

Discuss the impact of the Afghanistan conflict on the economy, society, political and environment.

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Afghanistan War is an international conflict in Afghanistan. It is a military invasion of Afghanistan that was launched by the U.S. and the U.K. in October of 2001, largely in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and with the intent of removing the Taliban regime from power. The conflict is still ongoing, with a possibility the NATO troops will withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.

Afghanistan has some of the most rugged terrain, inhospitable mountainous landscape in the world. More than 50% of the total land area lies above 6,500 ft. (2,000 m). It all ends in the high peaks of the Hindu Kush, where extensions of the Pamir Mountains, Karakorum Mountains and the Himalayas all come together. In the north, the landscape is primarily covered with farms. The desert with scattered salt flats occupies the southern landscape. Plants and wildlife in desert and mountain systems are adapted to the rigors of these habitats. However, the harsh conditions make these systems especially fragile and put them at risk from sudden changes, and both deserts and mountains are notoriously slow in recovering from damage. Afghanistan once consisted of major forests watered by monsoons. During the Civil war, members of the Taliban illegally traded timber in Pakistan, destroying much of the forest cover. US bombings and refugees in need of firewood destroyed much of what remained. Less than 2% of the country still contains a forest cover today. Bombs threaten much of the country's wildlife. One the world's important migratory thoroughfare leads through Afghanistan but due to the conflict, the number of birds migrating through this passage has dropped by 85%. In the mountains many large animals such as leopards found refuge, but much of the habitat is applied as refuge for military forces now. Additionally, refugees capture leopards and other large animals and trade them for safe passage across the border.

Refugee camps also cause significant environmental issues. The increase in people in the area put extra pressure on the local government to provide sufficient resources such as wood which has resulted with deforestation and the loss of habitat for meant species. There is little water available, any refugees use local streams like in a camp near the Afghanistan border where 1000-2000 refugees use a small stream as their source of water for drinking, cleaning and washing.

The bombings in Afghanistan have resulted with cities like Kabul becoming ruins with the majority of the infrastructure destroyed. The bombs had a dreadful impact on civilian life; destroying many cities as well as killing many Afghans. The death toll as a result of the bombing was 3,000 - 3,400 killing both civilians and members of the Taliban. Due to this intense bombing campaign, many urban and village residences, bridges, mosques, electricity and water supplies were destroyed like the hospital in the western city of Herat was bombed where 100 people were killed. Another example is the Hospital in Kandahar which was thought to have been bombed by mistake, however after a clarification it was in fact an old peoples home that was bombed.

In addition, the landscape and environment have been polluted with cluster bombs and depleted uranium which has injured thousands of Afghans. In a country reliant on agriculture, it has resulted with unemployment increasing as many do not want to work in a field full of mines are injured as a result, decreasing GDP and putting more reliance on foreign aid.

Another important impact of the conflict is the introduction of antipersonnel mines, where it is thought that about 10 million mines have been laid in Afghanistan.

The landmines are clustered randomly and have not only caused damage to humans and wildlife, but have destroyed hundreds of irrigation systems in Afghanistan. The damage associated with landmines is not just limited to civilians, the environment and wildlife is often killed by exploding mines. Even the retrieval of landmines has a detrimental effect on the environment. Moreover pollutants have been released into the atmosphere as a result of the fighting such as cyclonite, a toxic substance that may cause cancer and deposited perchlorates, which damage the thyroid gland. Numerous landmines left behind in Afghan soils still cause the deaths of men, women and children today.

As a direct result of the fighting in Afghanistan there have been 2,053 coalition deaths in Afghanistan and the civilian death toll is considerably higher at 8,813. The total deaths as a result of the war are 19,629. In Afghanistan, both death rate and birth rate are high with 1,269,000 births and 18 deaths per 1000 in the same year. The life expectancy for the average Afghan has dropped significantly to 44. The war has lowered people's life expectancies as the death rate and life expectancy rates highlight.

During the Taliban rule, the role of women was domestic and had little rights. Women could not be educated or enter employment and those who defied the Taliban were punished extremely, with some women being publically executed. However after the Taliban's fall from power, women's rights have increased with women returning to education and employment. Education has greatly improved in Afghanistan since 2001, where more than 5.4 million children returned to school with nearly 35% of them girls. However it is still estimated 11 million Afghans are still illiterate. Many schools lack funding so have poor facilities and the number of qualified teachers is low and cultural bias that many Afghans have against educating women still needs to be overcome.

Since the invasion of 2001 the economy of Afghanistan has improved significantly due to a mixture of billions of US dollars in international assistance and investments. It is also due to dramatic improvements in agricultural production and the end of a four-year drought in most of the country. However, Afghanistan still remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world that is highly dependent on foreign aid. The Afghan economy is significantly dependent on agriculture as most of the land is cultivated. The major export is poppies which are then used in the drug trade and the profits fund the Taliban war effort. Afghanistan is the source of 95% of 30 tonnes of heroin used in the UK each year. Profits from poppies are considerably higher as the estimated annual profit from poppy cultivation for a single farmer is 1,000 to 2,000 Lakhs, as opposed to the 20 lakhs from cultivating wheat. Therefore farmers are willing to grow poppies to get more money and many farmers refuse to switch back to growing wheat.

The Afghanistan conflict has a detrimental effect on the countries that are members of NATO, such as the UK where it has funded \$7 billion to the war effort, but it has been argued this money could have been used to pay for the NHS deficit. In addition U.S. Tax payers have paid \$172 billion to fund the war. President Obama is putting a further \$33 billion to the war fund in order to pay for sending 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. In addition, an extra \$2 billion is being requested for aid and "civilian" operations in Afghanistan, this money will be used for reconstruction of cities like Kabul and Kandahar.

Afghanistan is also dependent on Aid from NGOs. In 2010, the UK increased its Aid spending by 40% to speed up stabilizing Afghanistan, where most of the

money will pay for wages, rebuilding cities and trying to establish a stable economy and industry rather than relying on poppies.

The fighting between NATO forces and Taliban has caused problems for people in the area like in Helmand province where people have migrated to escape the fighting. Some 3.7 million Afghan refugees who have fled the conflict in Afghanistan over the past years with the majority living in neighbouring countries like 1.5 million in Iran and more than 2 million in Pakistan. The huge influx of refugees has caused problems for neighbouring countries like Pakistan which are often LEDC and are forced to cope with additional people. As a result of mass migration, there has been an extra demand for resources such as food and fuel in the host country. However, the refugees are a cheap labour force so contribute to the country's development but this can also create hostility with the local residents who see the refugees 'stealing their jobs'. As of September 2008, all neighbouring countries have closed their borders with Afghanistan, unable to support additional refugees. Since 2002, over 5 million people have returned to their homes since the fall of the Taliban regime. In an effort to reduce the presence of Taliban fighters in their own nations, both Iran and Pakistan have begun deportation programs, forcing Afghans to leave refugee camps and return to Afghanistan. A major concern is that these camps have become successful recruiting centres for the Taliban, Pakistan spent \$1 billion to prevent Pakistan becoming dominated by Taliban influence which had happened previously. The extreme number of refugees has put extra pressure on neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, which is a developing country and cannot cope with the strain. It has destabilised the country economically. As a result the standard of living in the camps is low. Due to low sanitation, poor diet, little water or energy infectious diseases are common often killing many people.

Refugees leaving Afghanistan has created problems as many of the refugees were scholars, doctors, teachers who left to escape the persecution from the Taliban but this has left a 'brain drain' with fewer educated people in Afghanistan. Another impact is the loss of vital workers which deters development and progress of the country.

After the invasion, the Taliban was removed from power and a democratic government was set up with free elections to elect the President. There were two elections, where both women and men voted and Karzai was elected President, showing democracy was established and working. However it was soon emerged the elections were fixed and the new government was corrupt, weakening the new system of Government. It also encouraged many Afghans to align themselves with the Taliban who were seen as a more stable government. NATO forces are trying to strengthen the fragile democracy in Afghanistan by holding international conferences.

Furthermore after the Taliban regime came to an end in Afghanistan, members were pushed into Pakistan, where they gained support of northern Pakistan. Their control spread over the country till they were only an hour from Islamabad. The Taliban's presence destabilised Pakistan, and the army pushed them back northwards to the Hindu Kush Mountains.

In conclusion the Afghanistan conflict has had both a positive and negative impact on Afghanistan and the people. The conflict has ended the Taliban rule which meant many Afghans benefitted as they were free from persecution. The education, economy, political and social impacts have generally improved. However there are some drawbacks such as the Government being corrupt and rigged elections and its extreme reliance on Aid.