



# TOU JE NATO IN AFGANISTAN IUNLE JE

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# 1 Introduction

Afghanistan, sometimes nicknamed the *graveyard of empires*,<sup>1</sup> has attracted international attention for almost 40 years, and even though other major crises have somewhat overshadowed it, the situation in Afghanistan is far from being stable or resolved.<sup>2</sup> Afghanistan and the intricate history that shaped it are of great significance to a number of nations, especially those joined in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This significance goes back into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the failed Soviet invasion, which ended in 1989, was a major factor<sup>3</sup> contrib-

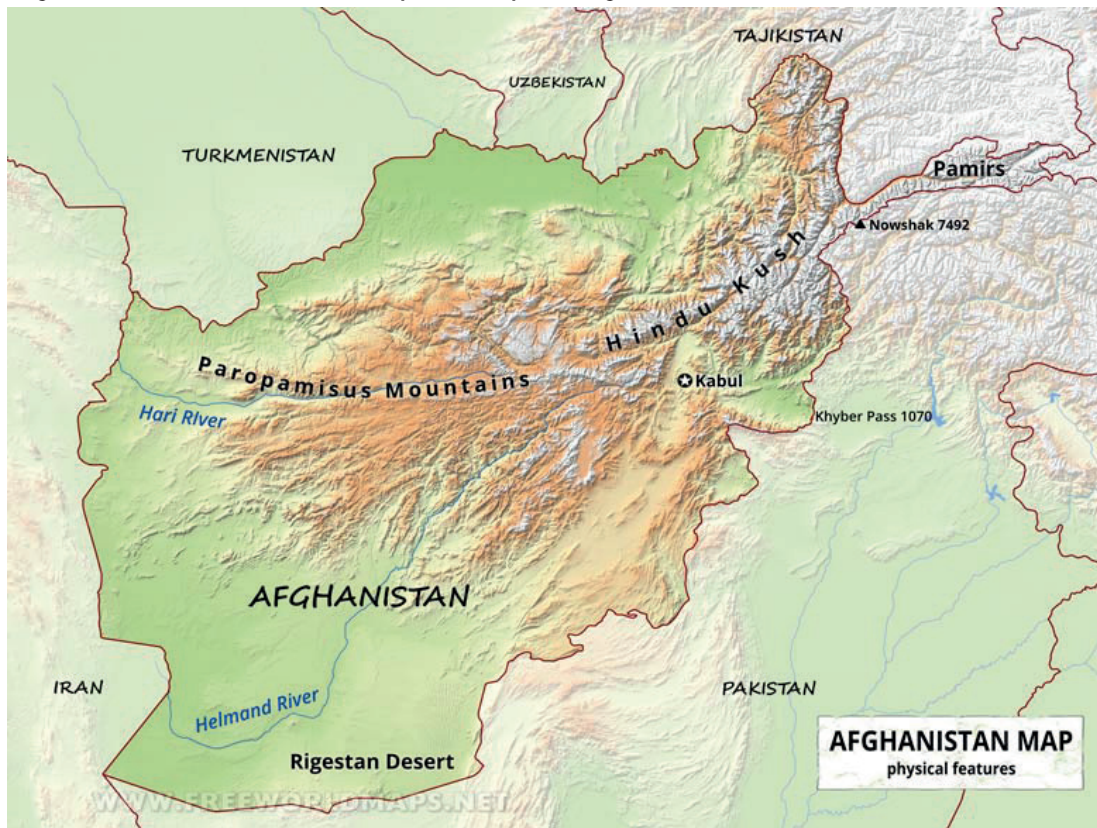
uting to the eventual collapse of NATO's greatest former adversary. The following decades witnessed NATO's longest and most challenging mission to date as well as the longest war in the history of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Neither the end of the war nor the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan are near completion,<sup>5</sup> therefore NATO must remain vigilant and make sure that its strategic concept for Afghanistan remains aligned with the current situation as well as address new challenges as they may arise.

## 2 Geography

The specific geographical features of Afghanistan can easily be seen as the original cause for its turbulent history<sup>6</sup> and they

are essential to comprehend the historical development of the region.



Picture 1: Physical map of Afghanistan<sup>92</sup>

### 2. 1 Physical geography

Afghanistan is a mountainous landlocked country in central Asia, which shares its longest border with Pakistan in the east and south.<sup>7</sup> The westernmost exten-

sion of the Himalayas known as the Hindu Kush Mountains dominate the country dividing it into three distinct regions:<sup>8</sup>

- The Northern Plains
- The Central Highlands
- The Southern Plateau

The North is the most fertile and as such is home to the bulk of Afghanistan's agriculture. The Centre is

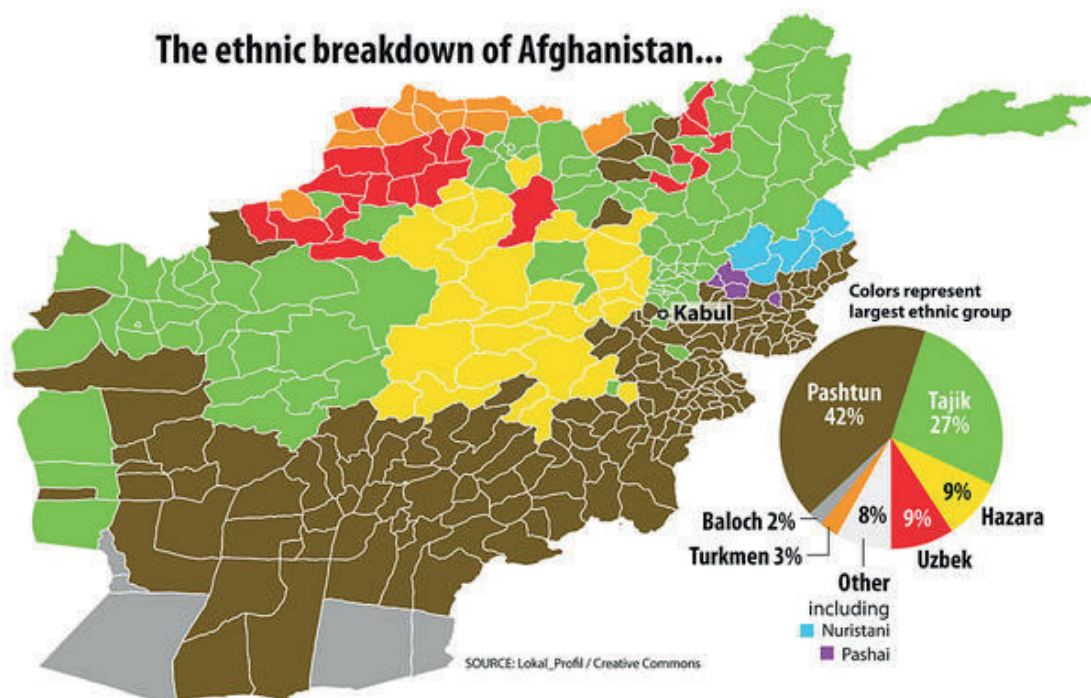
occupied by mountainous terrain that is hard to traverse even with the use of modern technologies. Finally, the South is mostly flat and dry and hosts the majority of Afghanistan's opium production.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it is the region with the strongest presence of Taliban (see Picture 4).

## 2. 2 Political geography

For the most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Afghanistan served as a buffer between the Tsarist Russia and the British Empire,<sup>10</sup> which effectively created Afghan boundaries through bilateral treaties.<sup>11</sup> These boundaries did not respect the distribution of ethnolinguistic groups and later proved to be problematic.<sup>12</sup> Due to the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan running mostly through mountainous or desert terrain, it is beyond the means of the current Afghan government to control the flow of people and (illegal) goods back and forth.

According to UN estimates, the population of Afghanistan sums up to about 35 million people.<sup>13</sup> As the result of political

instability, Afghanistan is a major source of refugees, most of them fleeing into the bordering countries such as Pakistan and Iran,<sup>14</sup> and more than 2.6 million Afghans from the total 35 million live outside of their homeland. The political system resembles (at least on paper)<sup>15</sup> that of the most democratic countries.<sup>16</sup> The country is split into 34 provinces<sup>17</sup> with the standard division of power into three branches (judicial, executive, legislative). However, there is also a special assembly known as the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly), which convenes to take decisions concerning Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and other significant matters.



Picture 2: Map showing the distribution and population percentages of different ethnolinguistic groups<sup>93</sup>

## 3 History

Afghanistan has a rich and tumultuous history, but to understand NATO's role in the country

it is enough to focus on the events of the last century.

### 3.1 Pre- 9/11 Afghanistan<sup>18</sup>

After gaining its independence from the British Empire in 1919, Afghanistan began to modernise itself under the rule of king Amanullah Khan. However, the populace resisted his reforms and a reactionary uprising caused the country to remain underdeveloped.

In 1973, the last Afghan king Zahir was deposed by anti-monarchists in the military and a republic was declared. After the efforts of the new president to limit the power of the parliament, another coup d'état was staged in 1978 establishing the Democratic Republic of

Afghanistan, a pro-Soviet socialist state with a one-party system. Despite the subsequent propaganda, the revolution was supported by only a fraction of the population.

Those who were indifferent at first soon began to rebel against the newly established communist regime as its radical social and economic reforms were directly opposed to the teachings of Islam as traditionally understood by the Afghans or sought to break up the deep-seated tribal structure.

#### 3.1.1 Soviet invasion

Knowing that the regime could not withstand the widespread opposition, the communists asked the Soviet Union several times for assistance. After a period of hesitation Moscow heeded the call for help and on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1979 Soviet troops crossed the Afghan border.

The Afghans did not look kindly upon the Soviets and regarded them as foreign intruders, with many of them declaring their struggle against the atheistic Soviets a holy war (Jihad) and calling themselves the mujahedeen (literally those who struggle for the sake of Allah and Islam).<sup>19</sup> Despite inferior military equipment, the mujahedeen posed a significant threat

to Soviet troops. Especially since they were supported by the locals and had knowledge of the mountainous terrain.

The fighting, as well as the radical reforms, forced as much as a third of Afghanistan's inhabitants to flee into the neighbouring countries, especially to Pakistan and Iran. Alongside the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, more than 100 refugee camps were established with the help from Western countries and Pakistan. Subsequently, some of these camps were turned into training facilities for the mujahedeen with not only the

help and funding by the governments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, western countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom or France, but also the People's Republic of China or Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Following

the training, armed groups of fighters would cross the border and attack the Soviet positions.<sup>21</sup>

Over the course of their operations in Afghanistan, the Soviet troops managed to maintain the control of major cities as well as air bases and partly roads connecting these locations. However, they could not hold on to rural areas and as such the power of the government did not extend far beyond the capital of Kabul and other major cities. With the Soviet Glasnost and Perestroika programs initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, true information about the invasion reached the general public in the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> The subsequent unpopularity of the operation, as well as the economic costs, pressured the Soviet leadership to abandon their Afghan endeavours and all Soviet troops were withdrawn by 1989.

#### 3.1.2 Civil war<sup>23</sup>

After the departure of Soviet units, Afghanistan fell into ever greater disarray with a multitude of opposing groups

**“ The power of the government did not extend far beyond the capital of Kabul and other major cities.**



operating throughout its territory. When the communist regime fell in 1992, the anti-Soviet opposition formed a new interim government. However, the opposition consisted of several groups with conflicting interests as well as ethnic backgrounds,<sup>24</sup> which resulted in a power struggle and a massive battle over the capital city of Kabul. No group managed to win a decisive victory and Afghanistan was effectively split into several autonomous regions.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. 1. 3 Taliban<sup>26</sup>

Originally Pashtun students of orthodox Islamic religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan,<sup>27</sup> the members of the Taliban movement, received training in the camps alongside the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and were intent on restoring order and establishing a pure society based on the strictest interpretation of Islamic texts. The Taliban established itself first in the south of Afghanistan in 1994 by conquering the second largest Afghan city - the city of Kandahar. Apart from the support they received from abroad (especially from Pakistan), the Taliban was also mostly welcomed by the locals due to their Pashtun origins and their ability to restore relative peace.

After consolidating in the south, the Taliban launched an

offensive to conquer the north of Afghanistan and in 1996 captured Kabul. However, there were those who resisted. In their efforts to stop the spread of the Taliban, the remaining anti-Soviet opposition groups based in the north of Afghanistan have created a pact, which later came to be called the Northern Alliance. This group included the representatives of the aforementioned interim government, which was still recognized as the legitimate government of Afghanistan by the UN, even though the Taliban controlled approximately 90 % of the territory at the height of its power.<sup>28</sup> On these territories, the leader of the Taliban movement, Muhammad Umar, sought to institute the purest Islamic regime in the world. He implemented the cruelest Islamic forms of punishments for crimes and curbed the rights of the Afghan people, especially those of women. As a result, the new regime was admired by militant Islamist groups, whose members flocked into the country in great numbers, including those of Al-Qaeda<sup>29</sup> and their leader Osama bin Laden. Gradually, Al-Qaeda gained influence in Afghanistan. This eventually proved fatal for Umar's regime after on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, when two planes hijacked by the members of Al-Qaeda crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center and another destroyed part of the building of Pentagon.

## 3. 2 Post 9/11 Afghanistan<sup>30</sup>

A worldwide denunciation of the attacks followed. Even the Pakistani government, despite their close ties and support of Taliban, sided with the United States. On 12<sup>th</sup> September, the Allies from NATO decided to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty,<sup>31</sup> provided that the investigation of the attacks reveals they can be regarded as an attack from abroad, for the first time in the history of the Alliance. When the Taliban ignored the US ultimatum to extradite the suspected perpetrators of the attacks and to close terrorist training facilities, the American administration opted for confrontation and Operation Enduring Freedom (EF) was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001.<sup>32</sup>

Initially, the operation comprised of airstrikes by the American and British forces, targeting especially terror-

ist training camps in the country. Subsequently, with newly gained support, the Northern Alliance began a massive offensive and reached Kabul as early as 13<sup>th</sup> November of the same year.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the year, the offensive successfully ended by capturing Kandahar, the last Taliban stronghold in Afghanistan. However, the defeat of the Taliban was only one of the

**“ On 12<sup>th</sup> September, the Allies from NATO decided to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.**

objectives for the United States and its allies, who, above all, wanted to capture the leaders of Al-Qaeda and Taliban.<sup>34</sup> Therefore EF continued well after 2001, eventually merging with the NATO-led Inter-

national Security Assistance Force.<sup>35</sup> It was only in 2011 that Osama bin Laden<sup>36</sup> was eliminated by the U.S. Armed forces in Pakistan and in 2015 that the Afghan government claimed that Omar died in 2013 from tuberculosis.<sup>37</sup>

## 4 International Security Assistance Force

### 4.1 Launch of the mission

It was essential to fill up the created power vacuum. Fortunately, the United Nations facilitated the establishment of an interim government in December of 2001, with Hamid Karzai as its head.<sup>38</sup> As it became clear that the new administration does not have the capacity to re-

store peace and order, the UN Security Council (UNSC) established an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF),<sup>39</sup> originally intended *“to create a secure environment in and around Kabul and support the reconstruction of Afghanistan.”*<sup>40</sup>

### 4.2 Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Due to the mandate of ISAF being limited to such a small region, other ways of supporting reconstruction of Afghanistan were established, including the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)<sup>41</sup> – Consisting of both military and civilian personnel, the PRTs were commanded by individual nations (many of them members of NATO) and fulfilled different roles ranging from providing security to monitoring the reconstruction

efforts. The dynamic changed following August of 2003 when NATO assumed command of the ISAF and October of 2003 when the mandate of ISAF was extended by the UNSC beyond the province of Kabul.<sup>42</sup> PRTs gradually began to be transferred under the ISAF with their military components under the command of NATO,<sup>43</sup> which also established new PRTs while simultaneously increasing the number of their personnel.<sup>44</sup>

### 4.3 Expanding the scope of the mission

Since 2004, ISAF has been expanding its scope by the deployment of mentoring teams to Afghan national army units and by the appointment of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup> In 2007, ISAF started to work in tandem with the European Union within the scope of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL),<sup>46</sup> providing support to the Afghan National Police (ANP). Apart from training and mentoring, ISAF assisted the ANP at the tactical level, sharing key information as well as joint patrolling of ISAF troops and Afghan police officers.

ISAF also played an important role in reconstruction and development, essentially extending the authority of the Afghan government to more remote areas by making them secure. The PRTs and their civilian personnel took on such tasks as reconstructing schools and irrigation ditches or building infrastructure in order to facilitate communication and mobility. Securing remote areas also enabled other international and non-governmental actors to undertake projects designed to relieve the locals.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.4 Countering drug-trafficking

ISAF was also active in counter-narcotics operations. Afghanistan lies in the so-called Golden Crescent. This prestigious sounding denomination is used to describe a region in central Asia responsible for a huge portion of world's opium production and Afghanistan is actually the world's leading opium producer. According to the UNODC,<sup>48</sup> more than 90% of the world's heroin production comes from poppy cultivated in Afghanistan. While areas under government control account for about 40 % of

this production, the majority comes from the southern regions of Afghanistan, which are still largely controlled by the Taliban.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the progress to eradicate poppy fields is slow even in the government-controlled regions as the Afghan government realises that poppy cultivation is sometimes the only way for poor farmers to sustain themselves.<sup>50</sup> Despite ISAF's best efforts, no resolution to this situation was found as of yet and poppy production actually continues to rise.<sup>51</sup>

## 4. 5 Taliban insurgency

As already implied, Taliban was not totally defeated and its insurgency continues to this day. Having realized that it cannot defeat its enemies conventionally, Taliban's tactics shifted to guerrilla tactics and suicide bombings.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the number of casualties began to increase<sup>53</sup> and since 2006 Taliban began to regain its lost positions.<sup>54</sup> Multiple reasons for this resurgence can be found. The most frequently mentioned are the US focus on the War in Iraq at the time<sup>55</sup> and the slow reconstruction process. Only in 2007<sup>56</sup> did the Alliance realize that the war was not over and that the number of troops stationed as part of the mission needed to scale up. Eventually, the numbers reached up to 130,000 personnel with more than 50 NATO and partner nations participating.<sup>57</sup>

**NATO partner countries** are countries that are not members of the Alliance but cooperate with it on specific tasks. Partners include countries as diverse as Austria, Russia, Republic of Korea or Colombia.<sup>94</sup>

Even with this surge of reinforcements under President Obama, the ISAF still did not manage to root out the Taliban and other rebel groups. The combination of extreme terrain, bad or non-existent infrastructure and the fact that Taliban secretly received aid from countries such as Pakistan<sup>58</sup> dragged

NATO and its partners into a war of attrition, which could not simply be won with the amount of resources or the strategies employed back then.<sup>59</sup>

This was made even worse when the issue of burden-sharing was raised inside NATO. The United States began to question the motivation of some of its European allies, who did not seem committed to the mission.<sup>60</sup> The existence of "national caveats"<sup>61</sup> prohibiting the soldiers of some member states to undertake offensive operations and different approaches to the mission led to a lack of a coherent strategy. Mainly, some allies believed that the military focus of the mission was exaggerated and that more emphasis should be put on stabilising and reconstruction. The fact that PRTs were commanded by individual ISAF countries hampered a unified strategy as well.<sup>62</sup> After several years and immense amount of resources spent, the public support for the War in Afghanistan in western countries began to diminish, assuming it was high in the first place.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the relations between the Afghan government and the West became tense due to several incidents of misbehaviour by American soldiers.<sup>64</sup> The death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 served as a welcomed pretext to accelerate the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan promised by president Obama.

## 4. 6 End of the mission

Since 2011, the security responsibility began to be transferred to the Afghan government, coinciding with the gradual withdrawal of ISAF forces. The ISAF officially ended in 2014 when the process of transferring command of security in all provinces to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) was complete.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Taliban insurgency continued throughout the years and this step meant an even greater strain on the Afghan army and police, which were already stretched thin with desertion being commonplace.<sup>66</sup>

Worse still, the results of ISAF's reconstruction efforts remain questionable. At the end of the mission, Afghanistan still faced administrative problems with the bureaucracy being notoriously ineffective and corrupt.<sup>67</sup> According to estimates, the narcotics industry equaled up to the third of the legal economy<sup>68</sup> and can be seen as a major factor undermining stability to this day. The state of Afghan democracy was also dubious at best as the legitimacy of the presidential and parliamentary elections was widely disputed.<sup>69</sup>



## 5 Resolute Support, ANA Trust Fund and the NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership

### 5.1 Launch

In January 2015, a new NATO mission named Resolute Support (RS),<sup>70</sup> was launched with the aim of providing

**“ Currently, the mission comprises around 16 000 personnel.**

training, advice and support to the ANDSF. Currently, the mission comprises around 16 000 personnel and new troop-contributing partner nations keep expanding this number, such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in July 2018.<sup>71</sup>

### 5.2 Financial support

Countries participating in the mission also contribute to the financing of the Afghan security forces with an emphasis on their long-term sustainment through the Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund.<sup>72</sup> This is of great significance, especially due to the tenuous situation concerning Afghan govern-

mental finances, which, at the present, are far from being sufficient to sustain the armed forces. Through this fund, NATO and other contributors can ensure that the ANDSF receives the necessary resources to maintain security, in turn creating room for economic growth and stability.



	Albania	83		Germany	1.300		Portugal	170
	Armenia	121		Greece	6		Romania	679
	Australia	270		Hungary	93		Slovakia	36
	Austria	18		Iceland	2		Slovenia	8
	Azerbaijan	120		Italy	895		Spain	40
	Belgium	78		Latvia	36		Sweden	29
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	60		Lithuania	50		the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia <sup>1</sup>	44
	Bulgaria	158		Luxembourg	2		Turkey	563
	Croatia	106		Mongolia	120		Ukraine	11
	Czech Republic	245		Montenegro	20		United Kingdom	650
	Denmark	155		Netherlands	100		United States	8.475
	Estonia	40		New Zealand	13			
	Finland	29		Norway	55			
	Georgia	870		Poland	247			
						<b>Total</b>	<b>15.997</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

<sup>2</sup> See links to media backgrounder on [“NATO-Afghanistan relations \(June 2018\)”](#) and to media backgrounder on the [ANA Trust Fund](#).

June 2018

Picture 3: Spreadsheet showing the personnel contributions of NATO members and partner countries<sup>95</sup>

### 5.3 Structure and tasks

Contrary to the PRT commands in every province, the RS works on a basis of 1 central command (“hub”) in Kabul and 4

regional commands (“spokes”).<sup>73</sup> The United States, Germany, Italy and Turkey are the RS mission “framework nations,” each

leading a regional Train, Advise and Assist Command (TAAC) responsible for coordinating support and capabilities within its respective command region. Additionally, two regional task forces conduct Train, Advise and Assist (TAA) missions with the ANDSF in the southeast and southwest of the country.<sup>74</sup>

## 5. 4 Enduring Partnership Declaration

In addition to the two aforementioned areas, NATO has also signed a declaration of Enduring Partnership with the Afghan government back in 2010. This treaty created a framework for cooperation after the end of

Apart from advising the ANDSF at all levels, the mission also provides support in areas such as logistical sustainment or, more importantly, civilian oversight to “ensure the Afghan security forces and institutions act in accordance with the rule of law and good governance.”<sup>75</sup>

ISAF, which was used to establish several programmes intended to, for example, increase the integrity and transparency of the armed forces or support disaster preparedness.<sup>76</sup>

## 6 Current situation

As of now, Afghanistan remains an unstable country with the security situation staying unsatisfactory. The country is plagued by corruption in the government, weak rule of law,<sup>77</sup> poor economy and the 2018 parliamentary elections are likely to face substantial difficulties with ensuring their legitimacy as well as the security of voters.<sup>78</sup>

However, the biggest issue to be addressed is undoubtedly the continuing insurgency of Taliban and the Afghan branch of ISIS known as ISKP,<sup>79</sup> which established itself in Afghanistan in 2014 after recruiting former Taliban members.<sup>80</sup> Especially the south of Afghanistan is ravaged by these conflicts, with a significant portion of the territory being under Islamist control and small pockets of resistance existing throughout other parts of Afghanistan, primarily in mountainous regions. Moreover, the Afghan government is threatened within its own territory by suicide bombings and other operations. The chances of the Afghan Government to reach a decisive victory against the radicals are doubtful at best<sup>81</sup> due to multiple factors including guerrilla tactics, rugged terrain, the continued support they receive from Pakistan<sup>82</sup> and Iran<sup>83</sup> or the enormous profits from poppy cultivation in Taliban-controlled territory.<sup>84</sup>

It might, therefore, be unsurprising that there have long been efforts to negotiate with the Taliban.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, many setbacks have arisen, for instance the assassination of Afghanistan's former president Rabbani, who was to lead the negotiations on the behalf of the government.<sup>86</sup> More



Picture 4: Map showing areas under the control of the Taliban and ISIL<sup>96</sup>

recently, the government tried to issue unilateral ceasefires to show their readiness to negotiate.<sup>87</sup> Although the ceasefires did not achieve the desired result, it is worth noting that Taliban itself declared a three-day truce at the end of the month of Ramadan, which was upheld for the most part by both sides.<sup>88</sup> It is hoped that Pakistan might convince Taliban to enter negotiations with the Afghan government. Unfortunately, Islamabad has not acted upon this call yet.<sup>89</sup> The situation is complicated by the fact that Taliban is split into multiple factions,<sup>90</sup> which became apparent after the

death of Mohammad Omar in 2013.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, any potential successful reconciliation will have to see the Taliban laying down arms and accepting the democratic constitu-

tion, which necessarily implies significant trade-offs by the other side in the negotiations, possibly even the end of any foreign missions to Afghanistan.

## 7 Conclusion

The previous years have seen the end of one NATO mission and the launch of another, signalling that NATO is well aware that it must continue in its commitment in Afghanistan, be it in a different form. Although the Resolute Support Mission provides crucial support to the Afghan armed forces, questions remain whether this is enough given the

current situation and the previous involvement of NATO in the region and whether Afghanistan will not fall back into disarray if left to its own. It is crucial for NATO member states to reassess their objectives in Afghanistan and decide what future role (if any) will NATO play in its future development.

## Questions for the negotiations

1. What was your country's historic involvement in Afghanistan?
2. What is your country's general attitude towards the missions in Afghanistan? Do/did they fulfil their purpose?
3. How should NATO proceed with the Resolute Support Mission?
4. What is your country's current commitment to the Resolute Support Mission? Does your country plan to extend this commitment?
5. Should NATO do more in Afghanistan? In what areas?
6. How can NATO contribute to the stability of Afghanistan? How does your country view the potential negotiations with the Taliban?

## Recommended reading

### **Afghánský konflikt**

a fairly detailed book describing Afghanistan's geography and history up to 2004

<http://files.slavomirhorak.webnode.cz/200000028-6c3d56d3a9/kniha-afghanistan2005.pdf>

### **NATO and Afghanistan**

the official NATO website on the topic as well as individual missions

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_8189.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm)

### **Resolute Support Mission website**

the official website of the RS mission

<https://rs.nato.int/>

### **analysing NATO's role in Afghanistan**

a thought-provoking essay about the ISAF

<https://www.e-ir.info/2015/02/08/analysing-natos-role-in-afghanistan>

### **the forgotten war: NATO's legacy in Afghanistan**

an informative essay summarizing the development in Afghanistan over the course of the conflict

<http://www.eadsociety.com/natos-legacy-in-afghanistan/>

### **how the US failed to rebuild Afghanistan** An informative essay summarizing the development in Afghanistan over the course of the conflict

a short video explaining in what respects the Allies failed in Afghanistan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKVdXbIpW9Q>

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HOSPODÁŘSKÉ NOVINY

**RESPEKT**