

# Afghanistan's 20-year war

*Steve Bell*

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*The US government's decision in April 2021 to withdraw from Afghanistan was followed, in August, by the collapse of the Afghan Government and the return of the Taliban. They quickly occupied the Presidential Office in Kabul, signalling their control of much of the country.*

The horrors that have come from the twenty-year war in Afghanistan must neither be hidden nor forgotten. British politicians need to seriously examine what went wrong with the policy of successive governments. Failure to do so will create new tragedies.

## **Where the war came from**

In April 1978 a new regime came to power in Afghanistan. It overthrew the hated regime of Mohammed Daud, a hangover from the old monarchy. In a country where the majority of the population was engaged in agriculture, less than 20 per cent had sufficient land for family subsistence. Life expectancy was 35 years, with infant mortality at 269 per thousand. Literacy was between 5 to 10 per cent, almost completely a male preserve. Employment of women, outside of agriculture, was confined to teaching.<sup>1</sup>

The incoming regime promoted a platform that included land reform; emancipation for women; equal rights for different nationalities/ethnic groups; and development. Such a bold programme was ambitious for a poor, undeveloped country. Yet far from being welcomed by the 'international community', the new regime was denounced as it was led by a communist party, the People's Democratic

Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The US government, under President Carter, and its local allies, the Shah of Iran, and Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship in Pakistan, immediately began a campaign to undermine the PDPA government.

Inside Afghanistan, the US and allies supported reactionary forces including landlords, tribal chiefs and conservative religious leaders. Armed and assisted by the US, an insurgency ground on, limiting the new regime's ability to raise living standards. Under considerable pressure, in December 1979 the PDPA asked the Soviet Union to send military forces to assist in the war. Thus began a decade of military intervention in Afghanistan by the USSR, until February 1989. The US stepped up its intervention, arming forces who were antagonistic to all talk of equality, democracy, liberalism or socialism – yet presented by the US government as 'freedom fighters'.

The thoroughly cynical nature of the operation was explained by Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to President Carter from 1977 to 1981. What follows is part of an interview he gave to a French magazine, in January 1998<sup>2</sup>:

*Brzezinski: ... According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahideen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the President in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention.*

*Question: When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against secret US involvement in Afghanistan, nobody believed them. However, there was an element of truth in this. You don't regret any of this today?*

*Brzezinski: Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, essentially: 'We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war' ...*

*Question: And neither do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism,*

*which has given arms and advice to future terrorists?*

*Brzezinski: What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?*

*Question: ‘Some agitated Moslems’? But it has been said and repeated: Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today.*

*Brzezinski: Nonsense! It is said that the West has a global policy in regard to Islam. That is stupid: There isn't a global Islam ...*

The creation of the networks which sustained the various tribal warlords and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was a conscious product of US foreign policy. Trained, armed and aided by the US, the protégé later turned on the master. This was an experience repeated by later US governments in Iraq and Syria, creating ISIS and Al Nusrah. ‘World history’ was to exercise terrible revenge on the US.

### **Dealing with the Taliban**

The war resulted in around a million Afghan deaths, and 15,000 Soviet dead. With the fall of the PDPA regime, the governance of Afghanistan no longer held such an interest for the US government. After the April 1992 overthrow, the US effectively disengaged from the mujahideen. The terrible atrocities committed by the new regime did not draw much US attention, nor the ensuing civil war. The new regime overturned the progressive social programmes. One-and-a-half million Afghans died in the ensuing civil war, and around seven million were displaced.

In the words of one Afghan woman:

*‘The US and western governments wanted the complete defeat of the Soviet Union and not the liberation of Afghanistan. In fact they sacrificed Afghanistan for their own agenda. They did not strengthen the positions of nationalists and the seculars in Afghanistan; they strengthened the Islamic fanatics and anarchy, including the coming to power of Bin Laden, Al Qaida and later the Taliban. The West was responsible for the civil war.’<sup>23</sup>*

Nor did the victory of the Taliban in 1996 renew US interest. Based on the Pashtun people, the largest ethnic minority, the Taliban secured nearly ninety per cent of the country. After the horrors of the civil war, they posed

as a purifying movement in Afghan society. They aimed to end the lawlessness with their own conservative interpretation of religious doctrine. None of which prevented the US government from seeking business opportunities with the Taliban. In her book, Malalai Joya explains:

*'Since they came to power, the Taliban had – like the fundamentalist warlords before them – been offering sanctuary and support to the Saudi Osama bin Laden, the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri and their foreign al-Qaeda followers. For years the United States had courted the Taliban, ignoring their cruelties while trying to make deals with them on behalf of the oil company UNOCAL, for an energy pipeline project through Afghanistan. The United States also encouraged the regime to crack down on opium production. (As recently as May 2001 the Taliban were given 43 million dollars as a reward for controlling the poppy crop.) At the same time, the United States turned a blind eye to what was happening in the terrorist training camps along the Pakistan border.'*<sup>14</sup>

Doubtless there were concerns among ruling circles in the US about the character of the Taliban, and its al-Qaeda guests. Yet these were former 'assets'; surely they were manageable? The horror and tragedy of 9/11 demonstrated otherwise.

### **9/11 and the prepared wars**

After 9/11, al-Qaeda were quickly identified by the US as the perpetrators. The initial public approach to the Taliban was to persuade them to hand over Bin Laden. In reality, other views were operating inside the US political establishment. The decision to oust the Taliban regime was taken quickly. Whether he was in the loop or not, Tony Blair addressed the House of Commons on 8th October 2001. He said:

*'We are in conflict with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime because the terrorists killed thousands of innocent people, including hundreds of Muslims and women and children; because the Taliban regime, in return for financial aid and other support, gave them succour.'*

A war against the Taliban, who controlled most of Afghanistan, was a war of regime change, and went beyond the issue of 9/11. Whatever momentary alignment existed, in reality they were quite different political forces. In Syed Saleem Shahzad's important book we read:

*'Al-Qaeda's ultimate aim was to establish an Islamic system under a Caliphate, but it was not an Islamic enforcement movement. Al-Qaeda was a resistance movement against Western hegemony that expected Islamic movements and the Muslim liberation movements around the world to forge a common front instead of fighting independently. This was the basic disagreement between Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood.'*<sup>5</sup>

By its nature, the Caliphate is an international, or pan-Islamist, project. The Taliban were preoccupied with establishing, and maintaining, an Emirate in the physical boundaries of Afghanistan. Overlooking this difference allowed the 'War on Terror' to be indefinitely extended both in time and to other regimes which 'provide succour' to the terrorists. This the people of Afghanistan were to discover at terrible cost, despite the effective destruction of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan within two months of the start of the war in October 2001, and even after the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011.

US foreign policy rapidly spread the targets to George Bush's newly discovered 'Axis of Evil', named in his January 29, 2002 speech. The targets now included Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Certainly, this came as a shock to the Iranian government who had provided valuable intelligence to the US government in the weeks preceding the Afghan war.

But the 'Axis' was a popularisation of the policy worked out prior to 9/11 in the 'Project for a New American Century'. This involved a group of politicians in and around the Bush government. The aim was to forcibly remake US imperialism's hegemony by a series of regime changing wars. Reporting on the investigations of US journalist Bob Woodward, John Pilger wrote:

*'On the morning of 12 September 2001, without any evidence of who the hijackers were, Rumsfeld demanded that the US attack Iraq. According to Woodward, Rumsfeld told a cabinet meeting that Iraq should be "a principal target of the first round of the war against terrorism". Iraq was temporarily spared only because Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, persuaded Bush that "public opinion had to be prepared before a move against Iraq is possible." Afghanistan was chosen as the softer option.'*<sup>6</sup>

Whatever qualifications Tony Blair utilised in promoting British involvement in the war on Afghanistan, the facts were that the US was following a policy which was neither proportionate to 9/11, nor simply arising from it. US imperialism was going to remake parts of the world

through military means, and the British government was going to be entangled throughout. To use the words of Blair to Bush in a note dated July 28, 2002, 'I will be with you whatever'.

### **The ultimate failure of the war**

Despite the relative ease of the initial victory over al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the occupying NATO forces were unable to turn the situation into a popular and stable government. Nor were they able to initiate a serious process of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan after the military victory. The new presidential and parliamentary system merely integrated the dominant war lords from the Northern Alliance and others who had supported the NATO intervention. Many of these were responsible for terrible massacres and war crimes during the civil war. Nor were they more popular and representative than the Taliban. In surveys carried out between 2002 and 2004 by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, most Afghans thought the mujahideen leaders were war criminals – with 75% believing they should be brought to justice, and 90% wanting them removed from public office.

The conditions of occupation meant that President Karzai, despite a serious history of involvement in Afghan politics, had trouble exerting authority, and had to live with the reputation of being 'Mayor of Kabul'. He also failed to distance himself from his brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, a notorious figure in opium trafficking. The overlays between the new political class and the mesh of militias, corruption and criminality were a daily fact of life visible to the people, if not the occupying forces.

Meanwhile, NATO forces took their orders from outside the country, and forcibly imposed their presence upon a population whose languages and life experiences they could not comprehend. Attempts to build up the Afghan National Security Forces continued to suffer from the fact that tribal militias were being rebadged rather than rendered uniform. The vast sums expended allowed for ghost soldiers on commanders' books, easy avenues for infiltration by the resistance, and a high turnover with access to wages and valuable arms to sell on.

Equally, much of the supposed reconstruction and development was devolved to foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who also took direction from outside the country. This separation from Afghan society created waste from aid. Meanwhile, cultural differences, underscored by differences in living standards, fuelled local resentment. As one Afghan woman described the process:

*'Our history has shown that governments which are established by foreigners are not stable governments because Afghans do not accept them. If they read the history of Afghanistan they would understand that Afghans don't let foreigners interfere in their country. One day they will understand that Afghans want freedom from them.'*<sup>7</sup>

Inevitably, opposition grew from daily friction to active resistance. The Taliban regrouped in the company of Pashtun kin in Pakistan, sheltered by civil society and in the powerful apparatus of the security state. Together, the internal and external processes merged. Tariq Ali, in a 2010 article, described how concretely the insurgency was formed:

*'As the British and Russians discovered to their cost in the preceding two centuries, Afghans do not like being occupied. If a second-generation Taliban is now growing and creating new alliances it is not because its sectarian religious practices have become popular, but because it is the only available umbrella for national liberation. Initially, the middle-cadre Taliban who fled across the border in November 2002 and started low-level guerrilla activity the following year attracted only a trickle of new recruits from madrasas and refugee camps. From 2004 onwards, increasing numbers of young Waziris were radicalised by Pakistani military and police incursions in the tribal areas, as well as devastating attacks on villages by unmanned US "drones". At the same time, the movement was starting to win active support from village mullahs in Zabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Paktika, and Kandahar provinces, and then in the towns. By 2006 there were reports of Kabul mullahs who had previously supported Karzai's allies but were now railing against the foreigners and the government; calls for jihad against the occupiers were heard in the north-east border provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan.'*<sup>8</sup>

By 2006 the regrouped Taliban was able to launch offensives which shocked the NATO forces. Even as they increased their levels of military presence, the occupiers displayed their profound myopia as to the real situation. The British Defence Secretary, John Reid, announced a doubling of the number of British troops in 2006. He said he hoped 'they could return without firing a single shot'. Instead, these troops faced continuous and serious action up to the point when they handed over their positions in Helmand province to the US Army in 2014.

Reid and the British government were oblivious to the history they were entering. Even though the British were supposedly the experts in counterinsurgency, there to show the Americans how it was done,

journalist Jean MacKenzie had to clue them in to the fact that the locals absolutely hated them, even though they had just arrived.

*'The only place on the planet where the British army would be less welcome,' she explained, 'is the Bogside in Derry. You have a history here of four wars, this being the fourth, in each case you've been seen as rapacious invaders coming here for your own benefit. And furthermore, not 100 miles from here is where your worst defeat in Afghan eyes took place. You could not have come to a more hostile, anti-British environment than Helmand.'*

Not only the army, but also the British public were sheltered from such important facts.

The attempt by US President Obama in 2009/10 to create a breakthrough with a surge in troop numbers petered out under conditions of a sustained and growing insurgency. For the occupiers victory and peace were necessary, for the resistance survival and endurance were sufficient. The extended nature of the conflict meant that politicians were increasingly operating without public support. In December 2009, a US opinion poll indicated 57% opposed the war. A similar poll in Britain in January 2010 indicated that 59% opposed sending more troops. The good sense of the electorate counted little to those determined to make reality conform to their pet schemes for the people of Afghanistan. Even President Trump thought there might be some possibility of overturning reality, with his own limited troop surge in 2017.

All to no avail. The fact is that an unrepresentative and unpopular government inside Afghanistan could not make the occupation palatable. Nor could foreign intervention produce anything other than such a government. The occupying powers could not commit the numbers of external forces necessary to subdue an indigenous insurgency which had vast experience of military action on its own terrain. The attempt at state building in the end was reduced to sustaining a huge body of Afghan soldiers and armed police whose discipline and effectiveness could not be made to match that of the Taliban led forces.

President Biden accepted the inevitable. On April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, he said:

*'We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan – hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal and expecting a different result.'*

On July 8th, announcing that troop withdrawal would be complete by the end of August, he said:



*'After 20 years – a trillion dollars spent training and equipping hundreds of thousands of Afghan National Security and Defence Forces, 2,448 Americans killed, 20,722 more wounded, and untold thousands coming home with unseen trauma to their mental health – I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan with no reasonable expectancy of achieving a different outcome.'*

### **The Afghanistan left behind**

The war remains lethal for the people of Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported 5,183 civilian casualties in the first six months of 2021, with 1,659 killed and 3,524 injured.

According to the 'Costs of War' project at Brown University, about 241,000 people have been killed in the Afghanistan and Pakistan war zone since 2001. This figure includes deaths as a direct result of the war. It does not include deaths caused by disease, loss of access to food, water, infrastructure and other indirect consequences of the war. More than 71,000 of those killed have been civilians. Between 66-69,000 Afghan troops were killed. 2.7 million Afghans were forced abroad, mostly to Iran. 4 million Afghans are displaced within the country, whose total population is 36 million. The study states:

*'Afghan land is contaminated with unexploded ordinance, which kills and injures tens of thousands Afghans, especially children, as they travel and go about their daily chores.'*

The study gives US war costs at \$2.261 trillion. This does not include the cost of lifetime care for US veterans, nor does it include interest payments on money borrowed to fund the war.

For Britain the war has caused 457 deaths and 10,382 casualties. The actual impact on those who served with the armed forces was much greater. The Royal British Legion estimates that between three and six per cent of homeless people come from an armed forces background. But the Legion acknowledges this is likely to underestimate the problem. Unemployment among veterans is estimated at 7 per cent, compared to 5 per cent for non-veterans. Trauma studies indicate that for deployed personnel 4 per cent suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while this rises to 6 per cent among combat troops. Doubtless there are many complex problems that veterans face which are not captured in these figures.

As for the financial cost, in May 2021 the British government, in a written answer to Parliament, stated that the total cost of 'Operation Herrick' from HM Treasury Special Reserve was £22.2 billion. This is only one source of funding for the intervention. In a Ministry of Defence letter dated 13 July 2015, the total cost for the Afghan operation between 2001/2 to 2013/14 was given as £21.3 billion. Frank Ledwidge's study, *Investment in Blood*, gives a figure of £37 billion by 2013, and an estimate of £40 billion by 2020. The National Army Museum website makes an estimate of £37 billion – meaning around £2,000 from every household in Britain.

As for the general condition of Afghanistan after 20 years of NATO intervention, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published a Response Plan in January 2021.<sup>10</sup> It states:

*'The trajectory of needs and scale of response over the life of this Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) paint a shocking picture of escalating suffering, hunger and danger.'*

It reports 18.4 million people in humanitarian need – half the population. Afghanistan now has the second highest number of people in emergency food insecurity in the world. Almost one in two children will face acute malnutrition in 2021. 30.5 million people require social assistance from the government and development agencies to help them cope. Desperation is leading to families marrying off young daughters and sending children to work. UNICEF reports:

*'The health system is struggling to absorb internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees, as well as additional caseloads related to COVID-19. Lack of health service coverage and capacities are limiting access to essential health care, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. Child immunization declined by 22 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 ...'*<sup>11</sup>

Inevitably, in situations of great social stress, the burden is most loaded on the vulnerable. 74 per cent of children experience violent discipline, including psychological aggression and/or physical punishment, in their homes. 67% of women are unable to access health services without a male escort.

As for the general economic situation, before the war Afghanistan already had a long-term problem of stagnation. Between 1950 and 2003, its gross domestic product (GDP) grew just over three times, compared to

29 other East Asian countries which grew an average of seven times. Per capita GDP was unchanged in Afghanistan between these years, while the 29 other East Asian countries experienced per capita growth of two-and-a-half times. Afghanistan was neither receiving, nor generating any substantial capital investment.<sup>12</sup>

Since 2003, any growth in Afghanistan has been distorted by the need to service the occupation and the continuing war. John Sopko, US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, asks the big question: ‘After all the money, \$86 billion, and 20 years, why did we see such poor results?’

His own report indicates that much of the billions spent on infrastructure went to waste, and that the lack of oversight led to much corruption. Although \$86 billion seems a huge sum, the ‘poor result’ is also linked to the \$2.261 trillion spent on paying for the war. These ‘regime change’ wars bear the common trait of much vaster sums spent destroying a country than rebuilding it.

According to the World Bank, the poverty rate in Afghanistan was 47% in 2020, compared to 36% in 2007. Unemployment stood at 25%. There is no relief in sight either. The World Bank reports a decline of GDP of 1.9% in 2020; and forecasts growth of 1% in 2021, 2.6% in 2022, and 3% for 2023. The anticipated growth is well below the average forecast for South Asia, which is 6.8% for 2021, 6.8% for 2022, and 5.2% for 2023.<sup>13</sup> Unless Afghanistan receives substantial capital inflows, the prospects for the people are grim.

### **Facing the facts?**

Some politicians who have supported the debacle are now refusing to face the facts. The enemy of the past twenty years, the Taliban, are now going to play a major, or dominant, role in the future governance of Afghanistan. Those who refuse to recognise the failure are obviously capable of repeating it. In the Parliamentary debate on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Commons debated the British government’s statement on withdrawal from Afghanistan. The government recognised that it was unable to continue its policy without US involvement, so British troops are being withdrawn within the US timescale.

Prime Minister Johnson had a serious problem of dressing up the failure as a success. He simply ignored the actual struggle against the Taliban. Instead, he reduced the war to an anti-terrorist operation focusing solely on al-Qaeda. He said:

*‘On the morning after 11 September, few would have predicted that no more*

*terrorist attacks on that scale would be launched from Afghanistan in the next 20 years.'*

He did not add that even fewer might have predicted that the Taliban would control most of the country twenty years later. His only references to the Taliban were to excoriate their social policies, which he claimed NATO had changed. Apart from that, he gloried in the US agreement with the Taliban that they would not allow Afghanistan's soil to be used to threaten the US and its allies. He did not explain why it took twenty years of terrible war to get such a simple result. Nor did he explain at which point the British government acknowledged that it could not prevent the Taliban returning to power.

From the Opposition Front Bench, Angela Rayner responded. Unlike Johnson, she made it explicit that the Taliban were going to achieve 'wider control'. However, she appeared to suggest that there was an argument for remaining:

*'... If we leave without putting a plan in place to ensure that Afghanistan does not go back to the conflict and violence of the past, we will have failed those who have given so much over the past 20 years.'*

To place 'conflict and violence' in the past is actually to pretend that the war was somehow a lesser period of violence than Taliban rule. This is simply untrue.

Rayner asked Johnson whether he argued for or against US withdrawal. Johnson didn't bother to reply – as if he would confront the US on such an issue! She asked him whether he offered an alternative, but gave no indication as to what the argument to remain might actually involve. Her preoccupation was to honour those in Britain who had sacrificed life and limb. Certainly, it must be very painful for anyone who supported the war to address such people. Her sincerity was clear as she reported her own brother had served, and she evidently must have experienced great anxiety and concern. But we must stare reality in the face when confronting such a tragic failure of British foreign policy. Rayner also challenged Johnson on budget cuts in aid to Afghanistan. Again, Johnson ignored the edge. Admirable though the challenge was, Afghanistan needs a great deal more than a little extra British aid after twenty years of war.

Does the NATO withdrawal offer Afghanistan the chance of a better future, one guided by the Afghan people themselves? The most appropriate support will come from the neighbouring countries who share not just

boundaries, but also kin across those boundaries. Afghanistan's greater integration into the regional economic and political initiatives is the only way its untapped resources and human potential can be fully developed. Already the patterns of this are emerging. The Chinese government has met a Taliban delegation to examine future co-operation. India, Iran and Pakistan are also realigning their political relations with the Taliban in the light of NATO's withdrawal. The member and observer states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – will increase their engagement. Turkey has offered to run and protect Kabul airport. If much is yet unclear, an alternative path of development for Afghanistan is visible. Johnson recognised the option:

*'It will take combined efforts of many nations, including Afghan's neighbours, to help the Afghan people to build their future ...'*

It's a great pity this wasn't recognised a couple of decades sooner. For people in Britain it is essential to draw the conclusion to end such grotesque displays of imperial arrogance. Compelling the British government to end its support for the war and siege on Yemen has to be a priority. Yemen is the one country in the world with a greater problem of hunger than Afghanistan. Britain's involvement worsens and prolongs the catastrophe for the Yemeni people. Action on this would be the first sign that people are learning the lessons of the debacle in Afghanistan.

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### **Notes:**

1. All figures from 'Revolution in Afghanistan', Fred Halliday, *New Left Review* 112 (Nov/Dec 1978).
2. Interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*, translation at [d gibbs.faculty.arizona.edu/files/afghan-ip.pdf](http://d gibbs.faculty.arizona.edu/files/afghan-ip.pdf)
3. Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Afghan Women*, p.20
4. Malalai Joya, *Raising My Voice*, p.60
5. Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban*, p.116
6. *New Statesman*, 16 Dec 2002, 'John Pilger reveals the American plan: a new Pearl Harbour'
7. Elaheh Rostami-Povey *ibid*, p.72
8. Tariq Ali, 'Mirage of the good war', in *The Case for Withdrawal from Afghanistan*,

Nick Turse (ed.), p.56

9. Scott Horton, *Fool's Errand*, p.169

10. OCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021 (January 2021 revision)

11. UNICEF, *Humanitarian Action for Children 2021 – Afghanistan* (15 Dec 2020)

12. All calculations based on Angus Maddison, *Contours of the World Economy 1-2030*, ps 175-177

13. World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*, June 2021

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### **President Biden 31.8.21**

‘...This decision about Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan. It’s about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries. We saw a mission of counterterrorism in Afghanistan – getting the terrorists and stopping attacks – morph into a counterinsurgency, nation-building, trying to create a democratic, cohesive and united Afghanistan. That’s something that has never been done over many centuries of Aghan’s history. Moving on from that mindset and those kind of large-scale troop deployments will make us stronger and more effective and safer at home. And for anyone who gets the wrong idea, let me say clearly: to those who wish America harm, to those who engage in terrorism against us or our allies, know this: the United States will never rest. We will not forgive; we will not forget. We will hunt you down to the ends of the Earth and you will pay the ultimate price ...’

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*On subsequent pages, we reprint the text of President Trump’s agreement between the ‘Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognised by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America’.*