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# Afghanistan: Human Cost of Armed Conflict since the Soviet Invasion

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## Abstract

*The Afghan wars present a good example of contemporary conflicts, often described as “complex political emergencies” (CPEs). These are the offshoots of diverse factors related to ethno-national, ethno-geographic, ethno-economic, ethno-religious and ethno-sectarian manifestations. In order to comprehend these conflicts in entirety, one needs to examine Afghanistan’s historico-cultural and linguistic dynamics, socio-economic structure, religio-tribal ideologies, and geo-strategic and geo-political stereotypes. The aim of the article is to furnish a comprehensive record of the impact on the country’s human capital from the Soviet occupation up to the US invasion. The US invasion in the post-9/11 environment, however, brought no let up to the miseries of the Afghan people. Importantly, the current Afghan conflict embodies horrendous consequences for the country’s survival on the one hand, and regional and global security on the other. The article examines how civilians have increasingly borne the brunt of the US and NATO air war against the Taliban and other insurgent groups. It examines air strike and casualty data to analyse trends and identify problems that cause civilian casualties in US air operations.*

*In addition, the social and psychological effects and violations of human rights associated with assassinations are more devastating than a body count. Moreover, the lack of security, economic development, effective rule of law, and coordination of effort stand in the way of sustainable progress in the country. Against the failing socio-economic system, opium cultivation has developed as an alternative to country’s poor economic base and quite limited sources of proper food, clothing, housing, and employment.*

## Key Words

Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Shura, Durrani, Jihad, Afghan, Capitalist Bloc, villages.

## Pauperised Afghanistan: An Appraisal

Afghanistan has been strategically important since ancient times and it has played a vital role in regional, economic and cultural integration. Following a long history, it assumed the status of a nation-state under Ahmad Shah Abdali (Durrani).<sup>1</sup> It was he who ensured

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homogenisation by welding together the divergent ethnic Afghan factions into a single centralised political system.<sup>2</sup> Its national character was first challenged by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had the goal of increasing its imperial designs, checkmating Russia, and extending their sphere of influence into Central Asia. Nevertheless, the natives offered stubborn resistance, culminating in the three dreadful Anglo-Afghan Wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the process, however, the whole country experienced periods of killings, looting, plundering, and damage to traditional systems and structures. The three Anglo-Afghan Wars were quite catastrophic, bearing horrific “retribution” on the Afghans and their livelihoods in the cities, towns and whole countryside.<sup>3</sup> The British strived to reduce resistance by unleashing a reign of terror, execution, exploitation, resulting in a large amount of deaths.<sup>4</sup> The Afghans’ sordid story did not end there, but instead continued with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1978. Since the development was neither strategically nor ideologically heartening to the capitalist bloc, the USA, in the garb of friendship and reconstruction, offered logistical support to the resistant Afghans. The US conveniently roped in Pakistan as a conduit for the arms and equipment supply, thereby assigning it the status of a “frontline state.”<sup>5</sup> Quite well thought-out strategies were woven to fulfil the purpose. These included

the indoctrination of the Afghans in religious fundamentalism as an effective tool to fight against the Soviets. Frenzied by religion, these Afghans fought in the name of *jihad* and offered unprecedented resistance to the Soviets, just as they had earlier done against the English. But during this entire struggle, tens and thousands died. An equal number became homeless, maimed, and sick. In addition, wholesale destruction was caused to infrastructure, some older than two centuries, due to continued gun battles, bomb blasts, air strikes and missile attacks.

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The destructiveness of modern war is widely understood, but the wars in Afghanistan have been uniquely and comprehensively destructive. For the last 30 years, the country has been marked by appalling episodes of violence, war and genocide. Given the long history of war in Afghanistan, one may reasonably conjecture that Afghans have no history but that of incessant conflict for power, regional hegemony, tribal and ideological supremacy and territorial possession,

with horrendous effects on the human psyche, mental makeup and individual and collective behaviour.<sup>6</sup> The vast extent of the violence and suffering has been muffled by the stoicism of the Afghans as the threshold of pain individually and collectively is almost unbelievably high. At present, Afghans live in a fragile state of affairs impacted by endless armed conflicts and wars. Sounds of guns firing, bombs, helicopters, machine guns and rockets are a daily routine for them.<sup>7</sup> Violence, destruction, expulsion, displacement, looting, and every other element of the litany of suffering have become the fate of the Afghans. Non-combatants, including women, children and the elderly, have suffered considerably.

Historically speaking, Afghanistan has been the victim of its history and geography: the region has been subjected to countless invasions and incursions.<sup>8</sup> In the more than 30 years since the Soviet invasion of December 1979, it has been exposed to the impact of political and ideological forces that are far beyond the capacity of the bulk of its own people to control.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet invasion made it a Cold War battleground, and the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union turned Afghanistan into a new theatre of competition, this time between regional actors determined that their competitors should not obtain a foothold in the shadows of the Hindu Kush. In the post-Soviet turmoil, there

was no end to the sorry state of Afghan affairs. The country soon plunged into a dreaded civil war following its failure to create a state, common national leadership, centralised army, and sound economy. Regional and sub-regional powers, especially Pakistan, private networks, smugglers, drug dealers and fundamentalists, used the failing state system for their own vested interest.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the country further sank into anarchy, with a complete breakdown of law and order. Murder, looting, rape, and extortion were rampant. Unprecedented human casualties, irreparable damage to public and private property, and wholesale population displacement were other manifestations of the post-Soviet civil war. Dreaded weaponry was used by local potentates to gain power and to take precedence over one another. Under the circumstances, villages, towns and cities were ravaged, and their leftover socio-economic and politico-administrative structures were obliterated to the great suffering of the public at large.<sup>11</sup> Men were arrested, humiliated, had their limbs amputated, and killed, and women were molested, tortured, and raped. Children were killed by bomb blasts, missile attacks, air strikes, gun battles, and so on, all of which had a profound impact on their health and mental development.<sup>12</sup> In consequence, the whole country was dotted with human skeletons, scattered here and there, which led to huge

humanitarian crises. Finally, in the post-9/11 environment, the US engineered a punishing Iraq-style embargo of war-ravaged Afghanistan at a time when many of its 20 million people were starving and homeless. People's sufferings and miseries have multiplied, and the US exercises its writ to deal with Afghanistan in the name of the "war against terror". However, under President Obama's new Afghan stabilisation strategy, the scale of the tragedy has further widened with the deployment of the additional NATO forces and the direct confrontation of the Pakistani army with the Taliban groups in Pakistan and the Pak-Afghan borders.

## The Human Cost of Armed Conflict in the Last 30 Years of Endless War

As discussed above, the Afghan wars and conflicts have caused enormous human suffering and migration over the years. The Soviet policy of subjugation and Sovietisation was based on physical extermination with a totalitarian ideology that intended to rupture Afghanistan's economic, social, cultural and religious legacy. The policy was conducted through the indiscriminate bombing of villages. The estimates of the physical damage suffice to prove the comprehensiveness of the destruction: tens and thousands of people killed, injured and rendered homeless in the process. To quote a report on the extent of the refugees:

"in Afghanistan virtually everyone is a victim."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the Afghan wars created the biggest refugee problem ever in the world. Virtually the whole population has been displaced from cities, towns and villages. In the end, more than 6 million civilians became refugees in neighbouring countries, requiring international agencies to pump in billions of dollars for their relief and rehabilitation. With the elimination of the Taliban, the refugee problem was thought to be over as more than 2-3 million had returned home by 2003.<sup>14</sup> But it increased quickly thereafter. The tale of human deaths was no less pathetic. According to a report, the "Soviet-Afghan war has killed at least a million Afghans, maimed and disabled many more, [it] created an army of orphans and widows, turned half the population into internally displaced persons and refugees, including six million outside the country."<sup>15</sup> One report indicates that 1.0 million people became disabled during the Soviet-Afghan war.<sup>16</sup> The migration and the human killings together kept the country's population always decreasing. The 1979 census estimated the country's pre-war population at 13.05 million, though other reports suggested it to be between 15-17 millions, including the nomadic population.<sup>17</sup> Noor Ahmed Khalidi calculated that 876,825 Afghans, constituting 7% of the total Afghan population, were killed during 10-year war (1978-1987).<sup>18</sup> Martin Ewan and

Marek Sliwinski estimate the figure at 1.25 million war deaths, or 9% of the pre-war population.<sup>19</sup> However, Siddieq Noorzoy presents an even higher figure of 1.71 million deaths for the same decade.<sup>20</sup> Other report says that the (1980-1990) decade of Afghan wars brought about marked demographic changes in Afghanistan. About 6.2 million Afghans, constituting 32% of the projected population, emigrated into refugee camps in Pakistan, Iran, and elsewhere, and more than 1.5 million

were killed, bringing the total to 7.7 millions, well over 40% of the total projected population in 1990. Of this total, over 5 million, or 47% of the rural population, were affected in the process. In this period 2.2 million from the rural areas migrated to the cities to escape Soviet bombing which added further to the miseries of Afghans.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the magnitude and intensity of demographic damages during 1980-1990 has been unprecedented, which can be readily seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Damage due to Soviet War, 1980-1990 (in millions)**

	1977 population actual	1990 projected population	Total killed	Total emigration	Internal migration
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.2</b>	19.1	1.5	6.2	2.2
<b>Urban</b>	<b>2.2</b>	2.9	0.15	0.60	0.0
<b>Rural</b>	<b>10.5</b>	14.4	1.27	3.90	2.2
<b>Nomads</b>	<b>1.5</b>	1.8	0.08	1.72	N/A

Reports suggest that from 1.5 million to more than 2 million war deaths have occurred in Afghanistan since 1978, with an average of 350 combat deaths per month in 1997.<sup>22</sup> This high level of mortality was accompanied by shocking and extensive war crimes and human rights violations. Human Rights Watch says that by 2000 some 1.5 million people had died as a direct result of the conflict<sup>23</sup> and some 2 million people had become permanently disabled.<sup>24</sup> Though the level of deaths reduced with Soviet

withdrawal in 1989, it did not end. This is proved by the deaths that followed the ethnic cleansing with the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif and Bamiyan to the Taliban in August 1998.<sup>25</sup> Over 2,000 “civilians” were brutally and gruesomely massacred from the Hazara ethnic minority within three days. The Taliban’s treatment of women was often horrific as they were tortured and raped.<sup>26</sup> The magnitude of the number of wounded was also on the rise due to the Afghan wars. To quote Rasul Baksh in 1994, “the proportion

of those incapacitated by the war is 31 per-thousand of the entire population of the country.”<sup>27</sup> Tens and thousands left due to the fear of the Taliban. This was particularly true of the ethnic minority groups on the Shomali Plains in the north of Kabul. Reportedly, some 180,000 civilians fled the country as “men were boiled or asphyxiated to death, wells were poisoned, land was mined, and traditional irrigation canals and dams were bombed” by the Taliban during their conflict with the Northern Alliance, particularly in 1999 and 2000.<sup>28</sup> The immediate victims of this widespread uprooting were children, the elderly, and war widows. While Afghanistan has the highest number of refugees in 1990, with 6.2 million, it also has the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the same period with 2 million. There was a substantial repartition of refugees after the fall of the Communist government in 1992, though 2.7 millions continued to remain refugees in Pakistan and Iran. The level of Afghan refugees was such that Pakistan had to close its borders with Afghanistan in 1994.<sup>29</sup> More than 1.5 million IDP were registered in Afghanistan between 1992 and 1997 alone. By late 1998, approximately 3.7 million Afghans were reluctant to return to their war-ravaged country under the Taliban regime. During this period 2 million refugees lived in Pakistan, 1.5 million in Iran, and about 10,000 on

the border of Tajikistan.<sup>30</sup> In 1997-2000 the Taliban pushed into northern Afghanistan, and this together with the 2000 drought prompted several hundred thousand of Afghans to flee the country.<sup>31</sup> During the United States’ bombing of Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan in 2001, tens of thousands of Afghan civilians also left the country as they had no food or shelter.<sup>32</sup>

## The Post-11 September Era

In the post-11 September era, the US declared a “war on terror” and launched an offensive in Afghanistan to punish the Taliban for harbouring and collaborating with the 9/11 attackers and to coerce the regime into bringing those involved to justice. Subsequently, it was aimed at toppling the Taliban regime and instituting a pro-US regime in Afghanistan, though the US finally ended the Taliban regime as an act of punishment.<sup>33</sup> The operation began on 7 October 2001 with air strikes against selected military targets, and later expanded to political and infrastructures to weaken the Taliban war effort.<sup>34</sup> In that, the US and NATO forces killed up to 5,000 Afghan civilians- almost double the number of civilians killed in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.<sup>35</sup> One report says that between 7 October 2001 and January 2002, at least 1,300 civilians were directly killed by the US-led aerial bombing campaign. In

addition, some 3,200 Afghans lost their life due to starvation, exposure, illness, and injury as a result of war and air strikes in that time. However, a 2002 analysis by the *Guardian* newspaper estimated a higher figure of 20,000 civilian deaths in 2001 as an indirect result of the US's air strikes and ground invasion.<sup>36</sup>

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Meanwhile, the massive US bombardment with the support of the regional powers resulted in the replacement of the Taliban regime with a new interim government after a United Nations' decision at a conference in Bonn, Germany in December 2001.<sup>37</sup> As a result a new Afghan government under Pashtun leader Hamid Karzai was set up on 5 December 2001.<sup>38</sup> However, the writ of President Karzai till date has been confined largely to Kabul proper. In the countryside, the regional power brokers (the warlords) and their provincial troops are restive,<sup>39</sup> and are bent on throwing Karzai's government out of power.<sup>40</sup> Most alarming has been the increasing ability in recent years of the Taliban to strike

back with greater vigour than before, thereby causing immense human losses and damage to infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> In 2006 alone, over 4,000 deaths were registered in Afghanistan, including those of the civilians and foreign soldiers. It is reported that some 769 Afghan civilians were directly killed by US- and NATO-led actions in Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the southern part of Afghanistan around Helmand and Kandahar, the heartland of the Taliban, saw a great deal of fighting and damage to infrastructure in the same year. Moreover, suicide attacks have been on the rise despite constant US and Pakistan army strikes.<sup>43</sup> In a wave of violence in 2006, Taliban-led militants carried out about 140 suicide attacks, more than five times the 2005 number, with another 35 suicide attacks in 2007.<sup>44</sup> In 2007, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) estimated that some 629 Afghans were killed directly by US-led coalition and Afghan forces, and 700 Afghans died through insurgency-related actions.<sup>45</sup>

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In the summer of 2008, the situation worsened to the extent that some 2,118

Afghans were killed by US- and NATO-led military and anti-government forces in Afghanistan. About 1,160 civilians were killed in various areas by insurgent-led attacks, accounting for 55% of the total deaths, while 828 were directly killed by international-led military forces, 39% of the 2008 total. The remaining 130 people, 6%, died as a result of crossfire or unexploded ordnance. Going into further detail, Afghan Rights Monitor, a Kabul-based rights watchdog, has an even higher figure of 3,917 deaths, 6,800 wounded, and around 120,000 displaced persons in the same period. The report further says that insurgents killed over 2,300 civilians, including 930 in suicide bombings, and that US- and NATO-led military operations killed over 1,620 civilians, with 520 civilians killed by Afghan military forces. Out of these, 680 Afghan civilians were killed in air strikes by US-led forces in various parts of Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> However, on the security side over 530 Afghan soldiers and 1,100 Afghan policemen lost their lives. These figures are far higher than those from the UN and international military forces. In addition, a Taliban-led assault on a Kandahar prison in 2008, freed 1,200 inmates, including 350 Taliban members. Violence in Afghanistan was generally 40% higher in 2008 as compared to 2007. Ambushes, suicide attacks, and targeted assassinations rose sharply. NATO reports that the Taliban's presence was strongest in the Helmand,

Kandahar, Zabol, and Oruzgan provinces in southern Afghanistan, and is either significant or conspicuous in the Paktia, Khowst, Nangarhar, Konar, and Nuristan provinces in eastern Afghanistan.

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The year 2009 was again the most lethal year for Afghans in the US-led war that had been going on since September 2001, with over 2,412 civilians killed and 3,566 wounded.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, in 2010, the human cost of the conflict again grew and some 2,777 civilian deaths were recorded, an increase of 15% compared to the previous year, and over 102,658 individuals were displaced due to the conflict.<sup>48</sup> The year 2011, brought yet another record number of civilian deaths as the violence intensified and security spiralled downward. The United Nations reported that over 3,021 Afghan civilians were killed, 4,507 wounded and many more displaced in 2011.<sup>49</sup> In the last three years, the armed conflict in Afghanistan has intensified, with daily fighting between the Taliban and other anti-government insurgents against Afghan government forces and its international military supporters. The US, which



operates in Afghanistan through its counter-insurgency forces in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), has increasingly relied on air power in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. The combination of light ground forces and overwhelming air power has become the dominant doctrine of war for the US in Afghanistan. The net result has been large numbers of civilian casualties. Moreover, the harm caused by air strikes is not limited to immediate civilian casualties, but includes significant destruction of civilian property, forced migration of civilians and the abandoning of their villages, thus further adding to the internally displaced population of Afghanistan. In every case investigated by Human Rights Watch where air strikes hit villages, many civilians left the village because of the damage done to their homes and of fear of further strikes. People from neighbouring villages also sometimes fled in fear of future strikes on their villages. They have also had significant political impact, outraging public opinion in Afghanistan and undermining public confidence in both the Afghan government and its international backers.

## Conclusion

In short, the direct effect of the Afghan wars on the population has been

stunning. More than 50% of population has been directly harmed by the war through death, injury, and displacement. There is hardly any Afghan family that has not been affected, and the effect has been invariably felt in the cities, towns and villages: houses, mosques, minarets, schools, hospitals, industrial structures, roads, bridges, orchards, and fields have all been damaged. Soviet tactics were designed to destroy the rural base of popular support for secessionism,<sup>50</sup> and the attacks were directed at destroying agricultural areas, water facilities, and livestock. Violating the Geneva protocols, the Soviets used various nerve gases, mustard gases, and other chemical/biological weapons in several provinces.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the massive bombings and the allied food shortages drove millions of peasants out of their villages. More than half of Afghanistan's 36,000 villages and hamlets<sup>52</sup> were turned into ghost towns, and millions of anti-personnel mines, especially the little "butterfly mines", fixed by the Soviets<sup>53</sup> maimed millions in the countryside.<sup>54</sup> A few reports suggest that 20 to 25 people every day were either maimed or killed by landmines, and by 1996, some 20,000 civilians were killed and another 400,000 disabled as a result.<sup>55</sup> Kabul has been the world's most heavily mined city and mines were fitted in houses, walls of buildings, roads and streets,<sup>56</sup> leading to numerous deaths and displacements. The impact is markedly worse as most

of Afghanistan looks primitive, with farmers struggling to provide food for their families. Many of them try growing the opium poppy as it requires less water than most food crops and fetches good returns on the international market. This lucrative crop was enthusiastically promoted by the Taliban to re-energise their feeble economy.

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For most of the time the country and its people have been dependent on foreign aid for sustenance. However, most of the support has been in the form of military aid and relief for refugees. Little aid has come in for institutional re-building and reconstruction. A recent study by the American non-governmental agency Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) and the Centre on International Cooperation (CIC) of New York University suggested that only 1% of Afghanistan's reconstruction needs have been met so far.<sup>57</sup> The fact of the matter is that only one dollar is officially spent on "reconstruction" for every US \$10 spent on achieving US geo-political objectives.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, "donor fatigue" is a significant problem

in Afghanistan, and the UN has been unable even to meet its relief targets. For example, the 1999 UN appeal for US \$112 million from the international community garnered only US \$29 million as of late June 1999, with a further US \$12 million pledged for relief efforts outside the appeal; previous appeals never met 75% of the targets.<sup>59</sup>

The wars have miserably affected the sustainable economic development of the country. Existing industries have been destroyed. In consequence, the most vibrant economic activities were the transit trade, opium growing, heroin manufacturing, and the smuggling of duty-free goods into Pakistan. The value of the transit trade was estimated at US \$2.5 billion in 1997, half of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP) of US \$5 billion.<sup>60</sup> The Taliban regime in Herat earned US \$30,000 every day on customs duties prior to the closing of the border with Iran in early 1997.<sup>61</sup> The overall annual value of Afghanistan's legal exports declined steadily during the 1990s to a value of well under US \$100 million, whereas the illegal narcotics industry grew to the extent that Afghanistan in 1999 produced 4,581 tons of opium, 75% of the world's total.<sup>62</sup> As of today, the only significant domestically produced exports are narcotics and some timber and gemstones. Instead of a viable economic base, the country is characterised by illegal or quasi-legal activities related to narcotics, arms trafficking, and

the smuggling of duty-free goods.<sup>63</sup> However, little industrial infrastructure has survived as it has been blown up by mines and other unexploded ordnance. Although mine clearing has been under way for over a decade, there are still an estimated 10 million mines scattered throughout the country,<sup>64</sup> a deterrent to traditional economic growth and repatriation of thousands of refugees. In addition, no Marshall Plan has been provided to rebuild Afghanistan, which has exposed the poor Afghan population to death and starvation, though economic development and human security is claimed to be the hallmark of the US-backed Karzai government in Afghanistan.

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The overall security condition since September 2001 across the country has remained volatile with an increase in the number of suicide attacks, ambushes, and targeted assassinations. On the whole, “the security at present is out of control, governance is limited and development is slow as a sequel of intermittent bomb explosions, suicide attacks and military encounters.”<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, the population as a whole is in a deplorable lot as regards their resources, psyche, education, healthcare, economy, social organisation, political culture, etc. Moreover, the agony and discomfort to the Afghan population, especially in southern and northern Afghanistan, is not yet over. The hugely expensive process of reconstruction has not yielded the desired results. It has correspondingly hampered institutional growth of the country, and badly impacted human security, healthcare, education, and public utilities. The spill over of Taliban actions has even reached Pakistan proper with bomb and suicide attacks killing tens and thousands and damaging invaluable property assets. To restrict the Taliban, the Pakistan government has geared up all its forces in the North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, Waziristan, and other strong holds of the Taliban. Under a new Afghan stabilisation strategy, President Obama, among other things, has sent 30,000 extra troops to Afghanistan, reinforcing the 68,000 US and 40,000 allied forces already in the theatre<sup>66</sup> in order to tackle the mounting violence and to uproot Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and other militant safe havens, though it seems to be a billion dollar question if it will be successful. Moreover, the US has funnelled well over US \$10 billion in military aid to bolster Pakistan’s counter-terrorism capabilities in the volatile border regions with Afghanistan.<sup>67</sup> In summary, the Afghan transitional government under

Karzai has questionable legitimacy among the people, is subject to coercion by better-armed entities, and is dependent on international forces in every way. Without security, there can be no reconstruction, and without reconstruction there can be no nation-building, thus leaving Afghanistan susceptible to continued instability and penetration by international terrorism. The lack of security, economic development, effective rule of law, and coordination of effort stand in the way of the sustainable progress of the country.

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The above discussion amply demonstrates that the decade-long war in Afghanistan since 11 September 2001 has caused the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians from insurgents and foreign military actions, as well as the deaths of possibly tens of thousands of Afghan civilians indirectly as a consequence of displacement, starvation, disease, exposure, lack of medical care, crime, lawlessness, and the destruction of their homes, property, and personal assets. In addition, the social and psychological effects and the violations

of human rights associated with assassinations are more devastating than a body count. An individual deciding to join a district *shura*, to campaign for a particular candidate, to take a job with a development organisation, or to speak freely about a new Taliban commander in the area often knows that their decision may have life or death consequences. Assassinations aim to deter individuals from exercising their basic human rights and freedom of expression, political participation, association, work and education. This suppression of individual rights also has political, economic, psychological and social consequences as it impedes governance and development efforts. Neither Afghan national security nor international military forces have been able to protect civilians from assassinations. In addition, the abductions of civilians increased by 83% compared to 2009, from 137 in 2009 to 251 in 2010. Added to this, insecurity, continuing violence and the pervasive atmosphere of intimidation and fear has caused a large displacement to urban centres. Those civilians who have stayed in conflict-affected areas, particularly women, children and the elderly, have seen their quality of life significantly deteriorate. Moreover, the civilian losses at present are a continuation of the extremely high civilian losses occurred during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, and the three periods of dreadful civil war from 1989-2001.

## Endnotes

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