



Militarisation in Afghanistan



What do we mean by militarisation in Afghanistan?

Decades of war, conflict, and occupation in Afghanistan has resulted in the extreme militarisation of the country. This militarisation has included a steady and massive supply of weapons and other equipment to Afghanistan, contributing to death, injury, and violence on a massive scale, and rampant corruption and social destruction.

The militarisation of Afghanistan has also forced the displacement of millions of Afghans and has taken and devastated countless lives over decades, and continues to do so today.



What have been the key features of militarisation in Afghanistan?

Weaponisation:

- According to the **SIPRI Arms Transfer Database**, sixteen states, including NATO member states, supplied weapons and equipment to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2020. During this period, the United States supplied 74 per cent of Afghanistan's weapons, followed by Russia, the second largest supplier, which was responsible for 14 per cent of imports.
- Much of this equipment **has reportedly been left behind** by the US military after its withdrawal and there is speculation of possession and possible use by the Taliban.
- Throughout the past twenty years there has been extensive explosive weapons use in Afghanistan by US and NATO forces as well as non-state armed groups. This has included the bombing of homes, schools, and markets.

War profiteering and corruption:

- The Security Policy Reform Institute **found that** US Congress gave \$2.02 trillion to five top weapons companies between 2001 and 2021. During the war in Afghanistan, these top five firms spent \$1 billion lobbying Congress and received \$2 trillion in Pentagon contracts.
- Private military and security companies (PMSCs) have also profited from the wars. A **recent study by Brown University** shows that much of the growth in US military budgets since 2001 is due to payments to **military contractors**. Contractors **received** about **\$104 billion** for services in Afghanistan since 2002, including nearly \$9 billion just in the last five years. In Afghanistan, contractors **outnumbered** US soldiers. At its **peak in 2011**, there were about 90,000 contractors in Afghanistan; by the withdrawal in 2021, **about 17,000 contractors** were still in the country.
- As noted by the National Priorities Project in its report **State of Insecurity: The Cost of Militarization Since 9/11**, since 2001 the US government has spent more than \$21 trillion at home and overseas on militaristic policies, while governments of other countries participating in the invasion and occupation have spent billions.
- The “**Afghanistan Papers**” published by *The Washington Post* in 2019 found that the “scale of the corruption was the unintended result of swamping the war zone with far more aid and defense contracts than impoverished Afghanistan could absorb. There was so much excess, financed by American taxpayers, that opportunities for bribery and fraud became almost limitless, according to the interviews.” Some of this **even resulted** in the Taliban being funded by the United States.

Abuse, death, and destruction:

- The Cost of War Project at Brown University **estimates that** the war in Afghanistan resulted in the deaths of 46,319 Afghan civilians. Others have **calculated** that an additional 69,000 Afghan military and police and more than 51,000 Afghan opposition fighters have been killed in the war. At least **5.9 million** Afghan civilians have fled their homes.
- In addition, the Cost of War project **calculates** that 2,324 US military personnel and 4,007 US contractors were killed. Soldiers and civilians of other countries participating in the war have also been killed.

- As part of the “Global War on Terror” and following the 9/11 attacks, the use of explosive devices and violence, torture, drone strikes, and special operations tactics by the United States and NATO special forces as part of “counterterrorism” efforts have all served to oppress, kill, and destroy millions of Afghans and other populations in the US and in other NATO countries.
- Afghans and other populations have been made subject to surveillance, search and seizure, detention, and forms of violence. Across the globe, Afghans who were forced or able to flee the country faced human rights abuses and horrific treatment as migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- While the US and allies have invested billions in funding the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan, many in the general population live in socio-economic devastation. About 55 per cent of the population of Afghanistan lives **below the poverty line** and food insecurity is on the rise. In the first half of 2021, insecurity forced the **closure** of over 920 schools, according to the Afghanistan Education in Emergencies Working Group. Conflict, along with a range of other socio-economic factors, kept nearly 3.7 million children out of school, 60 per cent of them girls, before the COVID-19 pandemic further impacted enrolments of around 10 million children.



What is WILPF’s focus concerning militarisation in Afghanistan?

- Established in 2015, WILPF Afghanistan is devoted to working with women, men, and young people to advance the role of women in Afghan society, promote peace-building, and develop women’s active social, economic, and political participation for a future of inclusion and prosperity.
- WILPF Afghanistan is also deeply committed to working with communities to prevent gender-based violence and to promote environmental initiatives that improve the health and security of all citizens of Afghanistan.

Actions and Recommendations

Addressing the violence and militarism within Afghanistan and within the states that occupied it will require concrete actions.

States, international organisations, and others must take responsibility to heal and repair the damage that has been done, and prevent future catastrophes. Disarmament, demilitarisation, and decolonisation are vital aspects of this work.

The following recommendations are not comprehensive but are critical.

- All actors must stop using explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), and for the war in Afghanistan to truly end, the US and its allies must stop drone strikes and special operations in the country.
- Access to education – for all children, including girls – should be a priority in Afghanistan, and schools and universities, as well as their students and educators, should be protected from attacks.
- All actors must uphold the progress made in eliminating harm from landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive remnants of war, respecting the emerging international norm against any use, and ensuring continuation of the country's longstanding commitment to demining, risk awareness, and other obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on Cluster Munitions (Afghanistan is party to both).
- More broadly, with the aim of preventing such military operations and interventions in the future, the United Nations (UN), national governments, and/or independent bodies should commission in-depth studies of US and NATO aggression towards Afghanistan in the interests of holding governments accountable for the immense human suffering created by the “Global War on Terror” and the lack of UN action against US wars of aggression.
- UN work against military spending should be renewed, with the General Assembly taking up the actions assigned to the Military Staff Committee and the Security Council through **article 26 of the UN Charter** in order to achieve commitments for serious reductions of military spending and regulation of weapons production.

- A system for reparations to the people of Afghanistan and other countries affected by the “Global War on Terror” must be instituted. Military budgets should be redirected toward reparations. In the meantime, the US and all other countries must open their borders to people on the move from countries where their wars and arms transfers have impacted human well-being. Once admitted to a country, refugees, asylum seekers, and all other migrants must not be subjected to surveillance, harassment, or other forms of state violence on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, etc.
- These are not all of the measures that should be undertaken, but they are all necessary to disrupt the cycle of war, weaponisation, and violence—within Afghanistan, within the US and other occupying forces, and globally. Peace, justice, and equality can only come from demilitarised and decolonised (i.e. not imposed by foreign military might) approaches to economic justice, social equality, and environmental welfare.

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