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## **The Calamity of War: Afghanistan's Ongoing Migration Crisis**

Afghanistan has endured over four decades of conflict, profoundly impacting its population, and causing one of the most significant refugee crises in modern history. The interplay of strategic rivalries among global superpowers and regional powers has exacerbated this crisis, resulting in persistent war, violence, and instability. The Soviet invasion, the rise and fall of the Taliban, and the US-led intervention have all contributed to the ongoing turmoil, driving millions of Afghans from their homes. This article delves into the devastating consequences of these geopolitical dynamics on Afghan migration and the struggles faced by Afghan refugees worldwide.

In the past 45 years, an estimated 8.2 million Afghans have fled their homeland, seeking safety and stability in neighbouring countries and across the globe. This mass exodus, unparalleled in modern history, is a direct consequence of persistent war, violence, and instability that have ravaged Afghanistan since the late 1970s (2). The Soviet invasion, civil conflicts, the rise and fall of the Taliban, and the US-led intervention have all contributed to the relentless turmoil that continues to drive Afghans from their homes (3).

The re-emergence of the Taliban in August 2021, facilitated by the strategic interests of the US and its allies, exacerbated an already dire situation (1). For many Afghans, the Taliban's return represented a resurgence of terror and oppression (2). The chaotic evacuation at Kabul airport, where 123,000 people were airlifted by NATO forces, highlighted the desperation of those left behind (2). Despite calls from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for neighbouring countries to open their borders, Iran, and Pakistan, which host 85% of Afghan refugees, imposed stringent entry requirements, leaving countless Afghans stranded (3).

In their quest for safety, many Afghans undertook perilous journeys through Nimroz province, Afghanistan's least populated region. Baloch smugglers

facilitated illegal crossings into Iran, where approximately 5,000 people entered daily (4). However, the Iranian government responded with accelerated deportations, expelling 20,000 Afghans between January 21 and February 4, 2024, alone (4). This crackdown reflects a broader trend, with 631,000 Afghan refugees deported from Iran between January and November 2023 (4).

Historically, the migration of Afghan Hazaras to Iran began in the late 1970s, during the Soviet occupation, and even earlier in the 1890s to escape massacres by Amir Abdul Rahman (5). Today, over 500,000 Hazaras live in the suburbs of Mary Abad and Hazara Town near Quetta, Pakistan, creating a significant socio-economic network between Afghanistan and Iran (5). This historical migration pattern illustrates the longstanding challenges faced by Afghan minorities in seeking refuge and stability (5).

The plight of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has also worsened significantly. Once enjoying relatively favourable conditions, Afghan refugees now face mass deportations, with over 375,000 expelled in September 2023 alone (6). This drastic shift in policy has instilled fear and uncertainty among the refugee population, many of whom have resided in Pakistan for generations (6). The Pakistani government views Afghanistan as a base for the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), further complicating the situation for Afghan refugees who are caught in the crossfire of geopolitical tensions (6).

In contrast to Iran and Pakistan, European countries have largely suspended the return of Afghan refugees since the Taliban's resurgence (7). However, Turkey has ramped up deportations, with 44,768 Afghans deported by air in the first eight months of 2022 alone (8). Despite Turkish authorities' claims of voluntary returns, Human Rights Watch reports that many Afghans faced forced deportations with no opportunity to apply for asylum, highlighting the harsh realities faced by refugees on the move (8).

The struggle for stability continues for Afghans in Iran, where many have lived for over 40 years. Despite managing to send their children to school and establish small businesses, these long-term residents face a complex and costly process to renew their residence permits annually (3). The Iranian government's lack of recognition for their decades-long residency adds to their precarious situation, as they navigate an uncertain future without the possibility of obtaining citizenship (3).

Seeking new horizons, an increasing number of Afghans in Iran are turning to intermediary companies to obtain humanitarian visas for Brazil, with the goal of reaching the United States or Canada. This arduous journey involves traversing 11 countries and the treacherous Darien Gap, a 160-kilometer stretch of swampy forest between Colombia and Panama (4). The high costs and dangers of this

route reflect the lengths to which Afghans are willing to go in their quest for a better life (5).

For those attempting to reach Europe, the risks are equally severe. Many faces overcrowded smuggler boats in the Mediterranean, harsh conditions in detention centres, and the complexities of the Dublin Regulation, which mandates that only one country is responsible for examining asylum applications (7). This inefficient and often exploitative system highlights the broader challenges faced by Afghan refugees as they seek safety and stability in an increasingly hostile world (7).

Afghanistan's ongoing migration crisis underscores the profound human impact of war and instability. The resilience and determination of Afghan refugees to seek safety and build new lives in the face of immense challenges reflect their enduring spirit, even as they confront a world that often seems indifferent to their plight. The root causes of this crisis lie in the strategic rivalries and geopolitical manoeuvrings of both global superpowers and regional actors, which have left Afghanistan in a state of perpetual conflict and disarray (1).

## References

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