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(UNHCR)**

**DISCUSSING THE SPILLOVER IMPACTS OF
THE AFGHAN REFUGEE CRISIS TO
NEIGHBORING NATIONS**

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Basic Overview of the Issue

Following the retreat of the United States (US) from Afghanistan, while many believed that this would be a turning point for a sovereign Afghan Republic, many others understood what would follow and tried to escape holding on to the US planes. The people were long tired of all the changes in government, civil wars, and internal conflicts that happened in the nation's past.

Afghanistan has been a long-troubled nation as mentioned, but with the most recent announcement of Joe Biden taking the American soldiers back home, the nation went into turmoil once again. The group known for its extreme ideology on Sharia law and its view of women, the Taliban has obtained control of the government. There exists a strict list of laws and harsh punishments, an authoritarian government backed by the religion of Islam. This environment has triggered a need for escape in Afghans, which later placed them as the third most displaced nationality in the world.

Afghans have spread out throughout the world, taking refuge in neighboring countries or going to farther lengths and seeking a life in the US or the UK. They did not arrive as small groups but as large communities to other nations and have affected life there. Social hierarchies, unemployment and job opportunities, cultural conflicts, humanitarian crises, and much more has to be discussed regarding Afghan refugees in other nations.

Explanation of Important Terms

Refugee

Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. They often have had to flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs and loved ones. Refugees are defined and protected in international law. ("What is a refugee?")

Internally Displaced People (IDP)

Internally displaced people, referred to as IDPs, have been forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, persecution or disasters, however, they remain within the borders of their own country. ("Internally Displaced People")



Social Inequality

Social inequality is characterized by the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society. It contains structured and recurrent patterns of unequal distributions of goods, wealth, opportunities, rewards, and punishments. ("The Sociology of Social Inequality")

Sharia Law

The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God's command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief. Known as the *sharī'ah* (literally, "path leading to the watering place"), the law represents a divinely ordained path of conduct that guides Muslims toward a practical expression of religious conviction in this world and the goal of divine favour in the world to come (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Sharia").

Insurgency

The violent struggle of a group of people who refuse to accept their government's power. ("Insurgency")

Detailed Background of the Issue

In order to have a deeper understanding of the situation surrounding Afghanistan and the refugees, the past events must be examined first. Events such as the rise of the Taliban, the US and NATO intervention, and the return of the Taliban are crucial to solve the issue of Afghanistan. First of all, the Taliban's rise to government.

The Rise of the Taliban

Following the Second World War (1939-1945) and during the Cold War (1947-1989), Afghanistan was always a troubled nation dealing with conflicts in the interior. Governments being accused of corruption was accepted as a common ordeal in the country. A reasonable start date for the events that shaped today's Afghanistan is the fall of the Republic of Afghanistan in 1978. That time's prime minister Daud Khan formulated many reforms for the country that signaled a shift from communism to the West, such as abandoning "the social ideals his regime initially espoused" (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan").



As can be guessed, this was not met with enthusiasm by some Afghan socialists, resulting in Khan's and other related politicians' murder. Chaos took over the nation, and the civil war began.

Skipping the early stages of warfare and coming to 1992, an interim government was formed. Although this might be perceived as an improvement, the Afghan people were suffering from hunger and they all depended on the aid sent by the UN. Unfortunately, this aid did not flow smoothly in, as militias and other small armed forces forced deliveries to make payments or turn around completely. An enraged group of students and leaders guiding them decided that the interim government was useless, so they decided to take the reins into their own hands. Taliban (Students) was formed in 1994 (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan").

Managing to bend the knees of said militias, the Taliban attained early fame, also getting help from the Saudi government. The people were tired of war, kidnapping, famine, and many other things. When the Taliban showed up as a source of hope to end things once and for all, many came to the call to arms (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan" 2024). Kabul was seized and the Taliban became the main ruler of the land. Opposition remained, as there was a pact called the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, but the Taliban had the upper hand for this time frame. The government received some initial support from UN members such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, but the Taliban's ideas and actions concerning sharia law and the rights of women denied them an official seat at the UN (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan").

The US Intervention

The issues for the Taliban grew, not linearly but exponentially. The United States was determined to put an end to terrorism in the Middle East and their prime target Osama Bin Laden was on Afghanistan soil. So, when the Taliban rejected the United States's request to extradite, they were met with sanctions. The actions would not turn out to be only centered around sanctions, as the 9/11 events unfolded the US found al-Qaeda and Bin Laden guilty of organizing such a terrorist act. Taliban did not hand over Bin Laden, so one option was left for the US: war (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan").



“Within weeks of the attacks, the United States and Britain launched an intensive bombing campaign against the Taliban and provided significant logistical support to Northern Alliance forces in an attempt to force the regime to yield to its demands.” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan") Taliban could go against such an organized and powerful force, and cities began being captured individually. Taliban had no choice but to accept defeat for their first but not the last rise to the throne. Taliban was kicked out and an interim government was formed, followed by a democratic election and Hamid Karzai being elected as the president.

The Islamic Republic

Karzai's time as president faced many allegations of fraud during the following elections, insurgencies from the Taliban, and most importantly a surge in the number of NATO troops in the nation. This, as everything does, yielded two sides. One side argued that NATO was running the country as they were also in charge of training the Afghanistan military and they were not to be trusted as their true aim could not be known. The other side argued the opposite and believed that the nation had an opportunity to improve. Fast forwarding seventeen years from 2004, both sides were partially wrong. During the period when there were 150,000 NATO soldiers in Afghanistan, the country was operating quite well compared to its history (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan"). Everything turned upside down for the Afghan government in 2020 and 2021 when the US agreed with the Taliban to not interfere with elections and prevent ISIL and ISIS from penetrating Afghanistan (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Afghanistan"). Taliban's gain was that NATO forces would slowly begin to return home, which meant room for an opening.

The Return of the Taliban

The Taliban did not hesitate and went on the offensive. Government troops were not ready and organized for a full-on attack, the Taliban captured the country one by one. A Taliban victory became obvious. The below



Figure 1: Afghans trying to escape the nation, NBC News



image became associated with the Taliban's victory. People escaped with what they could find, one way being hanging on to US ships and hoping to fly to freedom, but many failed.

All of this history brings today's Afghanistan being ruled once again by the Taliban. An Afghanistan where economic, social, cultural rights, women's and girls' rights are condemned by international organizations ("Afghanistan 2023"). An Afghanistan where discrimination, unlawful attacks and killings, the death penalty, torture, and ill-treatment are common ("Afghanistan 2023"). An Afghanistan where freedom of expression or freedom of religion is not optimal ("Afghanistan 2023"). All of these conditions result in one thing for many Afghans: escape.

Current Humanitarian Situation

It is estimated that there are 6.4 million Afghan refugees scattered around the world who need assistance of many kinds (UNHCR, 2023). Afghan people fled to the closest neighboring countries they could find, the most prominent ones being Pakistan, India, and Iran. All these nations were suddenly bombarded with people flooding into the nation, searching for food, shelter, and a job. So, the first problem that arose was the population increase and with it the humanitarian situation of the refugees. Since the number was so high, none of the governments could carry the burden of all the refugees, and most of them were left out in foreign lands to survive by themselves or to find a safe place back in Afghanistan, becoming internally displaced.

The most devastating problems the Afghan refugees are facing are starvation and the recent environmental occurrences. Many of the refugees do not have an ensured access to food and water, and they fight for their lives every day. On a side note, the children do not have access to education or do not go to school as there is no economic opportunity for them, and other reasons such as being discriminated against. The environmental occurrences refer to two things in particular. Afghanistan has been experiencing heavy rainfall as never seen in the past two years ("Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained", 2024). With most families having little to none shelter, this has also brought increasing cases of cold



and other illnesses around the refugees. The region has also been hit by a major earthquake that has led to losses.

The Economic Aspect

Another problem arose on the economic side of things. Afghan refugees were open to any kind of job or wage that allowed them to cover their necessities. Employers started to hire Afghans rather than citizens to lessen their costs overall. This gave rise to unemployment among the citizens and gave rise to tension between the two nationalities. The refugee situation of Afghans quickly turned into stealing the lives and nation of others so some governments decided to react harshly. Iran and Pakistan made decisions to deport Afghan refugees who had not obtained any legal documents and sent them back to Afghanistan, which was viewed as inhumane by the Taliban. Other nations, however, such as India opened their arms to the refugees and even started an emergency visa for Afghans.

The humanitarian situation mentioned above punctuated hunger in refugees and displaced people. This turns out to be a more economic issue than a humanitarian problem, as finding food is not the problem in Afghanistan or neighboring countries, the problem is affording them. This is also not mainly due to people losing their jobs and abandoning their homes but the sanctions applied on the Taliban. Before 2021, Taliban was dependent on foreign income and investments, almost at a percentage of 75%. When the US sanctions came into effect after the Taliban, the central bank and the economy collapsed, inflation went sky high. Being so dependent on one thing before, Afghanistan was without a solution to its economy which ended up hurting not the Taliban, but the refugees themselves.

Political Effects

Afghan refugees' lives are very important, however, there are political reasons why the refugees can't find a peaceful home. First of all, the Middle East and neighboring countries that are avoiding conflict are already under a heavy burden of refugees from different nationalities. There are African, Syrian, Palestinian and many others seeking refuge. Massive bordering countries such as Türkiye and Iran become a target for these refugees. However,



there is a limit to which nations can handle the weight of refugees and both are very overboarded, therefore can't offer the prosperous life that Afghan refugees hoped for.

Looking at the European Union, the response is negative. The EU has an agreement in place with Türkiye to keep the refugees inside Türkiye in exchange for tons of money. This has been applied for now but recently Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made a call for global cooperation, putting pressure on the EU nations which are already under pressure from local disputes. The major forces of the US and China are also involved in the issue. The US has offered up many Afghan refugees new life opportunities but it is also exceeding its limits. In response, China has blamed the US for starting another conflict yet again and demonstrating hypocrisy when it comes to delivering aid to the suffering.

So, there are three main issues that the Afghan refugee crises gave birth to in neighboring nations. First and foremost is the situation of the refugees in the countries. The refugees left their homes abandoned mostly without taking any valuables or money and are now in the battle of survival in foreign lands. Most of the refugees do not have a stable income or an income that is enough, leading to a lack of food, water, shelter, and other needs.

Another problem that both the refugees and the hosting nations face is the conflict between cultures and conditions. Afghans work underpriced but end up receiving the jobs which would have normally landed on a citizen, and when this is applied to a population voices begin to rise. Furthermore, since there are too many Afghans unfortunately displaced, they end up allocating themselves to some places more commonly and suddenly a district becomes more Afghan than Indian or Iranian, which again leads to conflict in the end. Finally, the host nations face an economic problem since there is a sudden influx of approximately 500,000 to 1,000,000 people coming into the country. Crime, traffic, inflation, pollution, and everything problematic rises. Afghan refugees, seeing the state of their country, do need a home elsewhere, but there is still much that needs to be done in order to ensure a safe and welcoming transition in neighboring countries.



Major Parties Involved

Afghanistan

Being the focus of the conflict, Afghanistan's people are in need of dire help. They have already gone through decades of conflict and the recently returning Taliban regime has made many evacuate the country or change town. With strict restrictions from the Western world, the Afghan economy is at a time of crisis which is directly affecting the refugee condition in the nation and in other nations. People are unable to afford food or basic shelter, therefore search for better opportunities in neighboring countries. There are serious cases of abuse, women rights and humanitarian rights in the nation as well.

Pakistan

A very close neighbor of Afghanistan, sharing borders, Pakistan has been one of the primary destinations of Afghan refugees. It holds the largest number of Afghan refugees currently. Due to the large number of refugees, Pakistan faces the same troubles mentioned previously in the text and refugees mostly reside in camps. One important thing to note is that the Pakistani government has started to deport undocumented and illegal immigrants into the nation, forcing some Afghans back into the rule of Taliban, raising international concerns.

United States of America (USA)

Blamed by many as the cause of Taliban rising to power once again in Afghanistan, the US continues to apply heavy economic sanctions on the nation. Not only is this damaging the country's economy, it is also having a heavy toll on the lives of the refugees, deeming them unable to buy basic needs. Leaving aside the negatives, the US has also shown positive actions toward accepting Afghans into the homeland and giving them visas.

European Union (EU)

Although the EU is not directly involved with the issue of Afghanistan, they are certainly included in the fate of Afghan refugees. Years of mass refugee flows into Europe has led the people of the continent divided, half looking at the issue as a humanitarian concern, while the other half considers what is best for Europe must be practiced. Nations



such as Italy, England, and Germany are facing many internal debates on the events conducted by Afghan or Middle East refugees. The EU is using Türkiye as a way to hold refugees just outside of its borders.

Türkiye

The gate to Europe and an Islam nation, Türkiye is one of the destinations for Afghan refugees to reside in temporarily. Contrary to the EU, Türkiye is very welcoming towards refugees and accepts them into the country, sometimes even granting them citizenship. The deal made with Europe is allowing the nation to enjoy economic incentives, however, the refugee number has gone through the roof in the country with over 4 million (“ILO’s...”).

Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
December 24, 1979	The start of the Afghan-Soviet War
February 15, 1989	Soviet forces withdraw from the region. The First Afghan Civil War embarks.
28 April, 1992	The Republic of Afghanistan falls. The Second Afghan Civil War starts.
1994	The Taliban forms and gains early victories in the civil war.
27 September, 1996	Taliban captures Kabul and becomes the government.
11 September, 2001	Hijacked planes crash into the Twin Towers in the United



	States.
7 October, 2001	The US invades Afghanistan.
13 November, 2001	Kabul is captured by the US forces and the Taliban falls.
27 May, 2014	President Obama announces initial plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.
February, 2019	US - Taliban peace talks initiated.
7 September, 2019	President Trump calls the peace talks off.
29 February, 2020	The US and the Taliban sign an agreement with the aims of peace.
14 April, 2021	President Biden decides full withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11.
15 August, 2021	Taliban resurfaces and captures Kabul, becoming the government.

Relevant International Documents

- Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 9 October 2024 (**A/HRC/RES/57/3**)
https://documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=A/HRC/RES/57/3&i=A/HRC/RES/57/3_1729242625165



- The Taliban in Afghanistan, October 2022
<https://unicri.it/sites/default/files/2022-10/The%20Taliban%20in%20Afghanistan%20-%20Assessing%20New%20Threats%20to%20the%20Region%20and%20Beyond.pdf>
- UNSC Resolution 2681 adopted at 27 April 2023
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/121/49/pdf/n2312149.pdf>

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Community Initiatives

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been in the center of the issue, trying to contain the crisis through a number of development aimed interventions within Afghanistan and its neighbors. The UNDP has undertaken a number of programs in poverty reduction, infrastructure development, and governance in order to stabilize communities and reduce forced displacement. Among the major programs is the Afghanistan Community Resilience Programme, which had the objective of bringing stability at the local level by offering sustenance and infrastructure rehabilitation for natural disaster precaution purposes. However, while there were some local successes, in the presence of ongoing insecurity, corruption, and a limited reach of development projects in Taliban controlled areas, it could not achieve much scaling up. These limitations reduced the initiative's impact in effectively solving the long lasting issue.

Voluntary Repatriation

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has played a vital role in the process of managing Afghan refugees within host countries like Pakistan, Iran, and others. To this end, the Voluntary Repatriation Program has been a massive initiative in these efforts, with many Afghan refugees being able to return between 2002 and 2016—one of the largest repatriation programs in history, with much criticism about the lack of adequate reintegration support at the time. Many returned home to unemployment, a lack of shelter, and even renewed insecurity, leading to secondary displacement. The program demonstrated the example that repatriation purposes must align with improvements in nation security and humanitarian conditions at the same time.



Solutions Strategy Programme

Another important solution attempt was the multi-year Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and international donors. SSAR focused on voluntary repatriation, enhancing conditions in host communities, and supporting reintegration programs in Afghanistan. Though SSAR did foster some extent of cooperation among the countries involved and responded to immediate needs, it was eventually underfunded and impossible to establish lasting solutions. Similarly, OCHA and WFP have played a role in emergency food assistance as well as other forms of humanitarian assistance for the refugee hosting countries. These aids were successful in containing immediate humanitarian crises, yet did little to address structural issues such as long term dependency on aid and the resultant economic pressures placed on host nations.

Solution Alternatives

Conditional Sanctions

Currently, the major issue inside and outside Afghanistan affecting the displaced and the refugees is, other than the government, the sanctions. The Western nations, the ones mainly responsible for such sanctions, can engage in dialogue with Taliban authorities and come to compromises regarding sanctions with the requirement of Taliban meeting a goal. For example, this could be raising the percentage of women going to work or receiving education to increase from 6% up to 15%. In exchange, some economic sanctions would be relieved of the nation. For this solution to work as intended, there also has to be a UN mechanism to monitor if the economic window provided by the sanctions lifted benefits the people more than the individuals in the government.

Financial Incentives to Host Nations

The most crucial part of the issue until Afghanistan reaches a total state of safety is the hosting nations of Afghan refugees. In order to have these nations protect and provide



living conditions to the refugees, more economic support should be provided. This would allow the overburdened nations to provide more easily, or entertain new countries into the issue to host Afghan refugees to enjoy the benefits of the incentives.

Local Projects in Host Nations

Another major issue is the integration of refugees into their host countries. They face every type of hardship from economic to racial. So, local projects started up by the UN organizations, working with local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with the goal of creating a sustainable community for both refugees and citizens to live and prosper in the city they are located in could be a huge step towards eliminating the tensions between both sides.

Useful Links

- <https://www.unhcr.org/af/> (Official website of the UNHCR for Afghanistan)
- <https://unama.unmissions.org/> (Official website of UNAMA)
- <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-endarips> (A document regarding humanitarian needs action plan for Afghanistan in 2024, published by OCHA)
- <https://afghanistan.iom.int/> (International Organization for Migration - Afghanistan)

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