants international actors to recognize the new Taliban government and interact with them as international actors.

Data processing

Over the next few months, Al-Jazeera will continue to dedicate a special space on its platforms to the Afghan dossier covering political and diplomatic meetings of the new Taliban government.

	Maintaining the Status Quo
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	Al-Jazeera will certainly continue to use its discursive strategies to counterbalance Western mainstream discourse on the Taliban and legitimate the new Taliban government. This will increase the diplomatic credibility of the new government in Kabul in support of Qatari foreign policy in Afghanistan.
	Strengthening of the Armed Insurgency
Scenario 2 Probability level: mid-low	The first scenario could trigger explosive regional and international consequences, i.e. the spread of anti-Western sentiments and strengthening of armed insurgency groups around the world .
	Al-Jazeera's Realignment to Western Mainstream Discourse
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	Despite the international pressure on the new Taliban government, it is unlikely that Al-Jazeera will change its narrative about the Taliban. In such a case, it would publish content more in line with the interests of key international players.

3.2 The Migration Crisis: Impacts at Regional and Global Level

by Roberta Carbone, Valentina Geraci, Luigi Limone

Abstract

The return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan has compounded an already alarming situation, leading to a humanitarian crisis whose roots certainly predate the events that started in August 2021. In fact, over the last forty years the country was hit by a series of violent conflicts that have significantly contributed to making the country's internal situation one of the most worrying in the world not only from a political point of view, but also and above all from a humanitarian one. This had a profound impact on migration flows that, although they are a long-standing phenomenon for the Afghan people, have undergone significant changes both in the number of people forced to leave and in the routes and paths taken.

Methodological Approach

The analysis provides an overview of the data relating to internal migration and displacement, repatriation, regional and international migrations that have affected Afghanistan in recent years. The analysis mainly focuses on the possible consequences of migration flows and the first responses to the Taliban's power grab – both at the regional level and, namely at the European level. The paper also analyses a series of dynamics linked to migration paths and the creation of possible new routes. In this regard, it is essential to closely monitor these dynamics to gain a clearer overview of the new realities and possible scenarios linked to the greater vulnerability of migrants, the growing violations of human rights and exploitation by criminal networks and traffickers, but also to understand the necessary steps to promptly face the social transformations that will affect the area under analysis. Hence, the strategic choice relating to the sources and data taken into consideration. To offer a clearer perspective of the situation and provide valid tools to hypothesize future scenarios, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) statistics were the main sources consulted. They provide quantitative and qualitative data, which allow a precise analysis of the migratory phenomenon inside Afghanistan, outward flows as well as the condition of refugees and asylum seekers. This information has been integrated by data collected by The United Nations Global Migration Database (UNGMD) and the documents provided by the ISMU Foundation, Initiatives and Studies on multi-ethnicity.

Context analysis

The great ethnic fragmentation, the frequent invasions (even before the return of the Taliban, for example those of the Soviet Union and the US) as well as environmental issues led to a significant level of mobility both within Afghanistan and outside national borders. On average, every year 250,000 people are affected by natural disasters and 200,000 to 400,000 are displaced due to conflicts, a trend that, following the latest developments, is expected to worsen.⁹⁸ In June 2021, almost half of the country's population – approximately 18.4 million people

– was in need of humanitarian aid. The economic crisis already underway, worsened not only by the conflict but also by the second drought in four years, pushed many families in extreme poverty, who were therefore forced to rely on dangerous coping mechanisms⁹⁹ to guarantee their survival, including resorting to irregular migration. Furthermore, problems linked to malnutrition, even acute malnutrition affecting more than half of all children under five, and to the lack of protection of civilians, in particular of the most vulnerable parts of the

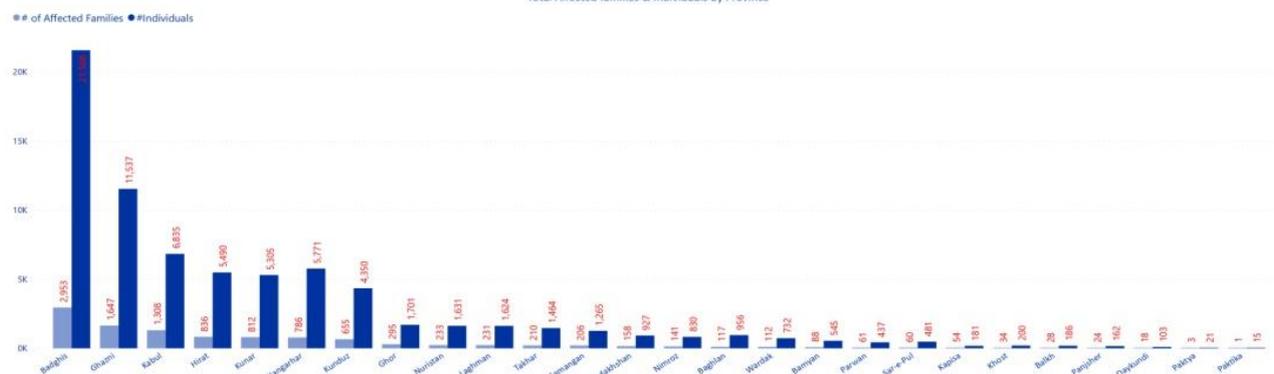
AFGHANISTAN

Natural Disasters Affected & Conflict displaced Population Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment Form (MSRAF) - 01 January - 07 October 2021

AFFECTED POPULATION



Total Affected families & Individuals By Province



Natural Disaster Highlights 23 September to 10 October 2021						
# of Families Assisted by IOM	# of Individuals Assisted by IOM	# of Joint Assessments	# of Verified Affected Families	# of Verified Affected Individuals	Province	Remarks
0	0	Yes	4	27	IOM,ANDM Nuristan	heavy rainfall
0	0		4	27		

Fonte OIM UN MIGRATION: 24 September - 07 October 2021

⁹⁸IOM Afghanistan, migration health strategic plan

⁹⁹This expression indicates the set of psychological mechanisms thanks to which an individual undertakes to control and master

emotional difficulties, situations of conflict and/or physical /mental tensions

population, including women, minors and people with disabilities, have reached very high levels forcing millions of people to flee their homes.¹⁰⁰

Characteristics of the Flows and Impacts

Although migration is a long-standing phenomenon in the history of the Afghan people, recent events have brought about some changes, both in terms of the extent of flows and in the routes taken by migrants and asylum seekers to leave their country. The number of displaced persons raises some concerns:

although the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)¹⁰¹ for Afghanistan predicted that around 500,000 people would be displaced due to the conflict throughout the year, this forecast was an understatement. Indeed, it is estimated that, between 1 January and 9 August 2021, more than 570,000 people were displaced within the country, and in 32 of the 34 provinces, there was a high number of forced displacements.¹⁰² The increase in displacements was particularly significant between May and July, when the withdrawal of troops by foreign powers started, with a consequent increase in uncertainty and the achievement of various territorial conquests in favour of the Taliban. Based on these

Total Number of Undocumented Returnees in 2021

Date	Iran				Total Iran	Pakistan				Total Pakistan	Overall Return
	Herat		Nimroz			Turkham		Kandahar			
	Spont	Deport	Spont	Deport		Spont	Deport	Spont	Deport		
01 Jan - 31 July	236,657	171,246	74,790	198,552	681,245	1170	276	5,539	250	6,949	688,194
01-26 Aug	19,067	43,672	6,861	39,318	108,918	80	4	0	0	84	109,002
27 Aug- 02 Sep	1,508	13,103	3,848	16,441	34,900	0	0	139	0	139	35,039
03-09 Sep	2,958	7,233	2,200	21,502	33,893	17	0	228	230	475	34,368
Total	259,380	232,724	87,699	275,813	858,956	1,267	280	5,906	480	7,933	866,889

Total Number of Assisted Returnees in 2021

Date	Iran				Total Iran	Pakistan				Total Pakistan	Overall Assisted
	Herat		Nimroz			Turkham		Kandahar			
	Spont	Deport	Spont	Deport		Spont	Deport	Spont	Deport		
1 Jan - 31 July	1,696	12,141	971	13,834	28,642	1,167	244	5109	210	6,730	35,372
01-26 Aug	0	0	20	1,588	1,608	74	4	0	0	78	1,686
27 Aug- 02 Sep	0	0	2	1,282	1,284	0	0	0	0	0	1,284
03-09 Sep	4	172	7	1,364	1,547	17	0	183	0	200	1,747
Total	1,700	12,313	1,000	18,069	33,081	1,258	248	5,292	210	7,008	40,089

Return of Undocumented Afghans from Iran - 2019 - 2021

Source OIM: report 03-09 September 2021

¹⁰⁰FLASH APPEAL AFGHANISTAN, immediate humanitarian response needs, September-December 2021

¹⁰¹The Humanitarian Response Plan is a document drawn up by the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in response to a protracted emergency or sudden onset that requires

international humanitarian assistance. The Plan articulates the shared vision of how to respond to the needs assessed and expressed by the affected population

¹⁰²IOM UN migration, Afghanistan situation, situation report 3, 1 September 2021

assumptions and taking into consideration the historical movements and the latest migratory trends relating to the Afghan people, it is believed that conflicts and insecurity will cause the displacement of about 750,000 people through 2021, a figure that exceeds the one predicted at the beginning of the year by 250,000 units.¹⁰³ In addition to the growing number of internally displaced people, figures on returnees should also be taken into account: between January and 9 September 2021 alone, IOM registered 858,956 Afghan returnees without papers from Iran and 7,933 from Pakistan. Regarding assisted returns, 33,081 Afghans repatriated from Iran and 7,008 from Pakistan.¹⁰⁴ These data explain the country's migratory

potential in the period prior to the regain of power by the Taliban, framing the migratory dynamics that have always affected the population. With the onset of the crisis, many Afghans, as seen in the days immediately after the capture of Kabul, left the country and many others are expected to continue to do so in search of protection in neighbouring countries or in Europe. Whether considering internal, regional, or international migration, it is possible to trace the migration routes taken by migrants fleeing Afghanistan.

Firstly, a "regional-local" route that goes from Afghanistan to Iran – sometimes crossing Pakistan – can be identified. Those who do not stop in neighbouring countries continue their



¹⁰³FLASH APPEAL AFGHANISTAN, immediate humanitarian response needs, September-December 2021

¹⁰⁴IOM UN migration, Afghanistan situation, report 03- 09 September 2021

journey towards Turkey to reach Europe, using Greece as a gateway and continuing the route by sea to Italy or opting for the so-called "Balkan route" by land, passing through North Macedonia, Serbia and/or Bosnia-Herzegovina to reach Hungary or Croatia and continuing, almost always irregularly to avoid being intercepted by the authorities, towards Germany and the sought-after destinations in Northern Europe or towards Italy. However, the wave of migration caused by the return to power of the Taliban had repercussions both at a regional and international level, partially transforming the dynamics linked to migration paths and potential routes. At the European level, a new possible route is the one that goes north from Turkey, towards Belarus, to guarantee access to the European territory not from Greece but from Poland and Lithuania, with greater risks for migrants and a higher involvement of cross-border criminal networks and trafficking

networks. Considering the current situation in Afghanistan and the total disregard for human rights by the Taliban forces to the detriment of the population, there is an urgent need to guarantee Afghan migrants and asylum seekers the protection deriving from their condition and to consider the situation as a "humanitarian crisis". However, this does not appear to be the approach adopted by foreign powers, both at the regional and the European level. European leaders are preparing for what they fear as a new "migratory emergency", worried about consequences like those of the Syrian exodus experienced in 2015. For this reason, the response of European governments to the return of the Taliban is today more focused on security issues. As evidence of this security approach, it is important to mention the words of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, architect of the open-door policy of 2015, who underlined the adoption of a different approach by stating:



"We cannot solve all of these problems by taking everyone in". The attitude of Austria is also drastic. The country announced a 40% increase in border patrol along the border with Slovenia and Hungary where since the beginning of the year 15,768 migrants who attempted to illegally enter the country have already been arrested. Faced with the opening of new routes, Poland and Lithuania too announced their intention to raise a wall on the border with Belarus, accused of smuggling migrants and asylum seekers into the European territory. Moreover, at the regional level, Turkey decided to build a roughly 300 km long barrier along the border with Iran, an event that prompted Greece to respond in turn with the construction of a 40 km wall along the border with Turkey, with the aim of establishing a precise and punctual surveillance system.

Alternative Ways in a Context of Greater Insecurity and Violation of Human Rights

When it comes to migration, the protection of human rights is a fundamental pillar in the draft and implementation of migration policies, which, however, is often underestimated or overlooked. Afghanistan signed all the main international conventions and treaties on human rights, with a minimum of reservations. However, the country is now confronted with the alarming and often unclear "political" choices of the Taliban. Women suffer

discrimination in their personal and professional life, and the same happens to some professions such as journalists, activists, lawyers, security officers, prosecutors, and their respective families. These violations, together with the socio-economic difficulties, the COVID-19 pandemic and other related factors have led to a humanitarian crisis that may result in possible new waves of migration in the future. Furthermore, the obstacles created by walls, barriers and increased border controls along the main migratory routes force Afghan migrants and asylum seekers to resort to irregular migration, with the risk of greater insecurity, exploitation, and systematic violations of fundamental rights along the migratory path. These dynamics benefit above all from the smuggling networks that are introducing new modus operandi to "facilitate" the migration of Afghans, sometimes providing falsified documentation and facilitating irregular border crossings to avoid police checks. The possibility of exploiting the confused and vulnerable state of the migrants is the key for the traffickers who use means of blackmail and create collection points located along the journey to rely on, until migrants are left on their own in the crosshairs of illegal work, exploitation, and lack of integration once they have reached their destination and concluded the payment.

Another issue today is the exploitation of irregular migration by state actors. An example is the case of Belarus, whose president Aljaksandr Ryhoravič Lukašėnka seems to have

recently exploited the requests for help by Afghan migrants and asylum seekers at European borders for merely political purposes, facilitating their illegal entry into Europe. The difficulties linked to the lack of effective and functional tools in the fight against the smuggling of migrants are concrete. The latest European Union's action plan against migrant smuggling dates back to 2015 and has not been updated since then. Nowadays, political actors have greater responsibility on individual choices on the issue of legal procedures and reception

Data processing

The information described and analysed so far shows that the impact of Afghan migration, a phenomenon worsened by the capture of Kabul at the hands of the Taliban, that forced many to migrate and undertake an even riskier journey, has repercussion on at least two levels: a "strategic" level, concerning geopolitical scenarios, with consequences both on the regional balances – i.e. countries bordering Afghanistan – and on the dynamics of international relations and agreements between countries – i.e. the regulation of flows and the possible responses of the EU towards the countries of origin (Afghanistan) and of transit (mainly Turkey, but also Belarus); and a "human" level, concerning the consequences on those forced to flee. The intertwining of their needs together with the priorities deriving from the "strategic" level, leads to longer and riskier journeys for those fleeing to find the protection they cannot enjoy in their country of origin. From the combination of these two levels, three possible scenarios arise, where the different level of probability is connected to the prevalence of "strategic" considerations over "human" ones and vice versa.

Greater focus on political interests, less on solidarity	
Scenario 1 Probability level: high	A scenario of rapid implementation in the short-medium term. It is characterized by the prevalence of the political interests of the countries of destination over the effective protection of the people on the run. This scenario is the simplest to implement, but the least far-sighted: it means facing the a "crisis" not with the intention of eradicating the root causes, but just keeping the "danger" away as long as possible. In this scenario, there is no room for a reform of the European reception system or a revision of the main instruments to counter the smuggling of migrants and for greater protection of human rights. The only element taken into consideration is the strengthening of internal security, using the threat of international terrorism as a momentum, supported by an intensification of border controls, which now take place outside Europe, directly in third countries of transit. Such scenario, already implemented in Poland, Lithuania, and Greece, requires agreements and declaration of mutual intent with third countries, in the framework of these agreements the EU would provide substantial funding and training to border operators for the containment of flows, without however implementing any overview mechanisms on reception systems and the protection of human rights, as it occurs in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya. As seen in the management of the Syrian "crisis", it is very likely that to contain the flow of Afghans, the EU will try to enter into agreements of understanding with third countries and, this time, not only with Turkey but also with Iran and Pakistan.
Balance between solidarity and political interests	
Scenario 2 Probability level: mid-low	In this scenario, a more hybrid approach is envisaged, it is mostly likely to be adopted over the medium-long term. The EU and its Member States explore multiple initiatives to promote legal ways – first and foremost the humanitarian corridors from Afghanistan or from transit countries where Afghan asylum seekers are blocked nowadays – to ensure access to protective measures in Europe to the extent possible. In parallel, the EU starts signing agreements with third countries of transit, whose main purpose is to provide technical support, for example through capacity-building and financial projects for the improvement of their reception standards. Such an approach would ensure a more balanced management of the Afghan migratory flow, with the European Union being ready to open its doors and with neighbouring countries affected by the phenomenon, in particular Iran and Pakistan, being better prepared to welcome migrants and provide them adequate protection and assistance.
More solidarity, fewer involvement of political interests	
Scenario 3 Probability level: low	It is rather unlikely that this scenario will take place in the short to medium run. It is characterized by a strong focus on human rights, the vulnerabilities of migrants and the adoption of safe and long-lasting solutions for those fleeing a country at war in search of international protection. For this solution to be effective, international actors, in particular the EU and its Member States, as the main destination of the Afghan migratory flows, should completely set aside their strategic interests, to leave room for the opening of legal migration routes and the review of the main legislative instruments on the refugee status and the reception and integration of migrants and asylum seekers. With the aim of protecting human rights, this scenario would also imply the draft of a new European action plan against the smuggling of migrants, which should outline in details the actions needed to dismantle criminal networks and punish those who exploit people's vulnerability as well as measures of access to justice and adequate forms of protection for the victims.

Conclusion

by Giusy Musarò

The return of the Taliban to power on 15 August and the creation of an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was a new turning point in the turbulent history of the country, and it certainly had repercussions on the political and economic relations with neighbouring countries and other players involved in the state's internal dynamics. This report dealt with the consequences of the Taliban's return at a regional and global level, outlining more or less likely scenarios on different macro-topics, such as the relationship with third countries, the impact on all the actors involved (neighbouring countries, the United States, the European Union and NATO), the financing of the new regime through the opium trade, as well as more transversal topics such as the migration issue, and Islamic terrorism, which have affected the country and the region for years.

One of the outstanding issues is the internal legitimacy and external recognition of the new regime, as well as the actions that the international community will undertake in the next few months in this regard. At the international level, two main approaches can be identified: a more pragmatic approach, such as the one adopted by China and Russia, opting for a certain degree of cooperation and dialogue with the new regime, and a less cooperative approach such as that of the United States and Europe. At the regional level, many countries have adopted the first type of approach, driven by a primary and shared interest in

guaranteeing and ensuring regional security, primarily Pakistan and Iran. While the former still maintains close cooperation with the new regime, in line with its historical position, Iran, despite being a historical opponent of the Taliban, supports an inclusive and multipolar Afghan government in which pro-Iranian factions can have a voice. The only exception inside the region seems to be India, which, despite being one of the largest regional donors, has refused to start a dialogue with the Taliban faction. At the regional level, Turkey plays a crucial role, the country aspires to become a privileged interlocutor of the new regime at the regional and international level, in line with its pan-Turkish approach in Eurasia¹⁰⁵ and its expansionist aims in the rest of the region. As stated in this report, greater cooperation between Turkey and Europe could boost its role as a mediator in the region. However, this role is subject to the level of stability and security that the new Taliban government will be able to ensure in the country in the long run.

The attacks of recent months on Afghan soil by the ISKP terrorist group have shown that Afghanistan remains an important gathering place for radical Islamic terrorist groups, whose characteristics and interests have been well illustrated in this report. Tensions between the ISKP and the Taliban could however earn the latter greater credibility, gaining regional and international support in the fight against the terrorist threat posed by the ISKP group.

¹⁰⁵ For further study, see: Frugiuele, A. (2021), "Il Consiglio turco: panturchismo in Asia Centrale", AMIStaDeS (*only Italian*)

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Internally, this threat could instead result in increased cooperation between the Taliban and other armed groups on the ground. The increased credibility and international support that could result from the terrorist threat in Afghanistan could however be compromised by the fact that the Taliban will probably continue to have unchallenged control over the opium and drug trade, either directly or through organised crime networks. This trade remains their main source of income.

In the West, despite the criticism towards the Biden presidency both internally and internationally over the decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan and the way the withdrawal was handled, the Afghan issue is not likely to affect the Biden administration internally. Internationally, however, the withdrawal of American troops could lead to the development of a new logic of intervention based entirely on the development and reconstruction of the country. However, the lack of inclusion and coordination between the US and its Atlantic allies before and during the troop withdrawal could have long-term repercussions on the relationship between them. On the one hand, NATO might be less inclined to engage in missions outside its area of interest in favour of US interests in the future. On the other hand, the loss of credibility of the Atlantic Alliance and the failure of the US to engage European countries may lead the European Union to adopt a more integrated approach to common defence in the near future.

Finally, the worsening humanitarian crisis that Afghanistan is facing today is bringing about some changes in the migration flows and routes taken by migrants to leave their country, raising fears of a new 'migration crisis', especially in Europe. A securitarian approach seems to be still prevailing at both regional

and European levels and is likely to affect the measures that will be taken to tackle this phenomenon in Europe, as well as in the countries of origin and transit. The most likely scenario in this sense could lead the European Union to sign agreements of understanding with third countries such as Turkey, Iran or Pakistan to curb migratory flows from Afghanistan. Instead, it is less likely that Europe will implement more far-sighted approaches promoting legal routes and the signing of agreements of understanding aimed at improving the standards of reception of third countries, and a more comprehensive reception and integration strategy in the continent.

The validity of these scenarios will depend on the type of government that will emerge in Afghanistan in the coming months and the decisions taken by it and by the international community. One of the greatest challenges that the new regime will have to face will certainly be gaining legitimacy at an international level, as well as at a national one. The latter, indeed, could be jeopardised by the acute humanitarian crisis that the country is going through, with millions of Afghans now living in extreme poverty and food insecurity. This situation, aggravated by a national economy paralysed by Washington's freezing of the Afghan Central Bank's reserves and aid from the international community, should be taken into serious consideration in any future actions. Bearing in mind the lessons from the past, the will and needs of the Afghan people should therefore be placed at the centre of purely geopolitical decisions and approaches.

Source classification

Source reliability		
A	Reliable	No doubt of authenticity, reliability, or competence; it has a record of complete reliability.
B	Usually reliable	Small doubts of authenticity, reliability, or competence; it has a record of valid information in most cases.
C	Reliable enough	Doubts of authenticity, reliability, or competence; however, has provided valid information in the past.
D	Usually unreliable	Significant doubt about authenticity, reliability, or competence; however, it has provided valid information in the past.
E	Unreliable	Lack of authenticity, reliability, or competence; record of non-valid information
F	Not evaluable	There is no basis for evaluating the reliability of the source

Content of the information		
1	Confirmed	Confirmed by other independent sources; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the topic
2	Allegedly true	Not confirmed; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the topic
3	Possibly true	Not confirmed; reasonably logical in itself; it is consistent with some other information on the topic
4	Uncertain	Not confirmed; possible but not logical; there is no other information on the topic
5	Unlikely	Not confirmed; not logical in itself; contradicted by other information on the topic
6	Not evaluable	There is no basis for evaluating the reliability of the source

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