Resource from RJ Tarr at [www.activehistory.co.uk](http://www.activehistory.co.uk)

**Debate: What should be the future policy of the West towards Afghanistan?**

**TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS / RESOURCES**

**Pre-class preparation**

• The cards overleaf should be printed out, cut up, ready to be distributed among the members of the class (there are 22 cards; if the class has more than 22 students, it is not a problem if some students have a second copy of the same card within the group).

**Task**

• Teacher introduction: “The US and NATO insist that their military withdrawal from Afghanistan does not represent a defeat, but an opportunity to rethink their strategy regarding how to deal with the Taliban. So what do you think should be their policy in the months and years ahead? There are four main possibilities, and at the end of this lesson you will decide which one you personally agree with”.

**Position 1: Send fresh US and NATO troops to Afghanistan to help build prosperity and democracy**

**Position 2: Send US and NATO troops to Pakistan instead of Afghanistan**

**Position 3: Keep US and NATO troops out, but continue military attacks on Afghanistan from offshore**

**Position 4: Keep US and NATO troops out, and focus instead on a diplomatic solution**

• Students should read the card they have been given and consider what it suggests should be the policy of the West towards Afghanistan. They need to memorise the information on this card ready to share it in discussion later.

• The teacher should collect in the cards and dispose of them (this will prevent the students from simply reading their card out word for word in the ensuing discussion).

• Divide the class into groups of 4-6 students. Each student should have a minute to share with the rest of the group what they think is the correct “position” to take and why. If they do this within 60 seconds, other members of the group should try to suggest possible problems with this course of action.

• When the discussion is over, give each student a letter (e.g. A-F for a group with 6 members). Re-organise the class into these six fresh groups and repeat the process.

• Finally, the teacher should lead a whole-class discussion and then have a vote (to get students moving around, you could ask them to stand in four different corners of the room to represent the “position” they agree with most.

Information cards (print out, cut up and give one to each student)

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| • Afghans have always resisted foreign occupation, so the United States cannot be a stabilizing force in Afghanistan and should withdraw in favour of a peace initiative involving countries in the region. | • America should conduct military operations from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the 1,500-mile border with Pakistan. |
| • As the British and Russians discovered to their cost in the 19th Century, Afghans do not like being occupied. | • However, there is no purely military solution to Afghanistan. Afghans need a better standard of living, which the corrupt central government is not providing. |
| • The solution for Afghanistan is political, not military. The US should withdraw its troops, and a regional alliance involving such countries as Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia and China could guarantee to support a functioning and stable national government. | • In Helmand province, which accounts for three quarters of Afghanistan’s poppy production for opium, the New York Times reports an Afghan official saying he has only “police officers who steal and a small group of Afghan soldiers who say they are here for a vacation”. |
| • It would make a lot of sense to shift US political and military efforts to Pakistan. | • Large numbers of Afghan civilians have been killed in air strikes, and this has allowed the Taliban to present itself as a symbol of patriotic resistance against foreign occupation. |
| • Nationwide, Afghanistan would need hundreds of thousands of coalition troops to fully protect them. | • The current government of Afghanistan is corrupt and inefficient: some of its top officials are engaged in the opium trade. |
| • The recent war is much longer than the combined US involvements in two world wars. | • If the Taliban is now growing and creating new alliances it is not because its religious practices have become popular, but because it provides the only available chance for national liberation. |
| • The U.S. cannot allow Afghanistan to become another Taliban-run sanctuary for al-Qaeda, which could lead to another 9/11. The U.S. must defeat the Taliban, even if this means increasing the number of troops. | • The US should strengthen support for Pakistan’s government and armed forces to prevent the movement of Al Qaeda and Taliban operatives back and forth across the border. |
| • The US has focused too much on building political institutions in Kabul, while the Taliban has focused on establishing control at the local level. | • The US has been undertaking a $65 billion a year campaign in Afghanistan to defeat an enemy that is mainly located across the border in Pakistan. |
| • The US must address the problem of Pakistan’s tribal areas, which are giving shelter to the Taliban and Al Qaeda and threatening the Pakistani government. | • The US must remain in Afghanistan and prevent more of the country from falling under Taliban control, even though Americans are concerned about the loss of life and financial costs involved. |
| • The US should resume its policy of waging drone attacks against Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Pakistan. | • The US has lost much of the international support it had after September 11, 2001 for its invasion. |
| • US diplomacy should aim at strengthening Pakistan against this internal terrorist threat to its survival. | • US forces should be out in the community, working alongside (and training more) Afghan army and police to support local officials and secure delivery of services. |

TEACHER NOTES – the cards can roughly be organised under these headings:

**Position 1: Send fresh US and NATO troops to Afghanistan to help build prosperity and democracy**

• The U.S. cannot allow Afghanistan to become another Taliban-run sanctuary for al-Qaeda, which could lead to another 9/11. The U.S. must defeat the Taliban, even if this means increasing the number of troops.

• The US must remain in Afghanistan and prevent more of the country from falling under Taliban control, even though Americans are concerned about the loss of life and financial costs involved.

• However, there is no purely military solution to Afghanistan. Afghans need a better standard of living, which the corrupt central government is not providing.

• The US has focused too much on building political institutions in Kabul, while the Taliban has focused on establishing control at the local level.

• US forces should be out in the community, working alongside (and training more) Afghan army and police to support local officials and secure delivery of services.

**Position 2: Send US and NATO troops to Pakistan instead of Afghanistan**

• The US must address the problem of Pakistan’s tribal areas, which are giving shelter to the Taliban and Al Qaeda and threatening the Pakistani government.

• US diplomacy should aim at strengthening Pakistan against this internal terrorist threat to its survival.

• The US has been undertaking a $65 billion a year campaign in Afghanistan to defeat an enemy that is mainly located across the border in Pakistan.

• It would make a lot of sense to shift US political and military efforts to Pakistan.

• The US should strengthen support for Pakistan’s government and armed forces to prevent the movement of Al Qaeda and Taliban operatives back and forth across the border.

• The US should resume its policy of waging drone attacks against Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Pakistan.

**Position 3: Keep US and NATO troops out, but continue military attacks on Afghanistan from offshore**

• America should conduct military operations from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the 1,500-mile border with Pakistan.

• The recent war is much longer than the combined US involvements in two world wars.

• Nationwide, Afghanistan would need hundreds of thousands of coalition troops to fully protect them.

• The current government of Afghanistan is corrupt and inefficient: some of its top officials are engaged in the opium trade.

• In Helmand province, which accounts for three quarters of Afghanistan’s poppy production for opium, the New York Times reports an Afghan official saying he has only “police officers who steal and a small group of Afghan soldiers who say they are here for a vacation”.

**Position 4: Keep US and NATO troops out, and focus instead on a diplomatic solution**

• Afghans have always resisted foreign occupation, so the United States cannot be a stabilizing force in Afghanistan and should withdraw in favour of a peace initiative involving countries in the region.

• The US has lost much of the international support it had after September 11, 2001 for its invasion.

• Large numbers of Afghan civilians have been killed in air strikes, and this has allowed the Taliban to present itself as a symbol of patriotic resistance against foreign occupation.

• As the British and Russians discovered to their cost in the 19th Century, Afghans do not like being occupied.

• If the Taliban is now growing and creating new alliances it is not because its religious practices have become popular, but because it provides the only available chance for national liberation.

• The solution for Afghanistan is political, not military. The US should withdraw its troops, and a regional alliance involving such countries as Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia and China could guarantee to support a functioning and stable national government.