

POLICY PAPER

U.S. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: THE AFGHAN TALIBAN

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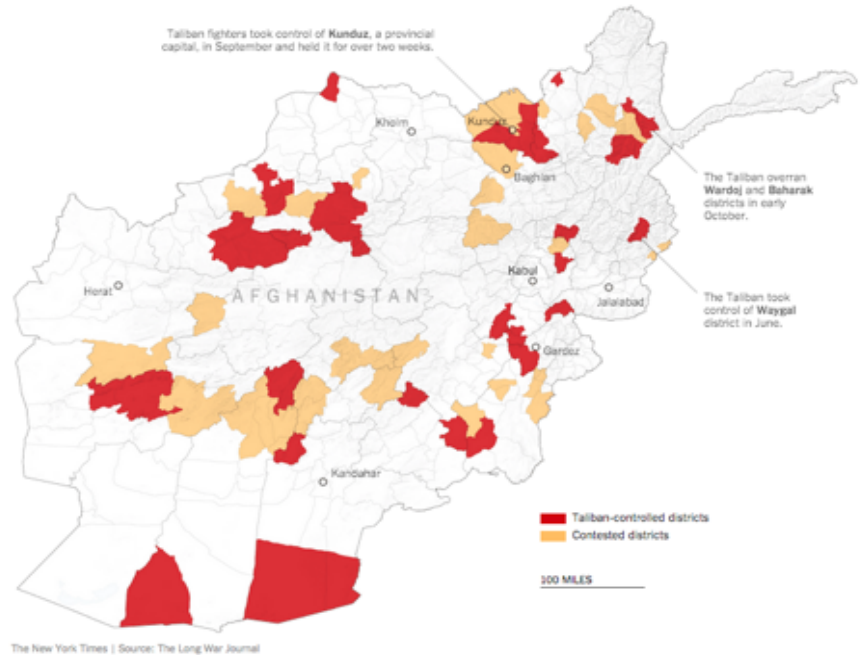
Since September 11, 2001, the United States has had a tremendous impact on the survival and status of the Afghan Taliban. However, in order to recommend further politics in handling the Afghan Taliban, it is important to understand the history of the organization. A large number of Americans know that the Taliban exists; however, many do not know that there are both the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban nor do they know that Mullah Mohammed Omar was the one-eyed founder of the Afghan faction of the Taliban. Furthermore, it is also important to understand how both the U.S. government and the Afghan government have intervened thus far. Throughout this essay, the history of the organization, the history of U.S. and Afghan intervention, and future policy recommendations will be further explained.

Although the Afghan Taliban is well-recognized as a terrorist group, its formation was conclusive to the pursuance of the Afghan people's interests. The organization formed as the Afghan faction of the Mujahedeen following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which lasted from 1979 to 1989 ("History of the Taliban," n.d.).

The Afghan Taliban was accepted amongst the Afghan people as it promised stability and to protect citizens from the corruption of the Afghan government. Even further, the movement was also supported by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency and its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Services Intelligence ("History of the Taliban," n.d.).

In addition to this, a major goal of the Afghan Taliban was to establish a Pashtun state. The Pashtun people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan; they are located in southeastern Afghanistan and parts of the northwest region of Pakistan (Szczepanski, 2016). The organization promised that the state would be peaceful and would enforce strict Sharia law. However, although the Afghan Taliban wanted to establish a corruption-free, peaceful state to call its own, it is evident that its means of obtaining a peaceful state were not peaceful.

In 1994, the organization captured provinces throughout the southern regions of Afghanistan. It was able to obtain these provinces because the groups who were in control of them had no means of controlling the land following the civil war and fall of the Afghan government.



Moreover, in 1996 the group had success in capturing Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital city (“History of the Taliban,” n.d.”). During this capture, members of the organization were able to overthrow the Afghan president, Burhan uddin Rabbani, who was seen as corrupt and anti-Pashtun (the Taliban insurgency would then kill Rabbani in September 2011).

At this point, the Afghan Taliban ruled much of Afghanistan. Its government was recognized as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by states such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. However, it was not recognized as an official government by the United Nations. Even further, the U.N. imposed sanctions on the government due to its inhumane practices such as its mistreatment of women, minorities, and political dissenters.

Although the organization ruled as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan for five years, its government was taken out in 2001 by U.S. forces and Afghan resistance following September 11, 2001. However, this has not stopped the organization. Rather than operating as a government, it is an insurgency attempting to overthrow the current Afghan government and

come back into power. Although the Afghan government generally does not support its cause, the government has been meeting with the Afghan Taliban in secret in Qatar (Yousafzai, Boone, & Rasmussen, 2016). However, since its cause is not supported worldwide, the organization is forced to resort to violence in order for its message to be heard.

This information is crucial in regards to policy recommendations because although the Afghan Taliban started as an anti-corrupt organization to promote a secure Pashtun state, its means of doing so go against universal values. Actions such as prohibiting women from receiving an education, requiring women to wear head-to-toe burqas, jailing men for having too short of beards, banning music, and not allowing women to work or leave the house alone go against the basic principles of democracy. Because of this inhumane treatment, other governments are not willing to work with the organization as it does not reflect their own principles (the U.S. for example).

Even further, between 1996-2001, there were at least 15 recorded massacres carried out by the Taliban against Afghan civilians. In 2015, four separate attacks between August 7-10 carried out by Taliban members killed at least 70 people and left over 450 people wounded. Last month, Taliban members claimed the killing of 16 U.S. troops; however, this is speculated to be an exaggeration as U.S. forces along with Afghan forces carried out airstrikes against the Taliban, which killed 26 civilian family members of the Taliban. Unfortunately, the airstrikes were also responsible for the deaths of both Afghan soldiers and two U.S. soldiers (“2 American Troops Dead...”, 2016). Although the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan, it still works with both NATO and the Afghan government in a collective effort to eliminate the Taliban.

Since the U.S. is still making efforts to eliminate the Taliban, it is important to note the organization’s successes and failures in order to suggest and implement policies. From 1996-

2001, the Taliban ruled Afghanistan – this can be described as a major achievement as it was recognized (by some) as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. However, the group was stripped of its title in 2001 after being toppled by the U.S. government for harboring Al-Qaeda operatives. Obviously, toppling the government would be considered a success for both the U.S. and its Afghan allies.

Moreover, since the fall of the Taliban's reign as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the organization has weakened drastically. It has a finite source of funding as it is not recognized as sovereign. Therefore, it does not have the ability to participate in international affairs (U.S. Department of State). While the Taliban has produced plans to capture additional provinces in the state of Afghanistan, many of these plans have been exposed by Afghan security forces. Although these plans were thwarted, Afghan security officials have warned the international community that high-profile attacks should still be expected from the organization.

Albeit being a struggling organization, the Taliban was able to capture the city of Kunduz in 2015; this was a major feat since its destruction in 2001 (Ferdinando, 2016). However, if it wants to survive as a stable organization, it must up its game and maintain a high profile (such as carrying out attacks that receive mass media attention). This is where both the U.S. and Afghan governments come in.

After taking the group's inhumane practices and successes/failures into consideration, U.S. executives are then able to implement policies in order to destroy the organization in its entirety. One tactic that the U.S. has used is conducting airstrikes against the group. These airstrikes can be justified – in May of 2016, an airstrike carried out by the U.S. killed the organization's leader, Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Mansour. The loss of their leader was a major setback to the organization; the airstrike can be described as the U.S. cutting the head off the

snake – the group was forced to scramble and implement a new leader. Thus, the justification for future U.S. airstrikes stems from the earlier success the state has had with previous strikes.

Although airstrikes can be successful for the U.S., the use of them also has negative impacts, one being collateral damage. Airstrikes have the ability to hit important targets such as compounds, training camps, and sources of revenue for the organization. However, they also come with a series of unintended targets such as residential areas and civilians. This is problematic for executive leaders; they are forced to make the decision of whether to strike and possibly kill civilians or to not strike and allow the organization to continue its practices.

In addition to this, the legality of airstrikes is viewed differently amongst the international community. For example, the U.S. has a domestic law that bans assassinations, yet, the U.S. conducts airstrikes to take out other leaders. This is also problematic for executives because they have to conclude what is deemed an assassination – is the airstrike technically considered as an assassination if the organization is not recognized as sovereign? Does the airstrike invade the airspace of another state, thus breaking international law? These are questions that U.S. executives must consider before making the decision to conduct the airstrike.

However, as previously stated, although conducting airstrikes has negative consequences, they are justified. At the beginning of 2016, there were roughly 9,800 U.S. troops still in Afghanistan; however, President Obama had plans to lower that number to 5,500 in 2017 (Martinez, 2015). It is evident that airstrikes have been replacing actual troops being in these countries; they are viewed as a swift way to eliminate the organization and its leaders. While it is inevitable for there to be collateral damage as a result of an airstrike (for example, the deaths of 26 Afghan civilians, the Afghan soldiers, and the two U.S. soldiers), the air campaigns against

the organization have generally been successful in targeting Taliban leaders. Thus, it is justified to conduct further airstrikes to cripple the organization.

However, it is also recognized that the U.S. government has an advantage in conducting policy regarding the group over the Afghan government. The geographical location of the U.S. is nowhere near Afghanistan, which is why conducting airstrikes makes sense, at least for immediate effects. The Afghan government does not have this advantage; the terror is taking place within its own borders. Afghanistan cannot conduct airstrikes against its own people.

It would make more sense for the Afghan government to deal with the Taliban in the form of negotiations. In the past, the Taliban has had no interest in doing so due to its dedication to religious and nationalist ideologies. The Taliban has typically viewed Afghanistan as corrupt, anti-Pashtun, and pro-Western democracy and the members of the organization would rather die than strike a deal with the enemy. However, the Taliban has broken the tradition of not cooperating with the enemy as they have had secret negotiations with the Afghan government in Qatar; it will be interesting to see if there are any compromises that arise from these meetings and what those compromises may be (Yousafzai, Boone, & Rasmussen, 2016).

Although the Afghan government has primarily taken over military operations in the region, it has not made significant progress. Furthermore, the NATO combat mission expired at the end of 2014, thus leaving the fight to the U.S. and Afghanistan (Laub, 2014). The two governments need to work together to devise a plan in dealing with the organization; however, this can be problematic as there is a lack of trust between the two governments.

First, it is important to note that the U.S. has a stronger military than Afghanistan. This alone has caused tensions between the two states. Although the U.S. sends advisers to Afghanistan to help train its troops, it can only train them but so much. While the trainings are

beneficial to Afghan troops, the military still does not have the strength that the U.S. military has. In turn, the U.S. tends to blame the Afghan government when its troops cannot match the strength and the commitment to the fight that the Taliban has (Laub, 2014).

Furthermore, the U.S. does not completely trust the government of Afghanistan. Following September 11th, the Taliban harbored Al-Qaeda operatives within the borders of the state. Many of these operatives, including important leaders, were traveling back and forth between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition to this, the Taliban harbored the most wanted terrorist in the world, Osama bin Laden. Prior to invading Afghanistan, the U.S. in conjunction with the U.N. demanded that the Afghan government (which at the time was ruled by the Taliban) release bin Laden so he could be punished for his crimes. Their demands were not met. Thus, an air campaign ensued over the cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Kunduz, and Mazar-e-Sharif.

While bin Laden was killed in Pakistan in 2011, the U.S. government does not trust that neither Afghan officials nor Pakistani officials did not have some sort of intel on what was taking place within their state borders. This is especially considering the fact that the leader was able to remain hidden for more than a decade; there very well could have been information regarding his whereabouts.

Similarly, the Afghan government does not fully trust the U.S. Following 9/11, the U.S. began Operation Enduring Freedom; the purpose of this operation was for U.S. and allied forces to prohibit the Taliban from offering a safe haven to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. While the coalition lasted for fourteen years, allied troops withdrew from the state. The U.S. and Afghanistan signed an agreement that the U.S. would continue to station troops within the

borders of the state; however, the U.S. withdrew in 2014 and the nature of its mission change to support the Afghan government.

The lack of trust that the Afghan government has with the U.S. stems from its failures following Operation Iraqi Freedom. The U.S. led a series of “shock and awe” attacks in Iraq, implemented a [failed] democracy, and abruptly left. The Afghan government does not want the same to place in its state; it needs the help of the U.S. and cannot receive that help should the U.S. fully withdraw from the state.

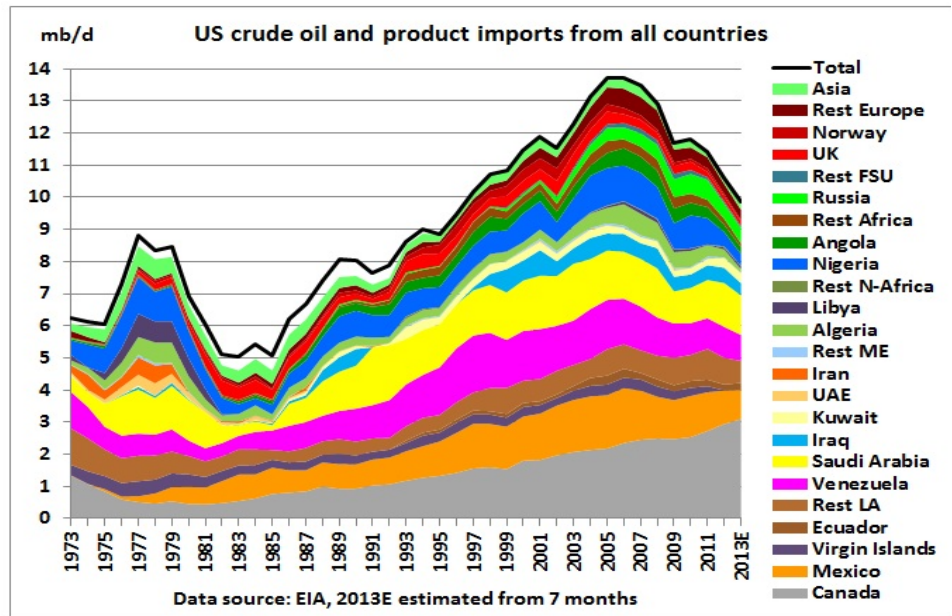
While there remains a lack of trust between the two governments, both have a common goal – to end the tenure of the Taliban. So, in order to reach this goal, each must take steps to trust one another and to share intel. The Afghan government does not have the strength to destroy the Taliban itself; similarly, the U.S. government must rely on Afghan intelligence in order to destroy the organization. Thus, each state must find a way to work together in order to reach their common goal.

In addition to this, it is not enough for the two governments to work together to end the Taliban. Afghanistan is recovering from being in a constant war for over three decades. While the state has come a long way in reconstructing its foundation, the U.S. can benefit from providing assistance to the state. The U.S. could pursue its national interests by helping Afghanistan rebuild their country. These interests include national security, economic prosperity, and rule-based international order.

Of course, the national security aspect of these national interests pertains to the Taliban. By assisting Afghanistan to become a strong state, the two can work together more effectively to defeat the terrorist organization. In addition to this, if Afghanistan becomes a strong state, it is

less likely that future terrorist organizations can thrive within its borders, especially if the state maintains close relations with the U.S.

Moreover, the U.S. can pursue its economic interests in the state because Afghanistan has both large oil reserves and large non-fuel mineral resources. The U.S. does not currently import oil from Afghanistan; however, it could impose incentives for



Afghanistan to export oil to the U.S. Such incentives could include an exchange of more ground troops for oil or more economic aid for oil. The Afghan government could then use the addition of ground troops or economic aid to further enhance their fight against the Taliban.

In addition to pursuing national security interests and economic interests, the U.S. can pursue a rules-based international order. This also directly relates to the Taliban; the organization produces over 80% of the world's illicit opium. Prior to U.S. involvement in the state, Afghanistan had no way of prosecuting those who took part in the illegal sale of this drug; this stems from the fact that both its legal system and prison system were in shambles. Prisons were overcrowded and had a lack of security. However, U.S. involvement in Afghanistan strengthened the state's legal system and cracked down on illegal drug trade (U.S. Department of State). By continuing to be involved in the state, the U.S. and Afghanistan can strengthen prison

security and can further crack down drug trafficking, especially on Taliban members, who partake in this act. Thus, by doing so, the U.S. and Afghanistan can establish a domestic order.

Another policy recommendation that has not been analyzed is the notion of doing nothing and getting U.S. troops entirely out of Afghanistan. The role of public opinion comes into play in regards to the U.S.' involvement in Afghanistan. Considering the American people are the source of funding for government institutions such as the Central Intelligence Agency, Congress, and the Department of Defense, it is important to listen to their input. According to Gallup polls, Americans have increasingly viewed the U.S.' involvement in Afghanistan following the aftermath of 9/11 as a mistake. Even further, according to the same polls, 78% of Americans view the country of Afghanistan itself as unfavorable (Gallup, Afghanistan).

While the American people do not know the classified information regarding the Afghan Taliban, it is important to hear what they have to say. The U.S. has a responsibility to protect the international community and maintain global order; however, if its people do not want the military to be involved in certain conflicts, especially conflicts pertaining to terrorist organizations, then the people's voices should be taken into consideration during the process of policy implementation.

Since 78% of Americans view Afghanistan as unfavorable, they may believe that the Afghan Taliban is Afghanistan's responsibility. They may believe that U.S. involvement is not in its best interest. They may also believe that by not being involved, the U.S. can exempt itself from future conflicts that may arise in the region.

While the U.S. has already been involved in the campaign to destroy the Taliban, the opinion to leave the organization up to Afghanistan is fair. If citizens feel that the U.S. should

not act as the global policeman, then executives and policy makers need to take these opinions into consideration as their future terms are dependent on public opinion.

Although there are numerous policy options to consider, each of them has consequences. The U.S. and allied forces can continue to conduct airstrikes; however, the legality of conducting these strikes is not a black and white issue. The U.S. government and the Afghan government can work together to defeat the organization; however, a lack of trust may prevent one government from sharing intel with the other. The U.S. can decide to leave Afghanistan entirely and do nothing to defeat the organization; however, without its strength, the Taliban can grow stronger and other terror organizations can breed in the region.

Although each action has negative consequences, it is currently in the U.S.' best interests to conduct airstrikes. As stated previously, the negative consequences include collateral damage, breaking international law by invading air space to conduct said strikes, and the legality of airstrikes in their entirety is not entirely clear. However, the U.S. has had success with these strikes as there has been at least one [recorded] death of an important Afghan Taliban leader – the leader being Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Mansour. It is possible that a continuation of these strikes can take out other important Taliban members, especially leaders and potential future leaders.

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