

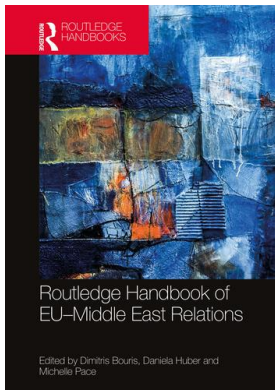
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# 31

## EU–AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS

*Oz Hassan*

### **Introduction**

Sitting within the gateway to East Asia, Afghanistan is no stranger to Europe. Historically, both geographical spaces have been intrinsically linked, in ways that contemporary Western discourses ignore. Starting with the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE), Darius I of Babylonia built an empire that stretched from the Balkans and the Black Sea through to present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. As this empire fell to Alexander the Great's eastern conquest (330 BCE), a new empire from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan and India took its place. In turn, the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom, in Northern Afghanistan, was declared independent around 250 BCE and served as the centre of trade and cultural exchange for three centuries on the silk road (Golden, 2011: 25). For over two and a half millennia, Europe and Afghanistan have been part of the same global history with interconnections allowed by geography and propelled by culture, commerce and the rise and fall of powers. These two entities are not separate imagined communities, but part of an interconnected web of history that weaves through the Arab Caliphates, Mongol invasions, the British–Afghan Wars and right up to today's so-called Global War on Terrorism and waves of post-conflict migration. At times their peoples have shared a familiar foe, and at others been mutual enemies. The complex systems they are nested within have come closer together and been pushed apart in the ebb and flow of international politics.

Within this context, it is not surprising that the European Union (EU) has been involved in Afghan affairs since its own establishment. Yet, this has not been reflected in the historical record. The EU's involvement in Afghanistan has, in fact, been underrepresented within the current literature, even if the EU has ultimately failed to meet its objectives of creating an Afghan-led political process that adheres to human rights and democratic norms (see Hassan, 2020). Accordingly, it is essential to correct this oversight and not accept the parsimonious notion presented by many scholars and commentators alike who have asserted that the EU only became a significant stakeholder in Afghanistan from December 2001 onwards (EU Council, 2009; Gross, 2012; Therios, 2010). To treat the relationship as if it simply bubbled out of the EU's counter-terrorism approach in the twenty-first century without any preceding historical context (Hassan, 2010), is an oversight that requires correcting. This chapter rejects these ahistorical accounts of the EU's relationship with Afghanistan and sets out a more detailed contemporary history. It provides an overview and shows how this complex relationship has been built

on stages of institutionalisation and crises. Ultimately, it shows distinct periods within the relationship whereby the European Community focused on “trade and aid” in the 1950s through to the 1970s; “Humanitarianism” from the 1980s through to 2001; and “state-building” since late 2001. Understanding these distinct stages reveals how the EU has grown, but also the tracks that have been laid to contour the future direction of the relationship.

### **The 1950s–1970s: trade and aid**

Having been subjected to conflict throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the modern nation of Afghanistan gained independence from British interference at the end of 1919 (Tanner, 2009: 219). Under Emir, and then Malik (King), Amanullah Khan, Afghanistan was determined to mimic European modernisation and fostered connections with London, Paris and Berlin; while balancing European power by recognising the new Soviet Union. Modernisation – which included compulsory education for women – proved controversial, and Amanullah Khan was driven from power in 1929, setting in stage a period of uncertainty throughout the 1930s and into the Second World War (Tanner, 2009: 221–25). Following World War II, Afghanistan’s neighbourhood changed in dramatic ways. The newly independent India and the state of Pakistan altered the regional subsystem in Central and South Asia, while the rise of two global superpowers was beginning to fundamentally reshape the international system. Indeed, both the United States (US) and the Soviet Union started to invest in Afghan infrastructure throughout the late 1940s and 1950s (Cullather, 2002a). This earned Afghanistan the title of being an “economic Korea”, with the Soviets investing in the north and the United States carrying out development projects in the south. While the Soviet Union became Afghanistan’s leading trade-and-aid partner, Afghan policymakers still relied on the West to achieve their modernisation plans (see Masannat, 1969). For Afghanistan, trade and aid were part of a more comprehensive attempt by Prime Minister, and later President, Mohammed Daoud to modernise and foster a developmental state (A. Suhrke, 2007: 2, 7). It was this that provided the European Community (EC) a gateway for European level engagement with Afghanistan.

The 1950s saw the EC and Afghanistan establish small levels of trade which steadily grew (see ECSC, 1954, 1962). However, this relationship expanded with the introduction of the 1962 European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the rise of European food aid in the late 1960s. With CAP-generated surpluses mounting, by the 1970s, the EC became the second largest food aid actor in the international system (Mousseau, 2005: 4). This proved essential to the EC level relationship with Afghanistan when, throughout the 1970s, the EC began expanding its food aid programme (OJ, 1973, 1975b, 1975a). For example, in 1971, it was declared by way of community action that the EC would “grant to the Kingdom of Afghanistan 10,000 metric tons of common wheat under its 1970/71 food aid programme”. This was followed in 1972 with the agreement to supply common wheat as food aid (OJ, 1973: 37–39). By 1975, EC food aid to Afghanistan had been expanded from common wheat to include 300 metric tons of skimmed milk powder and 600 metric tonnes of butteroil (OJ, 1975a: 33–37, 1975b: 26–30). Over nearly three decades, the EC built the foundations of an evolving trade and aid relationship with a relatively stable Afghanistan. Surpluses within the European system were spilling into Central and Southern Asia, creating interdependence between these two nested subsystems. For the EC, the institutionalisation of trade and aid was a by-product of the CAP, rather than a product of the Cold War security architecture. The relationship provided an avenue to alleviate distortions in Europe’s internal agricultural market, whilst supporting the perceived need for a growing “actorness” in global affairs (Bergmann, 1977; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 200; Sjöstedt, 1977). For Afghanistan, suffering from a cyclical lack of rainfall and drought along

with other complex system strains on its own agricultural infrastructure, this was welcomed. As such, whilst this relationship was not apolitical, it was helping foster reciprocal discussions around the modernisation and development of the Afghan state, moving towards urbanisation and universal education. This was disrupted by the revolution of the People's Democratic Party (PDPA) in April 1978 and the Soviet invasion in December 1979 (Cullather, 2002b). This crisis set the stage for a reframing of Europe's trade and aid relationship with Afghanistan, taking on more security concerns through the geopolitical lens of the 1980s and 1990s.

### 1980s–2001: Europe's humanitarian role in Afghanistan

EU involvement in Afghanistan began to have a sharper focus on security issues following the 1979 Soviet invasion. As that particular episode of the Cold War unfolded, European powers began to see their relationships with Afghanistan through the prism of "solidarity" with the US. This filtered into EC level action, leading to a shift away from being a trade-and-aid partner (Jenkins, 1980) towards being a more deeply engrained humanitarian actor. In response to the invasion, the EC suspended food aid to Afghanistan, arguing that it could not guarantee it would not be intercepted by Soviet forces. Instead, the EC directed aid to Afghan refugees that had fled to neighbouring Pakistan (Commission of the European Communities, 1981; Jenkins, 1980: 1–2; Pentassuglia, 2001: 9). However, as the EC began to grapple with its wider policy response, it became clear that there were problems with EC level crisis management policies. As Ham illustrates, "Neither the EC nor the EPC [European Political Cooperation] were authorised more than in an informal way to deal with th[is] security issue" (2016: 115). The Soviet invasion had revealed the fissures between the EC and Member States, as they became strained under the more acute pressures of a bipolar international order. This pressure exposed the EC's inability to act, and the limitations of European level crisis management. In the name of Western solidarity, national governments refused to provide the EC with the authority or coherence for firm leadership. The crisis exposed the tensions between pushing for European integration and maintaining Atlantic solidarity. For the "solidarity of the West", Member States forfeited the development of the EC's crisis management instruments, even as the Carter administration embarked on its Grain Embargo and the use of the "food weapon" as a form of statecraft (Jenkins, 1980; Paarlberg, 1980). As commodity prices rose, following the Arab oil Embargo, a brief era of "food power" took hold whereby the US attempted to apply pressure within the international system by withholding grain exports (Paarlberg, 1985). Conspicuously, however, the limitations placed upon EC level action began to shape its involvement in Afghanistan through the 1980s. As the EC became marginalised, by the US and EC Member States, it was obliged to focus upon civilian power opportunities and developed a distinctive humanitarian approach towards ongoing crises. In and through this crisis, the EC was able to recast itself within the framework of its normative power.

Marginalised as a traditional security actor, the EC was forced to veer away from anything resembling a traditional state-based geopolitics approach to crises. This shaped what the EC considered politically possible and desirable. As a result, by 1984, there were growing calls from the European Parliament to create a budget heading for "aid towards self-sufficiency for refugees and displaced persons" in Asian and Latin American developing countries (see European Commission, 1988). Nevertheless, between 1984–1997 the Commission continued to use "an ad hoc budget heading with no legal basis" to initiate and inject funding for projects (Commission of the European Communities, 2000: 4). It was in 1985 that the institutionalisation of a more consistently humanitarian approach took root in the shape of the *Aid to Uprooted People* (AUP) programme, and the redelivery of aid to Afghanistan, from a representative office in Peshawar,

Pakistan (ICG, 2005: 3). The aim of the AUP programme was to assist in the expected return of refugees. Nevertheless, because the EC's humanitarian approach to Afghanistan was further institutionalised in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the EU emerged as the most significant humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan (see Hassan, 2020). With the post–Cold War context allowing the US to pivot away from Afghanistan, the EU became the single largest humanitarian donor to the country with over €500 million in aid allocated throughout the 1990s (European Commission, 2003). Thus, from its formal inception by the Maastricht Treaty on 1 November 1993, the EU inherited more than a tertiary role in Afghanistan. It was because the EU was in this position that it would later run into tensions with the Taliban, who rose to power in the early 1990s.

### ***The EU and the Taliban***

The materialisation of a new mujahedin regime, in 1992, did little to quell the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of Soviet troops and years of civil war (Katzman, 2005: 3). Warlords applied little restraint in violating human rights and the rule of law. Exacerbated by drought, Afghans faced unbearable levels of human suffering, leading to millions becoming either internally displaced or fleeing to Pakistan and Iran (Rashid, 2000: 21; Ruiz and Emery, 2001). Whilst the response was overseen by the United Nations (UN), the EU emerged as the most strategically situated actor prepared to undertake the role of humanitarian coordinator within the region (Agence Europe, 1994). The EU maintained an emphasis on multilateral crisis management, buttressing the UN, but was willing to bypass the UN in instances where European NGOs directly appealed for EU funds (see Hassan, 2020).<sup>1</sup> This was especially the case in the aftermath of the US withdrawing funding from its USAID programmes in Afghanistan. As the EU became the largest single aid donor, it, along with the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO),<sup>2</sup> became instrumental in providing food, water, healthcare and shelter to the local population throughout those parts of Afghanistan that could be reached. In line with the “values and principles for the intervention of European humanitarian aid”, ECHO financed projects in the areas of “independence”, “neutrality” and “relief” (European Commission, 2010). The EU's office in Peshawar also began to take on a discreet role in “coordinating the work of NGOs, particularly in the health sector, which was supported by UNICEF, WHO, and the governmental authorities”, allowing the EU to become the “de facto coordinating body” in a range of sectors, and particularly in the realm of humanitarian assistance (Burns, 1995; Donini, 1996: 38–51). By 2000, the EU and its Member States provided over 95% of all Country Programmable Aid (CPA) to Afghanistan (Hassan, 2020). It is difficult to see this as anything other than a consequential humanitarian role in the absence of any other international leadership, yet this detail is not evident within the albeit limited literature on the EU's relationship with Afghanistan. Whilst the international community remained unable to negotiate a peace settlement between warring factions, the EU had an institutionalised network of NGOs and formal humanitarian assistance programmes that placed humanitarianism at the core of the relationship. It was precisely because the EU was in this position in the 1990s that tensions emerged between the EU and the Taliban.

It was in the mid-1990s that the EU began asserting a higher priority to Asia. With the 1994 release of the EU's first regional strategic document *Towards a New Asia Strategy*, the Union wanted to become more involved in the region playing a greater role in “the management of international affairs. . . [and] a constructive and stabilising role in the world” through a “positive contribution to regional security dialogues” (Commission of the European Communities, 1994). This sat well with the EU becoming the de facto coordinating body for aid

in Afghanistan, even as the Taliban emerged in 1994 and began to challenge warlords in and around Kandahar province (Rashid, 2000: 22). Emerging as a politically viable alternative to the insecurity of the civil war, the Taliban finally seized Kabul on 27 September 1996 (Katzman, 2010: 5). This raised the concerns of the EU, strengthening its resolve in humanitarianism even as it faced a hostile environment and renewed challenges. The EU, in line with most of the international community, with the exceptions of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, declined to extend diplomatic recognition to the Taliban (ICG, 2005: 3). The European Parliament voiced distress about the “role played by external forces, in particular, Pakistan and the USA, in supporting the Taliban offensive [against Kabul]” (European Parliament, 1996: 156). The EU’s concerns were justified, as the Taliban cemented an “absolute discriminatory regime against women”, the committing of “atrocities”, an “extreme interpretation of Sharia . . . implying inhumane forms of punishment”, the attacking of “humanitarian workers” and the burning of “foreign films and books” (European Parliament, 1996: 156). These would be recurring humanitarian themes emphasised by the EU throughout the late 1990s.

### ***The EU and concerns over international terrorism***

Concerns over the Taliban’s relationship with international terrorism began to alter the EU’s relationship with Afghanistan in the late 1990s. Indeed, the EU began to identify the risks to the international system posed by the Taliban regime through this lens. As a presidency statement set out,

The EU notes with concern that the continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan increases the potential for international terrorism and drug trafficking with destabilizing effects for the region and beyond. The EU, therefore, calls upon all parties in Afghanistan to halt such activities on Afghan soil.

*(Bulletin EU, 1996)*

By 1998 the EU was definitive in its assertions, drawing concrete links between the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan and “the *harbouring and export of terrorism*”, which threatened the “stability and economic development of the whole region” (Bulletin EU, 1998). Over this short timeframe, the EU became acutely aware of the problems precisely because it had human intelligence on the ground, working with NGOs within the country. Nevertheless, the EU was not yet ready to break with its underlying humanitarian approach, nor did Member States provide it with additional instruments. Issuing its common position on Afghanistan in 2000, the EU made clear that,

In order to step up the fight against drugs and terrorism, the Union will support *sustainable alternative development* and urges all the Afghan factions to refrain from financing, training or sheltering terrorist organisations.

*(Bulletin EU, 2000)*

This approach embodied the EU’s normative agenda, whilst recognising the manner in which the EU was marginalised as a traditional security actor, even as Afghanistan was increasingly seen as a security concern for the Union; a reality that was made all the more apparent by al Qaeda’s 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks and the precipitated period of crisis that followed.



## 2001–2020: democratisation, reconstruction and marginalisation

Just as the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to tensions between Atlantic solidarity and European integration, so too did the crisis presented by the 11 September terrorist attacks. On the one hand, the Commission declared,

The events of 11 September are redefining the foreign policy landscape and presenting the Union with new challenges. . . . Recent events have added a new “security” dimension to the European Union’s international perspective. *The Union should take the lead.* It must . . . try to develop instruments which will extend effective co-operation between police and judicial authorities to the international level. Such a development will help in the fight against terrorism both inside the Union and in the rest of the world.

*(European Commission, 2001a)*

Yet, the George W. Bush administration’s desire to form “coalitions of the willing” and proceed on an “ad hoc” basis, as it launched its campaign against the Taliban and al Qaeda, undermined the EU as a partner. Not only had NATO been rejected, but the manner in which ad hoc members joined the coalition was a direct challenge to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Transatlantic solidarity came at the expense of European integration and the development of EU level security instruments. Britain, France and Germany bolstered their solidarity with the US, at the cost of a Europeanised response. Thus, as Eva Gross concludes,

This . . . provoked resentment not only for compromising EU unity but also for engaging in what may be termed mini-lateralism: discussing contributions in closed meetings, often ahead of EU summits – thereby sidelining smaller EU Member States.

*(2009: 39)*

Once again, out of marginalisation and limitations of crisis management, EU-level action would develop a distinctive response. Pushed aside by the US and its chosen partners, Member States coalesced around a normative agenda of development, reconstruction and democratisation. This was made possible by the swift collapse of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001 and the start of the Bonn Process (see Astri Suhrke et al., 2010). In late November, Afghan political leaders met in Bonn, which culminated in the 5 December signing of an agreed transition of political power structures. The European General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) fully supported the process, appointing Ambassador Klaus-Peter Klaiber as the European Union’s Special Representative for Afghanistan. The Ambassador bore responsibility for implementing the Union’s policy in Afghanistan within the “framework laid down by Security Council Resolution 1378, in close liaison with the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative” (General Affairs, 2001: 13). At the top of the EU’s agenda, however, were three main concerns, which have underpinned the EU approach for decades.

Firstly, the GAERC placed humanitarian aid as an “absolute priority for the Union” (General Affairs, 2001: 13–15). This was an enduring sinew of the EU’s humanitarian approach. Significantly, this emphasised the necessary requirement for a “consistent and coordinated approach to humanitarian aid, immediate needs and reconstruction . . . by all possible means” (General Affairs, 2001: 13–15). The EU played to its strengths early within this process, but the GAERC continued to build the EU’s approach. Secondly, the GAERC sought to prioritise the

post-conflict security situation in the country. Collectively, the EU remained concerned about the “repeated attacks on representatives of humanitarian NGOs in Afghanistan” and the re-emergence of warlords (General Affairs, 2001: 13–15). Thirdly, EU level action became committed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and its long-term social, political and economic transformation into a functioning democratic state. Accordingly, Member States allowed the EU to expand beyond the minimally coalesced principles of humanitarianism of the 1980s and 1990s. The eventual democratisation of Afghanistan was seen to be in the interests of the EU’s broader security goals. The epitome of this was set out in the *European Security Strategy* which argued that,

Bad governance . . . and civil conflict corrode States from within . . . Afghanistan under the Taliban [is one of] the best-known recent examples. Collapse of the State can be associated with obvious threats, such as organised crime or terrorism.

*(European Union, 2003: 4)*

With the EU elevating the reconstruction of Afghanistan to a central security goal, a significant shift in policy began to emerge. The GAERC asserted the need for the “formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government committed to a positive gender perspective and improving conditions for women” (General Affairs, 2001: 13–15). To move this reconstruction programme forward, the EU became a founding member of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Steering Group (ARSG), with the European Commission jointly co-chairing the group with the United States, Japan and Saudi Arabia (European Commission, 2001b). The ARSG was instrumental in early discussions of how to develop a coordinated approach to the international contributions. Indeed, as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began to release their preliminary needs assessments for Afghanistan’s reconstruction, the EU was able to push forward the “base case” assumption that \$9–12 billion would be needed over the first five years. This became the preliminary position for the 2002 ARSG Ministerial Pledging Conference in Tokyo, where the EU pressed for reconstruction contributions beyond those already allocated for humanitarian assistance (European Commission, 2002). This role played to the strengths of the EU, both as a body used to reaching common ground within a multilateral setting, but also because of its previous *de facto* humanitarian coordinator role. As a result, the EU was a key player in developing a common approach to, and coordinating, “the international contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan” (Europa, 2002). Within this role, the EU sought to push democratisation forward in Afghanistan while assisting with Afghanistan’s reconstruction.

Since 2002, the EU has maintained consistent objectives towards Afghanistan, persistently asserting the need for democratisation within its broader objectives. These objectives have included:

To promote the Bonn Agreement and its implementation by all groups. To promote democracy and the protection of human rights. To establish an effective macroeconomic and monetary framework. To reinforce the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism. To promote cooperation with neighbouring countries. To enhance the role of women. To provide support for civil, social and military structures and services and aid for all those in need, especially refugees and displaced persons.

*(European Commission, 2006: 4)*



Repeatedly rearticulated by the Commission, these goals were given particular emphasis in the 2003–2006 and 2007–2013 Country Strategy Papers (CSP). However, these objectives were broad and often in conflict with those of the War on Terror at an operational level (Hassan and Hammond, 2011). As Waldman points out, “The Bonn Agreement and subsequent international plans envisioned the swift establishment of a highly centralized, functional, democratic state, and set over-ambitious modernizing goals” (2013: 826). It was within this context that the EU took on its post-conflict reconstruction role in Afghanistan. Attempting to realise its goals, the EU focused on policing and the rule of law, the healthcare sector and rural development (Blockmans et al., 2014). From a marginalised position, these efforts sought to complement other actors, rather than be internationally leading efforts in their own right. Member States have, however, transferred responsibilities to the EU where their efforts failed; for example the initially German-led police training mission was transferred to the EU in 2007, leading to the institutionalisation of EUPOL. Nevertheless, in the round, the summation of this has meant that the EU has maintained substantial levels of aid as a key donor in official development and humanitarian assistance, but its influence and responsibilities in Afghanistan have not matched the financial contributions it has made (see Hassan, 2020).

### ***Refugees and the resurgence of the Taliban***

Over time, increased violence and the resurgence of the Taliban has led to the EU tempering its ambitions in Afghanistan. For example, the EU has moved from condemning the Taliban throughout the 1990s, determining their liability for international terrorism in the 2000s, only to invite them into a peace process and therefore a potential governmental role in the late 2010s. This realisation has often been masked by Member States using the euphemism of an “Afghan-led” peace process. As the EU Council agreed in 2018,

The EU supports an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, with the Government and the Taliban at its core, as the only viable path towards a sustainable resolution of the armed conflict.

*(European Council, 2018)*

Thus, whilst democratisation and reconstruction remain at the core of EU policy, this has come to include the Taliban as a partner in ending instability. In practical terms, this is because the EU has long regarded dialogue with the Taliban as a fundamental component of any stable peace process (see Hassan, 2020: 88–89). This, in turn, is seen as being in the EU’s wider interests as “a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is a cornerstone for the stability and development of the entire region” (European Council, 2018). Whilst this was out of step with the US throughout the 2000s, the US has come to agree with the EU position. In July 2018, the Trump administration invited the Taliban to enter peace talks. As US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo (2018) professed, the Taliban “cannot wait us out” but “we can’t settle this from the outside”. This cannot be considered anything other than a significant move away from the lofty aspirations of the early 2000s. Yet for the EU, this move is also the result of affairs in Afghanistan directly impacting the internal politics of Member States. By September 2017, Afghans had become the largest group of asylum applicants in the EU, fleeing an increasingly violent conflict (Pitonak and Beşer, 2017: 4). This prompted the EU and Afghanistan to sign the non-binding agreement entitled a *Joint Way Forward on migration issues* and place Afghanistan within the context of the 2016 EU *Global Strategy* (EUGS) (European Parliament, 2018: 3).

The EUGS was designed to make decisive steps on Security and Defence and develop a “new level of ambition and key steps to upgrade cooperation to ensure the security of [the] Union” (Europa, 2018). Based on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy’s (HRVP), Federica Mogherini’s, *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence* its aims are to develop crisis management tools and “help governments jointly build military capacity” (Europa, 2018). However, with all its discussion of security and defence, along with the need for an integrated approach to conflicts, its impact on the EU’s approach to Afghanistan has been limited. The EU has been eager to pursue economic diplomacy in the region, in particular with its strategic partners in Japan and India, while pushing for deeper trade and investment with China (Europa, 2018). This is a clear reflection on the Eurozone crisis reflecting the EU’s economic vulnerabilities. However, despite a considerable level of positive noise in policy circles, the EU’s stated commitment through the EUGS has remained mostly the same as that throughout the 2000s. Accordingly, the EUGS has merely reinstated a commitment to “support state-building and reconciling processes in Afghanistan together with our regional and international partners” (European Union, 2016). Indeed, there has been little substantive intellectual evolution in the EU’s approach to Afghanistan since the broader framework for engagement was established in the 2000s. While the EU and its Member States remain Afghanistan’s most significant international aid contributors, the EUGS has done little in the short term for crisis management in Afghanistan.

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the EU’s relationship with Afghanistan has evolved through a succession of steps. Firstly, based on trade and aid, secondly, its humanitarian agenda, and thirdly a focus on state-building. The common thread running through each stage is not simply that change has been precipitated by the need for crisis management. Rather, it is important to note how the form of crisis management has itself been shaped by a multitude of intervening actors within the international system. Fundamentally, history shows that great powers push and pull the European and Asian continents together and apart. This has been the case for over two and a half millennia; remaining true throughout the Cold War of the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. This dynamic push and pull within the relationship is important to recognise if we are to understand the future of EU–Afghan relations. Without a peaceful settlement, the abandonment of Afghanistan gives rise to a postcolonial legacy of insecurity and internal violence. In turn, as the 1990s showed, EU institutions try to fill this security vacuum and mitigate the worst of the humanitarian catastrophes that await. This is not simply a result of an altruistic desire or normative commitment, as powerful motivators as these are, but because Afghanistan’s internal dynamics have ramifications on European interests. Accordingly, the findings of this chapter provide a warning, whereby we can understand the international retrenchment of the US broadly, and US desire to withdraw from Afghanistan specifically, as likely to renew pressure on the EU to match funds with responsibility.

### Notes

- 1 In Hassan, 2020 there is more emphasis on this point. By talking to those on the ground at the time, this point seemed so obvious as to not need stating. However, it has all but disappeared from the historical record, and needs to be stressed before this point is lost within broader debates around Afghan history.
- 2 ECHO, set up in 1991, is now known as the European Humanitarian Aid Office.

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