NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

REVISITING US LIBERAL INTERVENTIONISM IN AFGHANISTAN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

M.A. THESIS

Alfred P. B. KIADII

Nicosia

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Approval

We certify that we have read the thesis submitted by Alfred P.B. Kiadii titled **"Revisiting US Liberal Interventionism in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospect"** and that in our combined opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of International Relations.

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Declaration

Declaration I hereby declare that all information, documents, analysis and results in this thesis have been collected and presented according to the academic rules and ethical guidelines of Institute of Graduate Studies, Near East University. I also declare that as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced information and data that are not original to this study.

ALFRED P.B. KIADII

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Abstract

Revisiting US Liberal Interventionism in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospect

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On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda forces attacked the United States (henceforth US) and bombed the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, sending shockwaves throughout the country and generating widespread solidarity. In late 2001, the US-led NATO forces intervened in Afghanistan in an effort to eliminate the terrorist threat and depose the regime. The mission evolved into full-fledged liberal interventionism, with nation-building, democracy promotion, and social engineering of Afghan society as its central themes. In light of this, this study examines the notion of liberal interventionism in Afghanistan led by the US. The research consequently addresses to explore the question: "How effective has the liberal interventionism led by the US been in Afghanistan since the military intervention?" and also Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental obstacle to liberal interventionism led by the US?" In order to construct a theoretical analysis, this thesis will utilise the concept of othernesss and draw on Edward said conceptualization of otherness.

Öz

Afganistan'daki ABD Liberal Müdahaleciliğine Yeniden Bir Bakış:
Zorluklar ve Beklentiler

Kiadii, Alfred P.B.
Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü
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11 Eylül 2001'de El-Kaide güçlerinin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD)'ne saldırısı sonucunda Dünya Ticaret Merkezi'ni ve Pentagon'u bombalayarak ülke çapında yaygın bir dayanışma yarattı. 2001 yılının sonlarında ABD liderliğindeki ANTO, terör tehdidini ortadan kaldırmak ve rejimi devirmek amacıyla Afganistan'a müdahelede bulundu. Bu minvalde ABD politikası; Afganistan'da ulus-inşası, demokrasinin teşviki ve Afgan toplumunun sosyal mühendisliği ile tam teşekküllü liberal müdahalecilik üzerine şekillenlendi. Bu gelişmeler ışığında, bu çalışma Afganistan'da ABD liderliğindeki liberal müdahalecilik kavramına odaklanarak, liberal müdahalecilik kavramını bu vaka üzerinden incelemektedir. Sonuç olarak araştırma şu soruyu incelemeye yöneliktir: "İşgalden bu yana ABD'nin önderlik ettiği liberal müdahalecilik Afganistan'da ne kadar etkili olmuştur?" ve ayrıca Afgan milliyetçiliği, ABD liderliğindeki liberal müdahaleciliğin önünde temel bir engel midir?" Teorik bir analiz inşa etmek için bu tez, milliyetçilik kavramını ve güç dengesine ilişkin yeni-gerçekçi bakış açısını kullanacaktır. Bu tez sonunda John Mearsheimer'ın milliyetçiliğin dört özelliğini tartışacaktır: birlik duygusu, eşsiz kültür, kutsal toprak ve egemenlik.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afganistan, ABD, NATO, 11 Eylül saldırıları, liberal müdahalecilik, Taliban

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List of Abbreviations

AFDHS—Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey

AIHR—Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

ANA—Afghan National Army

ANDSF—Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

ANP—Afghan National Police

ASI—Afghan Security Institution

CIA—Central Intelligence Agency

COIN—Counterinsurgency

EU—European Union

GWOT—Global War on Terror

DDRR—Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation & Reintegration

ISI-K—Islamic State of Iraq and Khorasan

IR—International Relations

ISAF—International Security Assistance Force

LIO—Liberal International Order

NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGOs—Non-governmental Organizations

NDS—National Directorate of Security

OFS—Operation Freedom's Sentinel

OIF—Operation Iraqi Freedom

ONE—Operation Noble Eagle

PDPA—Afghan Communist Party, the Democratic Party of Afghanistan

RS—Resolute Support

RSM—Resolute Support Mission

SSR—Security Sector Reform

TAA-Training, Advising, and Assisting

UN—United Nations

UNAMA—United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

UNDP—United Nations Development Fund

UNSC—United Nations Security Council

USFOR-A—U.S. Forces-Afghanistan

USSR—United Socialist State Republic

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, the US suffered catastrophic terrorist assaults on the country's symbols of power, the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. (Paust, 2003), perpetrated by men ultimately identified as al-Qaeda agents. The assaults sent shockwaves across American society, galvanising global outrage against the culprits and concurrent sympathy with the US. Discussions concerning terrorist threats were propelled into the spotlight, becoming a mainstay of worldwide media institutions, including nonstop coverage of evacuation attempts at the attack sites. This was, however, the era of the 'unipolar moment' and the ostensibly 'end of history' (Krauthammer, 1990; Fukuyama, 1989), during which the cold-war logic of balance of power politics and containment were considered anachronisms suitable for the historical museum.

If anything, the terrorist attacks confirmed the demise of the balance-of-power rationale that guided US foreign policy from 1917 to 1991 but also exposed the US to a new threat (van Evera, 2008). That the struggle against radical groups such as jihadist groups must be a priority for US grand strategy, given the global network of terrorism emanating from socioeconomic disparity in Global South. As a result, the battle against terrorism has become the defining principles of the US foreign and security policymakers precisely since the September 11 attacks. To some extent, the dramatic magnitude of the 9/11 attacks were felt not only in terms of the human suffering and economic losses, but also in terms of shattering the perception that the US is the only secure great power, surrounded on two sides by the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Second, the 9/11 attacks cast both doubt on the US invincibility and rendered hollow the myth surrounding great-power dominance.

In response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the US launched three operations: Operation Noble Eagle (ONE), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The first was the designation given to the domestic security operations initiated by the newly constituted Homeland Security. These operations resulted in support for the federal, state, and municipal government apparatuses of the US. The second was the term used to refer to US military activities in Afghanistan; aid to allies and others

conducting military exercises against terrorism, as well as military actions against terrorists in other nations. The third was the US military campaign in Afghanistan, which resulted in the invasion of Iraq, the assassination of Saddam Hussein, and subsequent peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and reconstruction activities (Kapp, 2005). These operations were necessary components of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). As Afghanistan became the first battleground in the Global War on Terror, the idea of liberal interventionism became the preferred US foreign policy approach.

Liberal interventionism, which gained popularity in the early 1990s, is the notion that the US has a messianic obligation to intervene in distant countries facing grave threats in order to protect human lives, exorcise threats, establish an inclusive democratic regime, and implement nation-building measures consistent with democratic values and free market capitalism (Beauchamp, 2021). This foreign policy concept fused precepts of moral denunciation of US foreign policy with post-Cold War triumphalism emphasis on US primacy and its role as a benign hegemon. However, three clusters of events led to the emergence of this approach as the staple of US foreign policy: the fall of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the US as the lone superpower, and the genocidal bloodlettings in Rwanda and the Balkans. However, the crowning moment for liberal interventionism occurred on the eve of the US' invasion of Iraq when Samantha Power, a former war correspondent who covered the Balkans in the 1990s, released her book, "A Problem from Hell," which catapulted her to prominence as it became an instant bestseller and received effusive praise from both the left and right of the political spectrum in the US (Wertheim, 2010; Bessner, 2019).

To its credit, the Liberal International Order (LIO), whose foreign policy linchpin is liberal interventionism and which is based on four pillars including democratic growth, liberal values, free trade, and multilateral institutions (Acharya, 2017), has facilitated prosperity, particularly for signatory countries. Following the end of the Cold War, countries that adopted liberal democracy during 'the third wave' (1991). Since then this optimism has faded some years later, and the post-Cold War system is under increasing strain with each passing day. Faced with this issue, two camps of foreign policy opponents have emerged, each advocating a different strategy for the US to pursue in order to correct its numerous international policy gaffes. The first camp, retrenchment, contends that the US should withdraw from a large number of military operations in the Middle East and Asia. The second

side, restraint, maintains that the US should define its strategic interests narrowly and fight wars only when vital interests are directly threatened (Wright, 2020).

Against this backdrop, why did things go so wrong in Afghanistan, despite liberal interventionism's effervescent enthusiasm? Carter Malkasian (2020) documented three critical factors in a *Foreign Affairs* article: that the two post-Taliban governments in Afghanistan, as well as their allies, were fundamentally corrupt, ran a patronage network, pursued land grab policies that alienated the Afghan populace, and also duped US special operations forces into targeting political adversaries. The other is Pakistan's covert operations, which are heavily influenced by its perception of the India-Pakistan rivalry. Pakistan provided a safe haven for the Taliban following their defeat in the US invasion on the basis of this arrangement. It aided in the training of Taliban troops and utilised its territory to launch incursions into Afghanistan. The third component is culture, which he considers to be fundamental. To summarise, the Taliban expressed an idea rooted in Afghan culture that inspired and motivated their troops.

John Mearsheimer, the prominent neorealist scholar, has written a very significant contribution to the discussion on liberal interventionism (2019), asserting that the foreign policy approach is doomed to fail, because it is rife with dangers. He stated that spreading liberal democracy throughout the world is a tall order as it corrodes relations with other countries. He contends that nationalism in these countries would grow stronger as a result of interventionist war and thus become a countervailing force against the initiative. Not only that, but balance-of-power reasoning would creep in and take preeminence, becoming a blocking force. He concluded that nationalism is the most powerful political ideology. Consequently, when nationalism clashes against liberal interventionism, the former would prevail, undercutting interventionist imperatives.

According to Toby Smith (2007), liberal interventionism is a foreign policy approach which combines notions of democracy peace theory and humanitarian intervention in the hope of promoting democracy. For Martin Gainsborough (2010), that it is a post-Cold War phenomenon that have led to novel patterns of interventions where Western states intervene in countries of the Global South. Thus, the essence of the thesis is to revisit US-led liberal interventionism in Afghanistan by highlighting the prospects and challenges. John Mearsheimer names four features of nationalism that are adverse to understanding liberal objectives: a sense of oneness,

which fosters the awareness that everyone in a nation belongs to the same polity; a unique culture, which is a shared tapestry of beliefs and practises shared by the citizenry; a sacred territory, which is profound attachments to particular geographical space; and sovereignty, the aim of a nation to maintain the monopoly of violence and control over their territorial integrity (Mearsheimer, 2021). Nationalism would lead smaller countries to resist great powers' micromanaging of the international relations and domestic policy imperatives of the former. In this setting, initiating social engineering in any nation is a herculean task, especially in a country whose political regime has been overthrown from power (Mearsheimer, 2018). Given the following, this thesis would reconsider liberal interventionism in Afghanistan against the backdrop of the neorealist antipodes of nationalism and balance-of-power consideration. Furthermore, attempts would also be made to draw on the fundamental assumptions of Benjamin Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2006). Lastly, the thesis also draws on the constructivism notion of identity.

To begin with, this thesis revisits the question of liberal interventionism in Afghanistan by examining its prospects and challenges. Considering the renewed theoretical debate about the US role in Afghanistan in recent years, as well as the fact that the US primacy is at risk in the current multipolar world, this study is a significant intervention, as studies of international relations contribute to the body of knowledge while also providing policymakers with nuanced understanding. Such a study would also shed light on how major powers create and formulate foreign policy. Moreover, it would provide insight into the difficulties that arise when it is implemented in countries in the Global South.

Meanwhile, the thesis would attempt to address two questions: "How effective has the liberal interventionism led by the US-led NATO intervention been in Afghanistan since its military intervention?" and "Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental obstacle to liberal interventionism led by the US?" These questions would shed light on the context of the intervention and explain its challenges and prospects. Thus, this thesis would explore the tensions and points of convergence between liberal foreign policy imperatives and nationalism and balance of power. Meanwhile, the thesis has been divided into four chapters; the first chapter discusses its history, scholarly significance, and aims and objectives. The second chapter, on theoretical paradigms, examines liberal interventionism by contrasting it with its polar opposites. The third chapter would summarise pre-intervention and

Afghanistan as the battleground for cold-war rivalry. Chapter four delves into the reemergence of the Taliban and the fallout from the US operation. Finally, the thesis will explore the following titles in order: introduction, problem statement, objective and significance of the study, limitations of the study, research questions, hypothesis, theoretical framework, pre-intervention, resurgence of Taliban, and post-intervention. The findings and recommendations of the study will be presented in the conclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Almost two decades after the much-heralded Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the deployment of liberal interventionism by the US, events in Afghanistan have not unfolded as intended. In 2021, the Taliban's resurgence drew severe condemnation for US liberal interventionism in that remote country in Southeast Asia's interior. However, for many years, Afghanistan was heralded as a success tale of liberal interventionism and its accompanying corollaries of democratisation and nation-building in Western foreign policy and security circles. When the Turban-wearing Taliban stormed heaven and reached the gates of Kabul with no apparent resistance from the army, the abscess ruptured, revealing severe fissures. The Afghan army's shortcomings became a grotesque public spectacle, and the regime's lack of support a source of shame, much to the chagrin of liberal interventionists who pointed to Afghanistan as a country that boasted about implanting a so-called liberal democracy on the soil of a feudal society riven by warring factions and religious fundamentalism. At its core, liberal interventionism is concerned with the propagation of freedom, the construction of international structures, the observance of international rules, and the promotion of democracy (Bosco, 2012). It is also an ambitious strategy, as it seeks to extricate troubled states from the throes of instability and bring stability to them, as well as to spread prosperity by eliminating illiberal forces and introducing democratic forms of government (Freedman, 2021). This foreign policy approach became prevalent as the US rose to become the most powerful nation in the international system. The Liberal International Order (LIO), for its part, is a concept for organising world order that is based on promoting the aforementioned values, such as free and open trade, security cooperation, multilateral cooperation, and democracy, and is presided over by the US (Ikenberry, 2020).

As was the case in Iraq and Libya, liberal interventionism in Afghanistan has already ground to a halt, resulting in numerous failures and enormous financial expenditures. According to a report from the Cost of War Project at Brown University, the US has spent $8 trillion on the Global War on Terror, leading to almost 900,000 people perishing ("Costs of the 20-year war", 2021). This initiative has been tracking the cost of the conflict in terms of dollars and cents, as well as the social and human toll it has taken on societies. According to a report from the same initiative, the US is deploying counterterrorism measures in 85 nations (von-Hein, 2021). Given these changes, the question is why liberal interventionism has been unable to accomplish desired goals in Afghanistan, such as nation-building and peace. Is liberal interventionism predicated on incorrect assumptions about the countries in which it has been implemented? Or does attempting to modify areas in the Global South through social engineering in order to create garrison democracies complete with green zones and a lack of comprehension of the populace result in disastrous failures?

Francis Fukuyama (2021), writing in *The Economist* immediately after the collapse of Kabul, contended that the US withdrawal following the collapse of the Kabul-backed government was a watershed point in world history, proving that the US had turned its back on the world. He bemoaned that the withdrawal from Kabul heralds the inevitable end of US dominance. Additionally, he argued that the US hegemony lasted two decades, from 1989 to the financial crisis of 2007–2009. He attributes the descent to US dominance, which peaked with the US-led invasion of Iraq with the stated purpose of social engineering Afghan and Iraqi societies, as well as the entire Middle East. Despite this, very few scholarly studies have been performed to evaluate liberal interventionism's applicability in Afghanistan. This thesis will explore US liberal interventionism in Afghanistan since 2001 in light of current circumstances. The country is explored throughout the thesis as one of the earliest frontiers of US liberal interventionism. It will also be viewed in the broader context of the approach's failure in countries of the global South.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The implementation of liberal interventionism by the US in Afghanistan was a watershed moment. It signifies the position of the US in the distribution of power in the international system and the ascent of the unipolar moment. Following the

recent pullout of the US, and with the rise of the Taliban, has given rise to an upsurge of renewed scholarly interest in the two decades of US liberal intervention in the country. However, not much has been done to systematically revisit US liberal interventionism. In light of this, this thesis seeks to contribute to the literature by analyzing US intervention in that Central Asian country especially when after twenty-years when the Taliban has returned, and the group is at the helm of leadership. What where the factors that led to the reemergence and what are the lessons that could be learned for future interventionist initiatives. Despite its early triumphalism, the spectacle of the US withdrawal, the abandonment of the proverbial Afghan women at the mercy of the Taliban, and the collapse of institutions established in the inter-interventionist period, many commentators believe the reemergence of the Taliban at the helm of leadership is a sad commentary on US liberal interventionism. In view of the foregoing, the aim of this thesis is to revisit the prospects and challenges of US-led intervention in Afghanistan from 2001-2021.

To this end, the study will attempt to address the following questions: what extent has US-led liberal interventionism been effective in the case of Afghanistan since its intervention of the country? Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental problem for US-led liberal interventionism? These two questions are the main points explored in this study. Thus, the study would review conceptual literature on US liberal interventionism.

Significance of the Study

By December 2001, the US, with the backing of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and with the seal of approval of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC), a full-scale military assault was unleashed on Afghanistan, crystallising into Operation Enduring Freedom. The operation became an instant success due to the precision of the mission and the military sophistication employed to implement it. This led to the deposition of the Taliban government in less than two months. With the defeat of the Taliban, a fragile peace was restored in Afghanistan, but the repercussions of the war lingered. The new forces that called the shots in Afghanistan were warlords in the 1990s, when the country was embroiled in a bloody civil war based on sectarian division. After 13 years, President Obama ended Operation Enduring Freedom in 2011 and launched Operation Freedom Sentinel, the tenor of which included counterterrorism, arbitrary US operations against Islamic

State forces and al-Qaeda, and military training and equipping of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) (Gady, 2016).

In the early interventionist years, Hamid Karzai emerged as the leader of the war-torn country. However, it was clear right from the start that the regime led by Karzai was rife with its own seeds of destruction as corruption ran riot. Ghani, like Karzai before him, presided over a government rife with patronage, nepotism, bribery, and compromise. By 2021, the failings of the Ghani administration had become deafening, which coincided with the waning confidence in the nation-building project in Afghanistan from the US side. With the drying up of consensus for liberal interventionism and with the Taliban closing in on Kabul, the Trump administration realised it was at a cul-de-sac and thus sued for peace and began discussions with the Taliban under the Doha framework for a national unity government which would encapsulate all the forces and power blocs in the country. Ironically, the US negotiated with the Taliban in Doha at the expense of the Afghan government, with whom it had bilateral security ties. The talks concluded, and the US agreed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. For their part, the Taliban agreed not to attack US troops as they exited the country. Additionally, the agreement required the Ghani administration to release 5,000 Taliban detainees, which it did begrudgingly in the face of significant US pressure (Ahmady, 2021).

Under these conditions, Joe Biden took office and met the existing agreement, but chose to postpone it for three months. On the other hand, Biden exacerbated the crisis by declaring that he would adhere to the terms of the Trump administration's agreement with the Taliban even if the timeline was extended. The decision of the Biden administration contradicted the advice of the US military leadership, including the Afghanistan Study, a bipartisan group established by the Pentagon and the USCongress (Ahmady, 2021). By the time the Taliban were at the gates of Kabul, and with the eventual collapse of the Afghan army, which did not even pose any resistance, the US and its allies scurried in embarrassing confusion, leaving behind them a slew of young people and women professionals who were seduced by the promise of a better life and went on trusting the statement as an article of faith (Braithwaite, 2021). In many ways, however, with some peculiar variations, the US pullout from Afghanistan mirrored that of Saigon, and it also evoked howls about the US eventual withdrawal from Mogadishu in the Horn of Africa. Hence, this study is significant because, since the height of the "unipolar moment," the US foreign policy

establishment has elevated liberal interventionism to the pinnacle of its foreign policy approach, which has dominated the international system but now faces criticism even from those who once defended it.

In addition, the primary utility of the study is normative in light of the numerous lives lost and the numerous victims uprooted from their villages and towns. It is also about these faceless and disinherited people on whose soil these wars were fought being promised that their lives would improve as the US would rescue them from the monstrous Taliban, and in its place, a government based on democracy would be installed. However, the Taliban have resurfaced with vengeance twenty years later. As a result, optimism for democracy and a free society has dwindled. What many Afghans will remember is the human cost, the "shock and awe" bombings, and the spectacle of the US-backed regime collapsing like a house of cards. For those who argued that the distant land strewn across the interior of Asia was a bright spot in the bloody continuum of liberal interventionism, the images of the Afghans clinging to the plane will forever stain their consciences. The hopelessness of the metaphorical Afghan women, the hordes of people scrambling to flee their homeland and seek refuge in unknown lands, would be the guilty verdict that would haunt the gun-ho purveyors of liberal interventionism.

Finally, this is a study of a nation engulfed in a stormy sea of sectarianism and conflict. The intervention of the US and its NATO allies to eliminate the Al-Qaeda threat would mark the end of a dark chapter in their national history and the beginning of a new one. As a result, some people began to envision futures filled with love, prosperity, social justice, and equal opportunity. Women and girls began to pursue education and many even earned terminal degrees as part of the dawning of a new day, excited about their new destiny. However, after twenty years in Afghanistan, with liberal norms such as humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect utterly discredited (Paikin, 2021), the Afghan population has been handed a landscape of desolation rather than budding metropolitan cities with massive amphitheaters, recreational parks, massive shopping malls, spurring infrastructure, or a flourishing middle class—all signposts of a liberal democracy haven. For those who believe that muscular interventions with ostensibly noble motives are brilliant ways to advance democratic imperatives in countries such as Afghanistan, even if they cost 100,000 lives and result in the US abandoning the country in a decadent state (Ramli, 2021), this research calls that notion into question.

On the other hand, for those interested in learning what happened in Afghanistan, this digestible study is aimed at revisiting US liberal interventionism in Afghanistan after two decades. It is a significant scholarly contribution on a foreign policy approach that dominated the Unipolar period and shaped the world.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the US liberal intervention in Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror (GWOT). As a result, the study would concentrate on established paradigms of international relations, such as liberalism and neo-realism, while also emphasising the constructivist idea of identity to help tie the study together. The primary shortcoming is that it does not evaluate liberal interventionism globally or in other jurisdictions. Instead, it would concentrate on Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, but would also throw light on the intervening years in order to contextualise the intervention. However, this is not a global study of liberal interventionism, even though the research will make brief allusions to countries where this method has been applied, particularly following the Cold War, when the US was the lone hegemonic power.

Research Questions

It is the goal of this research is to find answers to the following questions:

1. How effective has the liberal interventionism led by the US been in Afghanistan since its intervention?
2. Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental obstacle to liberal interventionism led by the US?

Data collection and Method of Analysis

This study, which employs a qualitative research approach, derives its sources from secondary data sources such as books, journal articles, newspaper clippings, and newly created websites. The qualitative method was chosen in light of the global coronavirus pandemic, which has wreaked havoc on the global economy and broadened the range of inequality.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework

With the demise of the Cold War, the US emerged as the unipolar hegemony in the international system, which placed it in a position of global primacy not seen since the height of the Roman Empire. In 1992, the US had the world's largest and most advanced economy, with a gross domestic product that was 60 percent larger than that of its new competitor and produced 25 percent of the world's goods and services (Walt, 2018). Unrivaled and unalloyed dominance, which was even seen in economic terms as the US ran a trade deficit. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union had disintegrated, taking with it the velvet revolution in Eastern Europe. Countries in Eastern Europe, including others in Latin America and elsewhere, seduced by prospering democracies, made a sharp democratic turn, culminating in the third wave (Huntington, 1991). Liberal democracy is the only game in town in both modern and postmodern polities. The expansion of the European Union (henceforth EU) in 1992 further strengthened faith in democracy and offered evidence that the rule of law and the progressive expansion of international institutions could create a zone of peace and prosperity among countries at war with each other repeatedly (Walt, 2018).

In the new liberal world order, the US was the most crucial state with specifically a hegemonic military presence. Having control over global commons such as the oceans and airspace, it was able to take decisive military action relatively easily anywhere on the planet. In the 1990s, US military spending trumped the defense spending of the next twenty or so countries combined. The majority of these states were close allies of the US, so the US's dominance over its remaining rivals was, in fact, enormous. Its armed forces enjoyed competitive and qualitative advantages never before seen, as its military spending exceeded that of Great Britain, France, Russia, or China (Walt, 2018). The US was seen as the indispensable power, as even the deaths of nineteen US Rangers in a bungled raid in Somalia in 1993 was a minor irritation which did not undermine the perception of the US military. Additionally, relations with NATO members and the US were robust as the latter formalised alliances with Asian nations including Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand. US-Russia relations were astonishingly cordial as the latter needed the help of the US to make a break with its socialist economy and migrate to a market economy (Walt, 2018). Bill Clinton captures the spirit of the time:

"It is clear that we live at a turning point in human history. Immense and promising changes seem to wash over us every day. The Cold War is over. The world is no longer divided into two armed and angry camps. Dozens of new democracies been born it is a moment of miracles." (Mearsheimer, 2011, p. 16).

Considering the unfolding events, Charles Krauthammer and the political scientist Francis Fukuyama penned two influential articles that would serve as the basis for the establishment of US foreign policy in the post-cold war era. In his article titled "The Unipolar Moment," Krauthammer argued that the US emerged from the Cold War as the unrivalled unipolar power and the world's most powerful nation. He urged US leaders not to remain silent and to use their influence to establish the new global order and enforce the rules (Krauthammer, 1990). Francis Fukuyama, in "The End of History," forcefully asserted the monopoly of liberal democracy as the form of government and free market capitalism as its economic foundation. Moreover, the US should take the lead in spreading democracy to underdeveloped nations worldwide (Fukuyama, 1989). Given these conditions, the US grand strategy has adhered to the basic prescriptions in the two articles as the majority of the mandarins in the US foreign policy establishment and within the Beltway agreed with Fukuyama and Krauthammer's arguments (Mearsheimer, 2011; Walt, 2018). However, these policymakers would have done well to heed the warning of Johann Gottfried von Herder, a student and contemporary of Immanuel Kant from the late eighteenth century: "Let it not be imagined that human art can instantly transform a foreign region into another Europe through despotic power" (Fukuyama, 2018, para. 2).

The 9/11 attacks to the Twin Towers happened at the time when liberalism was perceived as truly global. Having felt the formidable effect of the 9/11 attacks, the NATO intervention of Afghanistan by invoking Article 5 under the Washington Treaty of NATO and also the Global War on Terror Campaign. Twenty years later, the Taliban have returned to power. In some ways, it is the most eloquent indication of the ideological defeat of the US and other countries that adhere to liberal interventionism. The US left Afghanistan in September 2021 without defeating the Taliban, exporting freedom and democracy, or freeing the proverbial Afghan women under the siege of the Taliban— the latter was one of the ideological justifications liberal hawks provided for the war. Afghanistan was the birthplace of the post-cold war US-led liberal interventionism, and it may also be the place where it perished.

In light of this, this section of the thesis seeks to evaluate the prospects and challenges of liberal interventionism by the US in Afghanistan. To construct a scholarly analysis, the paper would heavily rely on several seminal works of scholarship. John Mearsheimer's (2018) *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*; Stephen Walt's (2018) *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of US Primacy*; Philip H. Gordon's (2020) *Losing the Long Game: The False Promise of Regime Change in the Middle East*; Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*; Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* and a host of other scholarly sources. In this framework, this section will address these questions: To what extent has US-led liberal interventionism been effective in the case of Afghanistan since its intervention of the country? Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental problem for US-led liberal interventionism? On the basis of a particular conceptual analysis, it is essential to examine these penetrating questions and conduct a critical analysis of liberal interventionism and its origins. The neo-realist framework of analysis and John Mearsheimer's four features of nationalism as an effective set of counterbalances to the liberal international order and liberal interventionism will be utilised. However, first a word about the notion of nationalism.

The Concept of 'Otherness'

The history of European interactions with individuals from diverse geographies and cultures has been the topic of considerable theorizing. However, many academics ascribe the colonial encounter and conquest to conflict and violence. From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness to EM Forster's Passage to India*, world literature is replete with tales of colonial encounters between the European self and the native others. Although some of the stories conclude with the embrace of difference, which is thus extoled as one of the markers of the constituent features of humankind. Even with that, the bulk of the stories feature conquests, domination, and intolerance. These latter vices colour European imaginations of native others, shaping common sense understanding of peoples and places, instilling prejudice, stereotypes, and fears that influence how the self, the dominant person, interacts with the other, the subjugated one. In contrast, when the 'other' is given a positive image, the out-group is viewed as non-threatening and harmless, and is therefore treated as

an equal. When the other's representation is emphasised via a negative prism, the out-group is deemed unworthy of representation (Resende, 2020).

Meanwhile, the concept of otherness has been utilised in a variety of ways to analyse relations of subordination and dominance, asymmetry, and inequality, particularly in the context of North-South relations. In recent scholarly works, the term has taken on numerous forms, such as native versus settler. Despite acquiring widespread popularity, researchers disagree on the precise definition of the phrase, resulting in a profusion of definitions. According to John Powell (2017), the terms are not synonymous with a person's likes and dislikes. Instead, it is founded on the conscious or unconscious idea that one group offers an existential threat to another. Such characterization, the writer posits, is amplified by misrepresentations and caricatures in the media and by politicians. As for Goran Therborn, Emeritus Professor of sociology at Cambridge University, otherness can be traced to existential inequality, as the primary goal of the categorical appropriation is to treat a group of people as beings of a different variety than oneself and people who resemble oneself as strangers and, most of the time, as human inferiors. In light of this, he considers race to be a socio-culturally malleable creation, similar to gender categories and other types of identity (Therborn, 2020).

In addition, Sisay Mengstite (2011) states, otherness is about defining one's identity in connection to others. For him, this is the product of social, political, and cultural constructions that are based on different perspectives. However, otherness can be experienced in divergent ways. Sometimes based on age, ethnicity, sex, physical anatomy, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, etc. Otherness is the discursive process by which a dominant in-group constructs one or more dominated groups by emphasising and stigmatising a difference—real or imagined— as a negation of identity and thus as a source of potential discrimination. The creation of the concept of otherness thus also gives rise to the application of principles that divide people into two groups: them and us. In light of this, the out-group is only a coherent force because it opposes the in-group and its lack of identity. This latter aberration is based on devices such as stereotypes that tend to stigmatise (Staszak, 2009).

In summary, the asymmetry of power relations is central to the construction of otherness. Notwithstanding, it is the dominant group that uses power and the instruments of power to impose its particularities on others while at the same time

devaluing the particularities of others and imposing corresponding discriminatory measures. It goes without saying that dominated out-groups are considered the others because they are subject to the constructions, categories, and practises of the dominant in-groups and can't make their own rules (Staszak, 2009).

Conceptualization of Otherness in International Relations

Numerous experts in international relations have acknowledged that their field is predominantly ethnocentric and hegemonic, reflecting the hegemonizing cultural prejudices of Western nations, particularly the United States. Despite efforts to widen and deepen the discpline, there is a vast divide between these researchers and the rest of the world in terms of how to conduct international Relations (IR). This academic reality has caused graduate students from the Global South who seek education in the Global North to be surprised by the dominance of discourses on democratic peace and relative power. In this context, academic forces trained to be sensitive to history, culture, and ethics recognise that the best international relations (henceforth IR) programmes offer few or no courses in these specialised areas. In light of this, a few IR specialists have associated their understanding of the world with their individual country governments' foreign policy initiatives. With this perspective, one of the most severe criticisms of IR has been its inability to address the subject of difference or the self/other dialectic. Therefore, scholars with cultural backgrounds have claimed that the study of international relations has perpetuated the old colonial practice of teaching at the perimeter as opposed to striving to learn from the latter (Tsygankov, 2008).

In light of this grim reality, scholars grappling with culture have proposed that international relations should not be considered a product of Western discourse, as this tends to foster status quo bias and obscure the transformational light that is absent from the majority of mainstream IR theories. In accordance with their mission to de-hegemonize the field, these academics have mounted a fierce challenge to the field's Western intellectual hegemony. Critics of modernization theory, for instance, decry its one-dimensional thinking and pro-Western bias. And, like modernization theory, which has provided insight into colonial cultural practices, mainstream IR theories seek to promote reciprocal engagement with the other, demanding it to follow the West's example. However, the study of identity in international politics enables the development of insights into human collectives, thereby granting the

latter ontological status and showing how they are formed and maintained (Neumann, 1996).

However, when international relations first formed as an academic field of study, it was primarily concerned with the acts of governments beyond their borders in the context of anarchy. Following this traditional trend, particularly against the backdrop of inter-paradigmatic debate, international relations (IR) has undergone evolutionary processes, recognizing its problematics as conflict and cooperation and the link between war and peace. And since the 1980s and 1990s, the field of study has witnessed major transformations in terms of its subject matter. This turn has been inspired by the emergence of aesthetic, sociological, and critical perspectives, prompting some scholars to focus on questions of identity and identity formation in relation to the national identity of states, or them being identity bearers, and the effect of national identities on interstate relations.

Erica Resende (2020) suggests that international relations can be conceptualised as the ongoing process of generating interactions between the self and others, or even in the formation of difference, or the ongoing process of transforming difference into otherness. She said, in conclusion, that the creation of self and other has dominated foreign policy thinking, development, and implementation. Iver B. Neumann (1996) states that since the 1980s, there has been an increase in interest in identity and collective identity creation in international relations. The origins of the issue can be traced back to the 1980s, when the discipline was barking up the wrong tree. He claimed that theorising identity in international relations is due to a lack of faith in the past.

In general, a person's identity describes how they define themselves in relation to their environment, people, and the world, as well as how they differentiate themselves from others. Although identity is stable, it is not immutable because it is a component of the cognitive and emotional systems and is developed early in life. According to Alexander Wendt (1994), collective identity formation and the question of otherness became an object of study during the emergence of the constructivist turn in international relations. In contrast to other mainstream schools of thinking, constructivism places identity and the construction of the dichotomy between the self and others at the heart of its theory. Wendt explains further that social identity is the meaning that an actor ascribes to himself, which takes into account others as social objects. Wendt seeks to show that in international relations,

the other is the polar opposite of the self and is typically associated with negative inclinations.

Except for constructivism, the postcolonial approach to international relations has focused on the construction of identity-otherness. In addition, tremendous lengths have been taken to theorise empire and postcolonial subjectivity. The greatest advantage of the theoretical postulate is that it creates a fresh study channel in the field of international relations that the discipline was previously immune to. And in contrast to conventional ideas, the postcolonial formulation attempts to centre the perspective of the socially marginalised in the global periphery. (Lena, 2017). This is done with the intention of undermining hegemonic discourse and eradicating the Eurocentric impression that societies in the global South were primitive, immobile, sclerotic, and in the throes of immobility prior to the colonial encounter. The postcolonial framework, on the other hand, disputes this notion and vehemently asserts the autonomy of the formerly colonial periphery's inhabitants.

Sybille Reinke de Buitrago argues that in international relations, governments practice otherness, which impacts policy and interstate relations. While the motivations for depicting others in different ways and partaking in the dynamics of othering are not identical, the perspective of the self is always in relation to the view of the others, leading to the conclusion that there is no self without the others and vice versa. Scholars have theorised that identity building and the theme of otherness have figured substantially in current US foreign policy formulation. In his landmark essay, Clash of Civilizations, he categorised immigrants as another unassimilable group and Arab Muslims as the external other who posed a threat to the economic preeminence and security of the United States. After September 11, 2001, the Bush administration employed such rhetoric to garner support for the war on terror and the military control of Iraq and Afghanistan (Lebrow, 2008).

Edward Said's Conceptualization of 'Otherness'

Edward Said was a public intellectual and creative thinker of the twentieth century whose ideas on literary criticism, the Middle East, and comparative studies affected academic research in these various domains. As an American of Palestinian heritage, Said's social engagement and academic competence centred on the Palestinian question. His insights into the Orient and the Occident, as well as the projection of the Orient by the Occident, were ground-breaking. In his book

Orientalism, which was instrumental in establishing the academic discipline of postcolonialism (Khalil, 2004; Biswas, 2007), Said offered a scathing critique of Middle Eastern Studies from the perspective of a dominant, limiting discourse designed to project images of the Middle East that reflect Western biases, prejudices, and a sense of superiority in civilization. Since the eighteenth century, the study of the Orient has been connected to the imperialist ambitions of the main powers: Britain and France from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of World War II, and the USsince then, in various forms (Gerges, 1991).

According to Said, Europe and America's interest in the Orient has been both political and cultural. However, it was the culture that led to the curiosity that influenced the political dimension, which was accompanied by basic political, economic, and military rationale to create the Orient complex and diverse. He continued by stating that the relationship between the West and the Middle East is characterised by asymmetrical forms of power, dominance, and many forms of complicated hegemony. The relevance of these critiques addressed crucial concerns in the study of the Middle East and other cultures; his fundamental questions in this respect were, among others, the depiction of other cultures, the relationship between power and knowledge, and the topic of non-political scholarship. (Gerges 1991). And it was Said's theoretical postulation that shifted the analysis of colonialism, imperialism, and the battle against it to the issue of speech — the latter occurring between the self and the other (Young, 2016).

However, for him, the duality of the *Orient* and the *Occident* — East and West — are not given facts of nature, but rather categories created by one civilization due to geography and value — in this case, European civilization, which has defined itself in relation to people from outside its borders. This is referred to as "imaginative geography" In light of this, the Orient and the Occident are not immutable, divine categories, but rather human creative constructs formed by one population of the world in an effort to define itself through exclusion. In contrast, he does not assert that the Orient and Occident are only concepts or mental constructs with no basis in reality. The stated objective was not to draw parallels between the East and what the West says about the East, but rather to investigate the coherence and nature of the West's discourse on the East. He then implies that Western discourse regarding the eastern Other is about the subject doing the representation as opposed to the object being represented, particularly when the representation occurs

through the imaginative lens of the European self, which epistemologically filters and integrates the Other into categories and values that are the idea of the latter (Khalil, 2004).

The heft of Said's academic corpus and the subject of his research elicited both commendations and appreciation. Gayatri Spivak identifies Orientalism as the foundation of postcolonial studies. Despite the glowing praise, the primary strength of Said's work is that it examines marginality. It has nothing to do with marginalisation. It focuses on the construction of an object for the sake of analysing and regulating it. In reality, his pioneering work is also concerned with how multiple cultures are merged into a single entity through simple and continual acts of representation. It is also about how otherness was established in text and consequently toughened through the application of foreign policy and the repetition of conventional wisdom. And in the third chapter of his book, Said presented an impassioned argument to the effect that the basis of scholarly and literary concentration on the East, as an offspring of the period of empire, persisted throughout the twentieth century's infatuation with the other (Scott, 2008).

In a word, the central issue of Said's magisterial corpus is the representation of the East via the conceptual prism of the West, as the other in history, literature, music, and culture. In addition, Said intended to demonstrate how the framework of power, knowledge, hegemony, and imperialism produce and reproduce the inferior status and image of the East as the inferior other in comparison to the West (Saada, 2014). In 2004, he declared that he had no specific Orient to debate for. He went to great lengths to praise the vision of the people of the Middle East and the Arabs and Muslims, who were labelled by hegemonic discourse as backward and lacking the intellectual faculties to appreciate democracy, free society, and the empowerment of women for fighting for a vision of their societies and polities that reflected the hopes and dreams of ordinary people (Said, 2004).

CHAPTER III

Historical Background:

US Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan Pre and Post-Cold War

In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was evident that the US would emerge as the leading global power, supplanting Britain. In light of the new circumstances, the Afghan government sought to establish a relationship with the US as a counterbalance to the USSR. However, the weakness of Afghanistan's coupled with it neutrality policy made the US less receptive to their overtures. US foreign policymakers placed a significant emphasis on establishing treaty relationships with a multitude of states to contain the USSR in order to ensure the Soviet Union's expansionism was halted in its tracks (Burrough, 2009). Nevertheless, the US provided assistance to Afghanistan and restricted itself to providing economic aid to Kabul. In keeping with this strategy, the US provided Afghanistan with meagre economic assistance under President Harry Truman's Four Point Program (Siddiqui & Butt, 2020).

Due to the escalating tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the US will no longer treat Afghanistan with indifference. At the dawn of Pakistan's independence in 1947, the Dura Line became the official border separating the two countries. A sense of grievance and protest over Pakistan's unilateral decision to draw the line of division between the two countries touched a raw nerve in Afghanistan. The government of Afghanistan protested that the line was unjustly imposed. Prince Daoud, the cousin of the king and prime minister, undertook a mission to unite the Pashtuns of the two countries under a single organisational and political framework, which would eventually lead to the incorporation of the Pashtun region into Afghanistan. This development alarmed Pakistan, as a large number of people of Pashtun descent resided in Pakistan. The US intervened to support Pakistan as a strategic counterbalance to Soviet expansionism and for the protection of US vital interests. The desire to incorporate the Pashtun people into Afghanistan, met with resistance from the US and Pakistan, led Afghanistan to align with the Soviet Union in terms of military support and training (Burrough, 2009). Consequently, the USSR increased its military and political influence in Afghanistan as a result of the combination of US reluctance and alienation towards the country (Siddiqui & Butt, 2020).

In spite of this, the US continued to provide economic aid to Afghanistan to prevent Kabul's complete incorporation into the Soviet Union. During the period from 1955 to 1965, the US provided $550 million in economic aid to Afghanistan,

while the Soviet Union provided $700 million. The US withdrew from the region in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the centrality of the Vietnam War and the US's efforts to forge détente with both China and the Soviet Union. It left the management of the region to the rivalry between the Soviet Union and China, both of which sought to establish hegemonic dominance over the region. Consequently, U.S. economic aid to Afghanistan diminished. From 1965 to 1975, Afghanistan received $150 million in foreign assistance (Khan, 1987).

It was under this condition that Mohammed Daoud, with the assistance of trained army officers, mounted a coup and overthrew his cousin King Zahir Shah, which did not even attract the concern of the US. The subsequent proclamation of Daoud, which signaled a tilt toward the Soviet Union (he was the only Asian leader to endorse Brezhnev's Asian Security Plan), and the subsequent support of pro-Soviet forces did not elicit harsh criticism from the United States. The US maintained a low profile in Afghanistan while providing economic assistance (Khan, 1987). As a result of his regime's decision to resurrect an old conflict over the Pashtun issue, Daoud was asked to resign by powerful forces in the country. Nonetheless, with the assistance of Soviet-trained army officers from the Parcham faction and at Moscow's urging, a faction of the Afghan Communist Party, the Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), supported Daoud, with some even serving in the cabinet. On April 27, 1978, Daoud was overthrown in a bloody coup due to a series of ruthless and contradictory moves, coupled with the downward spiral of the Afghan economy, events that alienated the Afghan people and were exploited by the united factions of the PDPA (Siddiqui & Butt, 2020).

Following the coup, the post-1978 regime announced that it would implement a number of crucial reforms in accordance with its agenda. Domestically, the regime moved swiftly to improve the literacy programme, change the family laws, reform usury laws, implement agrarian reforms, and change the country's family laws to resemble those of the Soviet Union. Internationally, the regime became closely aligned with Moscow, resulting in the signing of a twenty-year treaty of friendship. Cooperation with Moscow witnessed a meteoric rise as Soviet military presence increased and support for the Soviet Union's third-world allies became a focal point of the communist regime's international relations. Undoubtedly, these domestic reforms were long overdue, but opposition to them explains the implementation delay. In the process of reforming the system, the regime avoided

being labelled a Marxist; however, courses for all students and elements of the government bureaucracy were based on the Marxist worldview, albeit disguised as "Epoch-making Ideology" (Khalilzad, 1980). Even with this camouflage, the cultural makeup of the society, combined with its Islamic and conservative makeup, made a wholesale adoption of an ideology that was foreign-influenced and perceived as both anti-Islamic and atheistic susceptible to domestic opposition (Siddiqui & Butt, 2014).

Importantly, when the revolution occurred, US allies in Pakistan and Iran protested that the coup bore Soviet Union fingerprints. The US rejected the claim based on circumstantial evidence, but acknowledged that the Soviet Union may have actively supported the coup. In light of this, the US continued its assistance to the coup regime in Afghanistan ($20,6 million in 1978). As the revolution progressed, however, the US came to believe that the new rulers of Kabul were communists and not nationalists. In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Shah in Iran by radical religious forces who loathed Iran's religion with the West, specifically the United States, this perspective became even more poignant. This Iranian development altered the regional balance of forces and its geostrategic configuration, prompting the US to reconsider its perspective on the Saur Revolution. In 1979, the US froze aid to Afghanistan, expelled Peace Corps volunteers, refrained from appointing new ambassadors, and began covertly supplying strategic aid to the fundamentalist formations opposing the Kabul regime in the form of medicine, communication equipment, and technical advice on the acquisition of weapons (Khan, 1987).

The combination of domestic opposition to agrarian reforms by influential agrarian forces and the vicious power struggle that ensued between President Nur Mohammad Taraki and the principal deputy prime minister, Hafizullan Amin, hampered the Saur Revolution and brought it to the brink of collapse just twenty months after communist forces seized control of the government. Taraki's ruthless purge campaign, which eliminated the Parcham faction led by Barak Karmal from both the PDPA party and the government as a whole, was one of the causes of the internal strife. In March 1979, Amin was sworn in as the sole prime minister, acquiring new powers and repressing opposition figures. Amin began to suppress opposition on the right and left of the political spectrum and made overtures to the US once he assumed power. The Soviet Union became alarmed by the situation and debated whether to intervene to remove Amin from power in Afghanistan. In 1979, Amin eliminated Taraki through a bloody coup. In the months of October and

November of that year, there were numerous military mutinies in Afghanistan. Consequently, Moscow alerted the Soviet forces and the decision was made to invade Afghanistan (Burrough, 2009; Siddiqui & Butt, 2014).

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After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the US' Afghanistan strategy was drastically altered. The invasion occurred after the Shah of Iran was deposed, destabilising the US twin-pillar in the Persian Gulf, which was comprised of Iran and Saudi Arabia. President Jimmy Carter stated that since the end of World War II, the US has been facing a grave threat. The Soviet incursion into Afghanistan was portrayed in Manichean terms, with President Carter implying that if the Soviet Union was not reined in, the world would face the gravest threat since the beginning of the Cold War. The Carter Doctrine, a significant departure from the Nixon Doctrine, which was predicated on regions assuming responsibility for their own defence, was intended to signal to the Soviet Union that the Gulf region was of vital importance to the US and that the US would assume ultimate responsibility for the region's security. While Carter's national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski would outline the doctrine by stating that the US has vital interests in three geostrategic zones—Western Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East—the objectives of the policy in Afghanistan were to punish the Soviet Union and prevent

Soviet expansionism in the region. The US imposed political and economic sanctions on the Soviet Union, which failed to produce the desired results and were subsequently lifted (Leffler, 1983; Kuniholm, 1986; Khan, 1987).

Prior to the formulation of a revised grand strategy, the Reagan administration relied heavily on the Carter Doctrine in its early years. However, the loss of Iran and the complications caused by the Iran-Iraq War, which began four months prior to Reagan's inauguration, compelled the US President to further consolidate its relationship with Saudi Arabia. This relationship with the Saudis would become the cornerstone of U.S. relations in the Gulf region and the fulcrum on which the Reagan supplement to the Carter Doctrine would pivot (in short, the US would not permit Saudi Arabia to become another Iran) (Kuniholm, 1986). In Afghanistan, the central tenet of the Reagan plan was to aid the Afghan resistance front, which did not attract US attention until Iran's fall to the mullahs. Even so, the US provided only medicine and communication equipment and consulted with the resistance forces regarding the acquisition of arms (Khan, 1987).

In conclusion, it was under these circumstances that the US demanded the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan. In addition, the US demanded that Afghanistan's sovereignty be restored and that the country maintain its neutrality. The US also stated that the Soviet Union's security would be factored into the post-intervention arrangement if it withdrew. On February 22, 1980, Soviet leader Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, exhausted by the war effort and assured that its security concerns would be addressed, indicated that the Soviet Union was willing to withdraw its troops in exchange for assurances that foreign forces would not intervene in Afghanistan. The British demanded a political settlement between the two key parties willing to find a way out of the impasse. The Geneva Conference was convened under the auspices of the United Nations, with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to Afghanistan presiding over the negotiations, which resulted in the Soviet withdrawal and the restoration of peace in Afghanistan after several rounds of contentious negotiations over the terms of the agreement (Rizvi, 1886; Khan, 1987).

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the US became unchallenged in the region and exerted disproportionate influence. As a result of its increased strength, the US radically altered its foreign policy toward Afghanistan and the entire region. The United States' redesigned grand strategy emphasises the export of Western

values and ideologies. Several factors, including the fall of the Soviet Union, economic prosperity in the United States, and the pursuit of liberal hegemony, have contributed to the shift in U.S. strategic orientation toward Afghanistan. Since then, the US has engaged in global missions with its vast wealth, superb military, and position as the most powerful force in the international system (Nazanin, 2021).

After 9/11 attacks

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorists based in Afghanistan attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, two emblems of American power. These strikes sent a shock wave down the spines of US policymakers—as well as the international community. However, what was alarming to the US was the fact that the terrorists, led and encouraged by Osama bin Laden. The world rallied to the defence of the US with words of love and solidarity, engulfed in grief. This incident significantly altered the direction of US foreign policy, resulting in the deployment of international forces to Afghanistan under US command. Meanwhile, by September 12, 2001, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (henceforth NATO) invoked Article Five for the first time in its history, declaring the attacks on the US as attacks on all nineteen members of the military alliance (Van Linschoten & Kuehn, 2012).

Shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush convened his national security team to discuss the appropriate response (Gilpin, 2005). Similarly, on September 14, 2021, the US Congress, gripped by terror after the attacks of al-Qaeda, approved a historic legislative act (the Authorization of the Use of Military Force against Terrorists). Four days later, President Bush signed this document which authorised the president to take stringent actions against those responsible for the terrorist attacks. This paper was akin to a declaration of war. The Bush administration had strong reason for regime change, but it was not prepared to wage a military campaign against the forces of terror. In light of this, in a September 2001 speech to the joint session of Congress, Bush outlined the demands of the US administration, calling on the Taliban to turn over all al-Qaeda operatives under their protective shield, urging them to close terrorist camps and hand over every terrorist and their support networks to the US(Lebovic, 2019; Malkasian, 202).

Predictably, the Taliban administration refused to consent to the demand from the US side, citing the absence of bilateral agreements or US recognition of

their regime as alibis for not handing over bin Laden and his henchmen. This resulted in a serious stalemate, with neither side willing to compromise. Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar believed that turning a Muslim over to a non-Muslim country would be a violation of Islamic canons, which will invariably generate a negative image for the regime regarding the perceptions of local Afghan customs (Van Linschoten & Kuehn, 2012). It was in this context that in December 2001, the Taliban regime was defeated and dissolved as a result of an US-led military action. Using a combination of superior airpower, blitzkrieg, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-backed warlords, the US and its NATO allies destroyed the Taliban administration in less than six weeks, killing or capturing hundreds of al-Qaeda fighters. Bin Laden and other surviving members of his terrorist networks fled to other countries for safety (Whitlock, 2021).

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the named used by the US for the Global War on Terror (GWOT) (entitled *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 2017) became an apparent success despite skepticism from both military and academic circles regarding the effectiveness of conventional military warfare in an unconventional war, drawing parallels to US wars in Vietnam and Somalia, European wars in their colonies, and the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Amidst these grim analyses, the Taliban regime and its al-Qaeda collaborators were overthrown (Chin, 2003). As a result of the routing of the Taliban, the new forces in charge of Afghanistan were commanders embroiled in a macabre civil war. The Northern Alliance became the dominant power among the new ruling groups (Wagemaker, 2008).

The Karzai years and the Challenges of State-Building

The Bonn Conference, hosted by the German government with leadership from the United Nations (UN), brought together key stakeholders (non-Taliban political actors) to lay out the framework of the democratic transition (Maley, 2013), which led to the formation of an interim government on December 22, 2001. Hamed Karzai then became the leader of the newly established administration. After six months, the former monarch of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, convened an ad hoc loya jirga to choose a traditional leadership. This was in fulfillment of the obligations of the Bonn Conference which urged the interim government was authorised to assemble a Loya Jirga (a grand assembly which brings together elders from across

Afghanistan to discuss matters of national significance) to determine transitional power (Peceny & Bosin, 2011; Myre, 2013). While focusing on counter-terrorism measures, the US encouraged the UN to play a central role in restoring peace and stability to Afghanistan. In light of this, the United Nations immediately began work on a democratic framework for Afghanistan (Hassan & Hammond, 2011). In addition, Karzai sailed to victory in October 2004, and a new parliament was elected in 2005. In this context, the USand its allies urged Afghanistan to create liberal democratic institutions to govern the war-ravaged nation (Peceny & Bosin, 2011).

Karzai was tasked with reviving a broken society where tribal warlords ran amok and had frayed at the edges as a result of longstanding conflicts and wars. Afghanistan was one of the few countries at the bottom of the human development pyramid when he assumed power. According to the UN Human Development Index (2001), by 2001, the life expectancy rate of Afghanistan was 40 years with an abysmal mortality rate of almost 26 percent for children under five. In addition, the report pointed out that the country ranked among the most destitute war-weary countries globally. One of every four children in Afghanistan could not survive up to their fifth birthday. Together with his western friends, Karzai oversaw the process of ambitious state-building, re-organising the bureaucracy, developing capacity, establishing a liberal peacebuilding framework, and ensuring that the rights of women were restored and maintained. However, due to the difficulty of the mission, his government plunged into a massive quagmire. In urban areas, only the wealthy had access to fundamental social services. The majority of the rural population was governed by ethnic warlords who have *balkanized* the country and created statelets. The coercive nature of the state was hindered, and the monopoly of violence, as was articulated by Max Weber as one of its distinctive qualities was absent (Hess, 2010).

In spite of these obstacles, the US initially supported the Karzai government with almost theological purity. Rebuilding efforts were bolstered by democratic peace theory and sentiments of US preeminence. The Afghan government relied on the US to carry out essential responsibilities, including the most fundamental. The US funded the maintenance of the police and the armed forces and ensured that the legal system was operational. The assistance from multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) and other favourable donors were galvanised (Swenson, 2017). In accordance with this strategy, the Afghanistan

Compact, which illustrates the model for change advocated by the international community, was signed in February 2006. The report recommended the Karzai administration to meet a number of goals, including security, governance and the rule of law, human rights, and economic and social development. To maintain security for national cohesion, the Compact emphasised the need for a nationally valued and professional army that reflects the cultural and religious diversity of the nation and is also accountable to the people, organised, trained, and equipped to protect the security of the state (Peceny & Bosin, 2011). Despite this, the US did not produce policy prescriptions that specified the parameters of change and reflected the cultural and religious validity of the legal order (Swenson, 2017).

The regime of Karzai was endowed with its own seeds of disaster. As the administration expanded, corruption began to seep to the surface. It became riven with corruption as close relatives of regime leaders disregarded the law. Karzai relied on the backing of his Popalzai tribe, particularly his brother (who was slain in Kandahar on July 12, 2011) and Jan Mohmmad Khan of Uruzgan (who was also murdered a few days later) (Maley 2013). Against this backdrop, his government descended deeper and deeper into the filth of neopatrimonialism. Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van De Walle (1994) describes neopatrimonialism as follows:

In neopatrimonial regimes, the chief executive maintains authority through personal patronage, rather than through ideology or law. As with classic patrimonialism, the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than an office. In contemporary neopatrimonialism, relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status. The distinction between private and public interests is purposely blurred. The essence of neopatrimonialism is the award by public officials of personal favors, both within the state (notably public-sector jobs) and in society (for instance, licenses, contracts, and projects). In return for material rewards, clients mobilize political sup- port and refer all decisions upward as a mark of deference to patrons (Bratton & Van de walle, p. 458).

Years later, Thandika Mkandawire (2015) would remark— "neopatrimonialism, is, then, a marriage of tradition and modernity with a hybrid offspring whose hybridity generates a logic that has had devastating effects" (Mkandawire, 2015, p. 565) However, Karzai's neopatrimonialism was not of the

Mobutu nor Bokassa variety. Both were essentially *sultanistic* and personalistic rules. Karzai grew up in a stateless society and never had the opportunity to refine his policy development talents. He served with an Afghan insurgent group headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan. As a result, his skill set lacks policy formulation and implementation. During his reign, this became horrifyingly clear. In 2010, the then-US ambassador stated that Karzai exhibited an extreme lack of understanding in terms of comprehending the ideas undergirding state-building (Maley, 2013).

After 13 years as the leader of Afghanistan, Karzai left the presidency. Former finance minister Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as the country's president, while Abdullah Abdullah assumed the office of CEO, which is equivalent to that of prime minister. Many parties, particularly international supporters of Afghanistan, greeted the departure of Karzai with relief. Some western politicians and diplomats viewed him as both unpredictable and challenging. He was viewed as a hindrance in the struggle against the Taliban (Dam, 2014). In contrast, former Finance Minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal argued in 2009 that the West is also to blame for the corruption that shook the Karzai regime (Graff, 2009). Whatever the case may be, the judgement on his reign has been scathing. In a 2012 survey conducted by the Asia Foundation, more than half of the respondents (52 percent) viewed corruption as a serious problem in their neighbourhood, 56 percent in their daily lives, 65 percent in their local officials, 70 percent in their provincial government, and 79 percent in Afghanistan as a whole. These findings are consistent with those of earlier research indicating that corruption is a significant problem. Integrity Watch found in a 2009 survey that one in seven Afghans have been directly bribed. In a country where the average annual income is only $550, the average bribe is $156. This level of corruption exceeds anything previously observed in Afghanistan (Maley, 2013).

The US "New" Strategy

Obama announced the deployment of 17,000 troops to Afghanistan shortly after assuming office. He maintained previous campaign statements that Afghanistan remained the most significant US battleground against the terrorist plague. He guaranteed that the US will adhere to a schedule for withdrawing its forces from Iraq. n January 2009, the Pentagon had seven thousand troops in Afghanistan, divided between the U.S. and NATO commands. Troops would then be focused on

countering the resurgence of the Taliban and thus stemming the tide of foreign mercenaries crossing the Afghan-Pakistan border in the south ("The US war in Afghanistan—1999-2021," n.d.).

On March 27, 2009, President Obama released a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the result of a careful 60-day interagency strategic study. During this process, the US consulted with both the Afghan and Pakistani governments. In addition, consultations were held with other partners including NATO allies, the donor sector, and members of Congress. The strategic layout has two primary objectives: To dismantle the networks of al-Qaeda and defeat the group wherever it has sought refuge. The White House emphasised that the new strategy will be adaptable and would periodically assess progress ("Remarks by the president on a new strategy," 2009).

The US government stated four primary objectives in its new strategy. First, the US portrayed Afghanistan and Pakistan as two states facing a single overriding threat. The new policy, which is radically different from prior ones, promises to increase economic and military support for Pakistan, which will be evaluated based on the effectiveness of Pakistan against terrorism ("Remarks by the president on a new strategy," 2009). Additionally, the US endeavoured to conduct active regional diplomacy including with the major states and organisations in the south, therefore establishing a trilateral framework. Second, the US administration admitted that, for the past three years, training resources that should have been allocated to its commanders have been diverted to the Iraq conflict. This will change. The US would deploy an extra 4,000 troops to train the Afghan security forces, in addition to the 17,000 sent in the early days of the Obama administration. The US pledged to fully train the Afghan army and police, and each American unit in Afghanistan will collaborate with an Afghan unit. To ensure that each Afghan unit has a coalition partner, new training will be provided to allies ("Remarks by the president on a new strategy," 2009).

In addition, the US recognised that bombs and bullets alone would not suffice for their liberal interventionist efforts in Afghanistan. Significant funding will be allocated to civil initiatives in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In light of this, President Obama committed to propose a budget to Congress that includes funding for the international assistance programme of the State Department. The steps were intended to lighten the load on US troops and ensure the safety and security of the US

mainland. The US leader also committed to provide funding for the civilian component of the mission by collaborating with NATO and the UN. The US vowed to establish a new contact group for Afghanistan and Pakistan that would unite all parties involved (Remarks by the president on a new strategy, 2009).

This temporary surge ordered by the Barrack Obama administration, which was inaugurated in 2009, would have little effect on a deteriorating scenario. This was exacerbated by the White House's unilateral ultimatum and the US' refusal to engage in genuine negotiation until time ran out. Through a geopolitical view, support for the Taliban was also a major issue. It was impossible for officials of both parties in the US to accept this grim fact. They collaborated with various administrations to conceal the cost of war, inflate the gains obtained, and overestimate the likelihood of success (Walt, 2021).

Operation Freedom's Sentinel

After thirteen years of the September 11 attacks, President Obama implied that the longest conflict in American history was nearing a reasonable conclusion. The US leader stated, while on vacation in Hawaii, that US and international efforts have delivered a hammer blow to al-Qaeda, including its core leadership, served justice to Osama bin Laden, and thwarted terrorist schemes. He voiced confidence in the liberal interventionist strategy in Afghanistan, stating that US troops and diplomats have helped the Afghan people retake their neighbourhoods and march toward the dawn of democracy ("Obama heralds", 2014).

On January 1, 2015, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) officially finished Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and commenced Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS). The new NATO mission, Resolute Support (RS), which focuses on Training, Advising, and Assisting (TAA) the Afghan Security Institution (ASI) and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to build their capabilities and long-term sustainability, has begun with approximately 13,000 troops (including nearly 10,000 from the US) from forty-one states (Campbell, 2015).

The OEF is comprised of interconnected missions to help the Afghan government. The primary purpose of the operation was to implement counter-terrorism measures against the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Khorasan (ISI-K), among others. The second purpose of the operation was to collaborate with the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to help the

Ministries of Defense and Interior of Afghanistan. In accordance with these two OFS objectives, the US will support peace efforts through advising the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The US planned to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by April 2021 if the Taliban complied with the provisions of the peace accord agreed with the Afghan government (Ortega Jr., 2021).

Counter-insurgency

In September 2009, US General Stanley McChrystal handed over a classified report to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. As stated in the report, without the implementation of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy and an additional 40,000 troops, there would be a huge failure in Afghanistan. This was a request to increase military presence to save a military operation in severe difficulty, and it sent shockwaves across American society and prompted concern in Washington. Insisting that escalating the conflict in Afghanistan could jeopardise his domestic programme, President Obama stated that he will examine all of his options before making a decision. Critics of the president accused him of vacillating and portrayed the option he faced as one between counterinsurgency and terrorism. Regarding the issue, his administration was divided by factions. Reportedly, Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton endorsed the counterinsurgency approach, while US ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry criticised the idea, stating his concern with the deployment of additional troops in this manner. Vice President Biden, for his part, expressed skepticism about the reinvigorated counterinsurgency effort and chose to co-author another document to dissuade President Obama from embracing a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. He encouraged the president to restrict the operation to killing al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan. People in the administration who backed a counter-terrorism measure noted that since the US had no real partners following the fraudulent elections that resulted in Hamid Karzai's return to power, executing a well-developed counterinsurgency strategy was a pipe dream (Boyle, 2010).

After months of deliberation, President Obama stated that the threat presented by Afghanistan and Pakistan to global security was not abstract nor fictitious. He cautioned that if it is not contained, it could lead to shocking spillovers that culminate in an attack on the US. Despite this, he made it plain that he intended to employ counterinsurgency tactics in pursuit of counterterrorism. Thus, the aim

would be to degrade the capabilities of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and prevent its ability to harm the US and its allies in the near future. In sum, he compromised by supporting the plan of General McCrystal for a counterinsurgency approach but limited its scope to counterterrorism aims. This action by the US leader limited his country's commitment to the Karzai government and set a schedule for the withdrawal of US forces (Boyle 2010).

According to Karl W. Eikenberry (2013), since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, two US administrations have gone to great lengths to guarantee that Afghanistan is not a breeding ground for terrorists with transnational ambitions and capabilities. This purpose has been articulated clearly yet achieving it has proven difficult. US authorities have battled to identify the methods, manner, and shape of the post-Taliban Afghan state, as well as the most effective tactics to establish such a state. This is hardly surprising given that the US had to improvise in a distant place with de jure rather than de facto sovereignty, a fragmented government with sectarian crises and competing factions, making it impossible to solve the socioeconomic problem. Consequently, achieving major strategic objectives under these conditions was never going to be easy.

In addition, he noted that the 2009 military surge was by far the most ambitious and expensive strategy the US has employed since 2001. This proposal was founded on the counterinsurgency (COIN) concept. The US military gave counterinsurgency strategy a fresh lease on life by codifying it in Field Manual 3-24, which was published by both the US Army and Marines. This revised concept is founded on the disturbing assumption that military leadership at all levels of the military (from privates to generals) is unchallengeable by the native populace throughout the battle zone. However, the actual purpose of military doctrine is to outline the role of the armed forces to campaigns, operations, and battles. Context-dependent military doctrine should be instructive rather than prescriptive. Not so with the US manual on counterinsurgency (Eikenberry, 2013).

Counterinsurgency has many names and shapes in the war maze. It evolved into democracy-building, state-building, and nation-building programmes, which failed to achieve their primary goals because they were unable to address the fact that indigenous culture and social structures outpaced western ones. The US refuses to acknowledge history's iron law: in a varied society founded on local customs and norms and without institutions, the great majority of help is either misdirected or

misappropriated. For instance, according to the report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, around $946 billion was spent between 2001 and 2021. However, the expenditure of nearly $1 trillion earned only a few hearts and minds. $816 billion of the $946 billion was spent on military expenditures for US troops. This is because the Afghan people received little or nothing from the remaining $130 billion, while another $83 billion went to the Afghan security forces. Additional $10 billion was spent on drug interdiction activities, and an additional $15 million was given to US agencies operating in Afghanistan, leaving only $21 billion for economic help. Afghanistan remained an impoverished, underdeveloped nation at the time of exit despite these enormous expenditures (Herd, 2021).

The Ghani Years

In 2014, due to the constitutional term limit, Hamid Karzai could not run for a third term. His erstwhile finance minister, who made an unsuccessful bid earlier, re-contested, hoping to be second time lucky. After a long electoral process mired in so much fraud and corruption that the winner of the polls remains unknown (Murtazashvili, 2021), a power-sharing agreement was brokered between Ghani and his rival Abdullah by US Secretary of State John Kerry (Murtazashvili, 2021) and his main rival Abdullah Abdullah. The former became president while the latter became chief executive officer (CEO) of the national unity government (Kaura, 2017), an extra-constitutional role viewed more as a form of political appeasement (Murtazashvili, 2021), further delaying the democratic transition process. However, the agreed power agreement required constitutional revision and the commencement of decentralisation through the convening of a new constitutional Loya Jirga, which never transpired (Murtazashvili, 2021). Ghani thus followed Hamid Karzai, who was the first post-Taliban president of Afghanistan and would be elected president twice, both times following highly contested elections ("Afghan president Ashraf Ghani: intellectual who had no answer," 2021).

The newly elected Afghan president and the chief executive officer both campaigned on the premise of negotiating a peaceful settlement with the Taliban. For Ghani, he also campaigned on his technical credentials (Murtazashvili, 2021). In contrast to Karzai, the guys appear to be quite serious about their vow, demonstrating a readiness to make concessions and coordinating with other foreign governments to guarantee that the target was reached despite the presence of

numerous formidable obstacles. For instance, during a trip to Beijing, China, Ghana encouraged other governments to assist his government's reconciliation initiative. He met with representatives from China, Pakistan, and the USto demonstrate his readiness to implement his proposal (Dobbins & Malkasian 2015). As a result of Ghani's aversion to civilian losses in US-led military operations in his country and the US's outrage over theft and corruption, the relationship between his administration and Washington would deteriorate (Murtazashvili, 2021).

Although increasingly isolated as a result of his long exile, Ghani came across as a man who was ready for peace with his fiercest foe—the Taliban. He was also keen on reform, working to break the patronage network which has long bedeviled governance in governance by deploying a new generation of young, educated, and vibrant Afghans to positions of leadership and significance in order to serve as counterweights to the discredited bureaucratic mandarins and move the agenda on corruption, state-building, and social transformation which would turn the country into a major trade hub and financial power at the intersection of central and South Asia ((Afghan president Ashraf Ghani: intellectual who had no answer to the Taliban, 2021). For instance, he nominated numerous women to critical posts, which impressed the US and its NATO partners and offered young Afghans optimism that he would distance himself from the warlords who have dominated Hamid Karzai's government (Murtazashvili, 2021).

True to tradition, he sacked and replaced senior members of the Afghan security forces, which shook the ranks of the security forces. He also marginalised key power brokers, including influential warlords who were regarded as cult figures in the provinces and were major centres of authority, particularly in northern Afghanistan. Such a risk would not pay off in the long run, as the inability of the Afghan government to defeat the Taliban in the north would be attributed to the previous policy of alienating warlords (Brezhan, 2021).

However, his extended exile in the US made him appear out of touch with the reality of ordinary Afghans. In 2014, he refused to adhere to the terms of the power-sharing deal he struck with his competitor, Abdullah Abdallah, which led to the formation of the government of national unity. Foreign and domestic power brokers pushed him to cancel the 2019 presidential elections, but he refused. The election would later be condemned as illegitimate and hampered by record-low participation. These were exacerbated by the fact that he surrounded himself with western-trained

and -bred advisors and aides while distancing himself from crucial domestic stakeholders in the country.

In his final years in office, Ghani watched as the US initiated talks with the Taliban. These talks paved the way for the withdrawal of the troops of the latter and then also instructed the Afghan government to release 5,000 Talban insurgents in order to conclude a peace deal. Described by the Taliban as the "puppet" of the US government, Ghani had barely any room to maneuver, delivering a barrage of television screeds that further dampened his reputation and made him come across as a visionary shortsighted academic whose grasp of reality is distorted ("The rise and fall of the Afghan president", 2021). Under these conditions, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan ended on August 15, 2021, when the Taliban took key cities and captured Kabul. President Ashraf Ghani fled the capital city by helicopter to safety in neighbouring Uzbekistan after swearing days earlier to not betray the trust of his people and that he was ready to pay the price with his life (Murtazashvili, 2021).

The Doha Framework

In the 2019 presidential elections, the political climate deteriorated due to the failings of the Ghani government, the declining faith in nation-building initiatives in Afghanistan, and the fading support for liberal interventionism. Abduallah Abduallah, who ran against Ashraf Ghani for the presidency, said that the election was marred by fraud. He added that the election did not represent the real voice of the Afghan people. This political catastrophe resulted in mutual recriminations on both sides as groups loyal to the two presidential candidates battled. Despite Khalilzad's efforts to unify the two presidential contenders, both have planned separate inaugural ceremonies for March 9, 2020. This threw the country into chaos and left many citizens unsure of what political administration Abduallah Abduallah, who had criticised Ashraf Ghani for not sharing power, desired.

The US and the Taliban signed the Doha Framework on February 29, 2020, in Doha. Zalmay Khalilzad signed for the United States, while Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar signed for the Taliban. This occurred in the presence of numerous international observers including US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The Trump administration pledged to evacuating all U.S. soldiers from Afghanistan and its allies and coalition partners, including support personnel, civilian forces, and private security contractors, among others ("Freedom's Sentinel", n.d.). In addition, the

agreement's fundamental provisions imposed obligations on all parties. The accord urged the Afghan government to initiate negotiations with the Taliban without delay and without preconditions. The US committed to reduce its soldiers from 13,000 to 8,600 in approximately 135 days and to remove all of its troops from Afghanistan within 14 months. In addition, the deal stipulates the exchange of prisoners between the Afghan government and the Taliban. It also requires the US to lift sanctions against the Taliban by August 27, 2020.

However, sanctions would be lifted following progress intra-Afghan talks. The Taliban also pledged the US that al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations would never use Afghan soil to undertake terrorist attacks against American forces and their allies. A portion of the agreement was redacted. The security situation in Afghanistan did not considerably improve following the signing of the deal. Terrorist acts compelled the USto suspend sections of the deal, including financial aid (Tariq, Rizwan & Ahmad, 2020). Contrary to longstanding US policy, the US made a contract with the Taliban without including the Afghan government. In addition, NATO, which invoked Article 5 of its charter when the US was attacked on September 11, 2001, was not visibly involved (Freedom's Sentinel, n.d.).

The Reemergence of the Taliban

Twenty years after the US-led NATO intervention of Afghanistan, which resulted to the Taliban's removal and the implementation of liberal state-building programmes, the Taliban have returned with a vengeance. The militant organisation seized control of Kabul on August 15. The rapid collapse of the Ashraf Ghani government and its associated security forces paved the way for the Taliban to not only capture provincial cities in less than 10 days, but also to take Kabul with no apparent effort and without a struggle. This Taliban capture of Kabul was met with outrage and disbelief. This was largely owing to the hasty evacuation of foreign nationals, diplomats, personnel, and Afghans who, having collaborated with the Ghani government, anticipated harsh reprisal from the Taliban. The chaotic evacuation efforts at the Kabul airport, with vulnerable Afghans clinging to the outside of the US military plane, are eerily reminiscent of the fall of Saigon in 1975. (Dagia, 2021). Afghans risk execution and servitude at the hands of the Taliban, as depicted by images on Twitter timelines, television screens, and group conversations. As the "hooligans of the extreme," as political scholar Tom Nairn termed them,

reclaim control of the country, the future is gloomy for women, Shias, and anyone who collaborated with U.S. and U.K. forces or with the regime, which has been successfully overthrown (Ramsay, 2021).

Despite Biden's objections, American failure in Afghanistan was not due to the country's historical challenges, but rather to the current pathologies of its administration. Pathologies such as dependence on a foreign subsidy, the desire for political legitimacy, and the expectations of the population are both historically conditioned and evident now. Candidates for the presidency of Afghanistan must confront these difficult circumstances. Late in 2001, the US interfered with limited knowledge of the state or its tense relationship with a long-established but strained national identity. Over time, US leaders have revealed themselves to be indifferent students of Afghan history, culture, and politics, allowing them to dishonestly blame Afghanistan's problems both on the Afghans and on apparently immutable historical factors (Hopkins, 2022).

However, the pathologies of the state are just as significant for Afghans as the repeated failures of prior governments to stop this scenario. This resulted in their eventual destruction. Even if history is a poor forecast of future events, it should serve as a guide for the forces calling the shots in Afghanistan. The Taliban's current viewpoint is reminiscent of the 1990s: ill-equipped and disinterested in the obligations of authority. Undoubtedly, this disinterest in governance helps to the Taliban's goal for international legitimacy, since it is a means to reopen the faucets of foreign funding. Their cordial approach toward international NGOs, the humanitarian community, and the UN is nothing more than an attempt to transfer governance responsibilities to these organisations. It also highlights the reality that Afghanistan, despite its victory, is a fiscal black hole into which the United Nations plans to pour $5 billion. The Taliban's capacity to garner assistance from Pakistan, the Gulf states, Russia, and even China is crucial to their continued survival as a government. Regardless of their final success, the pathologies of the Afghan state will likely outlive them and any succeeding Afghan government (Hopkins, 2022).

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili (2022) contends that the Afghan state failed because it lacked legitimacy among the people, whose sources she claims are numerous and linked. According to her, there were three causes for the collapse: one was that the Constitution of 2004 prohibited the Afghan population from participation in or monitoring of the central government's business. Each day, the

gap between citizen participation and US intervention widened. In addition, the international coalition was preoccupied on counterinsurgency techniques and the consolidation of authority that were incompatible with the mission of establishing democracy. This was exacerbated by the fact that international donors were more interested in rapid remedies than in a methodical process that would provide long-term outcomes. Even worse, discredited state institutions were not reformed, and parallel institutions were developed, severely eroding the legitimacy of the state. Thirdly, Ashraf Ghani's reckless leadership exacerbated the state's demise. Without Pakistan's help, the Taliban could not have reemerged as a military and political organisation. Nonetheless, the Taliban could not have been effective if the Afghan government lacked popular legitimacy. Without the failed government, the Taliban insurgency would have produced no productive results.

In this chapter, I provided the historical background to the US-led liberal interventionism in Afghanistan which happened after the September 11 attacks. The chapter also traced the US-Afghan relations from the heydays of the Cold War to 9/11. Having done that, the chapter which follows will provide the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Challenges and Prospects of US-led liberal
Interventionism in Afghanistan

The preceding chapter endeavoured to construct the theoretical apparatus upon which this study is founded. Efforts were made to provide a perspective on the concept of nationalism and how various international relations (IR) theories

conceptualise it. To be sure, point of departure of the theoretical framework is that nationalism and the balance of power posed serious threats to US-led liberal interventionism in Afghanistan, from the defeat of the Taliban in 2001 to their reemergence in 2021, after more than two decades of experimentation with liberal interventionism and its attendant corollaries of nation-building. In this chapter, it is attempted to answer the two research questions: "How effective has the liberal interventionism led by the US been in Afghanistan since 2001? Is Afghan nationalism a fundamental obstacle to liberal interventionism led by the US?" Given the failure of the US-led liberal intervention in Afghanistan, this chapter argues that policy failures, corruption, political alienation, neoliberal prescriptions, and the contradictory relationship between liberal interventionism and Afghan nationalism hampered US-led efforts to transform Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era. Consequently, what follows is a reflection on the post-Taliban trajectory, which started off with the Bonn Conference held in 2001.

The Bonn Conference

In November 2001, when it became evident that the Taliban regime was on borrowed time, it became imperative to establish a political and security framework to guide Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era. Since September, diverse opposing factions, excluding the Taliban, have been engaged in negotiations with the support of the UN and the US. The various parties agreed to the formation of a Loya Jirga, but there was no consensus regarding the composition of the post-conflict government. This lack of agreement on crucial issues created friction, as tensions between the opposing factions continued to escalate. By November 2001, the events in Afghanistan had outpaced the political discourse regarding the future of the country. The victories of the Northern Alliance on the battlefield and their entry into Kabul gave this Tajik and Uzbek-dominated group de facto control of much of the country, including the capital city and the central government's institutions. The Northern Alliance went to great lengths to besiege government buildings, appointed its leaders Muhammad Qassem Fahim, Muhammad Yunus Qanooni, and Abduallah Abdullah as ministers of defence, interior, and foreign affairs, respectively, and impeded efforts to establish a broad-based government representative of all factions and interest groups with the exception of the Taliban. In response to mounting pressure, the Northern Alliance agreed to participate in negotiations in Bonn with

other groups, including the Rome Group, which represented the Pashtun population; the Cyprus Peace group (largely made of Afghan exiles wanting a peaceful settlement to the conflict); and a group based in Peshawar and supported by Pakistan (Cottey, 2003).

By 5 December 2001, all parties had signed the Conference's agreement. The purpose of the conference was to outline Afghanistan's post-Taliban trajectory. Despite the view of some critics that the conference was unrepresentative and unbalanced because key stakeholders and interest groups were not invited to the conference to participate in the talks. The agreement reached at the Conference outlined a path out of the country's protracted conflict. In response to critics, the UN Special Envoys Lakhdar and Brahimi emphasised that even if the conference was not representative of all the Afghan parties to the conflict and thus did not reflect the balance of forces in the country, it offered Afghanistan a path to peace and laid the groundwork for the establishment of a democratic government. As stated in the preamble of the agreement, the participants in the negotiations acknowledged that the interim government was not only a first step but also a crucial one in the formation of a government that reflected the balance of tribes, gender, and the free will of the people to exercise political agency. despite the significant influence of US and UN envoys (James Dobbin, former Us ambassador to Afghanistan and Lakhdar Brahimi, former UN envoy to Afghanistan respectively). The document ratified by the parties was largely the result of extensive negotiations and dialogue, and thus reflected both the Islamic heritage of the country and its democratic dimensions. The agreement took a high-risk approach to the thorny issue of regional powerholders by emphasising centralised government. However, the essential components for developing political institutions that reflect democratic principles were absent (Nixon & Ponzio, 2007).

In a nutshell, the Bonn Agreement set the course for the post-Taliban era by achieving a number of significant milestones. The agreement provided for the establishment of a six-month-long interim authority (Cottey, 2003). This authority was tasked with running the day-to-day governance of the country, including the establishment of institutions crucial to the reconstruction of the state, such as the Civil Service Commission, Human Rights Commission, and the central bank, among others. The Agreement also included a commitment to transition the country to democracy by holding transparent elections no later than two years after the

establishment of the emergency Loya Jirga and a constitutional Loya Jirga, roughly 18 months after the establishment of the Transitional Authority, in order to adopt a new constitution. The Bonn Agreement also required the United Nations Security Council to authorise the early deployment of the international peacekeeping force (Cottey, 2003). In some respects, the Bonn process was a creative and deft demonstration of how to use traditional state power centres to create effective democratic governing institutions (Nixon & Ponzio, 2007).

Nation-Building Initiatives in the Post-Taliban Era

When President George W. Bush, Jr. was a candidate for the White House, he was unequivocal in his rejection of nation-building—state-building, which was central to Clinton's "democracy enlargement" strategy (Brinkley, 1997, p. 111). The future president of the US stated, "I do not believe our troops should be used for nation-building." I believe that our troops should be used to fight and win wars (Fukuyama, 2014, para. 1). President Geroge W. Bush's aversion to nation-building coincided with his realist leanings toward realpolitik and balance-of-power politics that were pillars of the containment strategy of the US at the height of the Cold War. Additionally, his opposition to nation-building could be attributed to the foreign policy failures of the Clinton administration in Somalia and Haiti (Henriksen, 1996; Riley, n.d.). In the meantime, Bush was not the only one who openly rejected nation-building. His foreign policy and national security team, including Condoleezza Rice, vehemently opposed the utilization of the military of the US for nation-building. In a *Foreign Affairs* article, Rice (2005) outlined the foreign policy of the incoming Republican administration, from US relations with Europe and the necessity of amending the Atlantic Charter to reflect the post-Cold War world, to US relations with China and US involvement in the Asia Pacific Region, adding that, unlike its predecessor, the new administration "must remember that the world has changed." It is not a municipal police department. This is not a political arbitrator. And it is most assuredly not intended to construct a civil society" (Rice, 2000, p. 53).

In a strange turn of events following 9/11, President Bush reneged on his pledge to base US foreign policy on nation building. In a 2002 address at the Virginia Military Institute, Bush stated that "peace will be achieved by assisting Afghanistan in establishing its own stable government" (Miller, 2010, para. 3). Years later, in his memoir, Bush would be more direct: "Afghanistan was the ultimate

nation-building mission" and "we had a moral obligation to leave behind something better because we had liberated the country from a primitive dictatorship" (Miller, 2010, para. 3). By the time of the global war on terror, George W. Bush had undergone a Pauline conversion, transforming from a staunch opponent of nation-building to one of its most ardent advocates. Bush's apparent about-face highlights the American public's intense ambivalence towards nation-building activities. Bush's embrace of nation-building did not make him an outlier in American foreign policy circles, as both conservative and liberal camps have embraced nation-building, albeit with differing tenors: liberals have conceptualised nation-building as a means of asserting US primacy and empire, whereas conservatives reject this liberal framing. Humanitarian intervention is supported by the former, while nation-building is supported as part of the Global War on Terror by the latter (Fukuyama, 2006).

Since 1989, the US and the international community have embarked on many nation-building initiatives. What the US meant by nation building is "usually state-building coupled with economic development" (Fukuyama, 2006, 3). In a study done by the Rand corporation, the authors of the study pointed out that there has been one nation-building effort every two years since the end of the Cold War. Despite this, the controversy over what constitutes nation building has triggered a lingering debate. While Iraq and Afghanistan could be considered nation-building on steroids, the authors of the Rand Study reject the notion that the US interventions in South Korea and South Vietnam should be deemed as nation-building initiatives because rather than building the state from scratch, these were efforts geared at supporting the status-quo bloc in countries rife with divisions, and the creation of democracy was not the penultimate goal of the missions. The logic of this argument is fuzzy: the US intervened in South Korea and Vietnam to undercut communist aggression, but in these missions the US rolled out aid, both in its political guise and in material economic terms. It was clear that the US saw the Vietnam war through the prism of two competing perspectives of nation-building: communist and western (Fukuyama, 2006).

While Vietnam and South Korea are considered contested terrains of US nation-building / state building, post-Taliban Afghanistan represents a classic case of nation building. The latter presented all the hallmarks of the significant issues of nation building in the starkest way possible. Hence, after the defeat of the Taliban, the US and its coalition were saddled with a gigantic task. The Central Asian country

was racked by grinding poverty and human mystery prior to the Soviet invasion of 1979. This was compounded by dysfunctional state apparatuses and a lack of social services. The complex combination of the Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation, the devastating civil war, international sanctions, long-running tribal cleavages left the country left the country with many challenges. Consequently, the fall of the Taliban, with the previous state structure either in ruins or utterly neglected as a result of the combination of the above, the country became quintessentially a *tabula rasa* for the forces of nation building (Starr, 2006; Suhrke, 2006).

Despite these odd realities, the inclination of the Bush administration was not immediately altered by the events of September 2001, and that of Operation Enduring Freedom. As a result, the US administration was somewhat reluctant to embark on drawing a blueprint for Afghanistan post-Taliban era. This was the mood among senior administration officials from September 2001 to November 2001. The main objectives of the administration were, in fact, two-fold: regime change and counterterrorism as opposed to nation-building and democracy promotion (Suhrke, 2006). This mood was echoed even during the early days of the Taliban's defeat. Asked by the media about what the US plan was now that the Taliban was routed, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld defended the US initial plan: that the US forces were executing the task the president had given them, which was to eliminate terrorists, and had no additional responsibility of attempting to sort out the internal issues of the Afghan people, such as the post-Taliban regime type (Hassan & Hammond, 2011). Subsequently, the US realized why the defeat of the Taliban fulfilled a key objective. Terrorists could use Afghanistan as a safe haven if they had a regime that was sympathetic to them. It was this realization that led the Bush administration to embark on nation building aimed at denying terrorist groups. (Suhrke, 2006; Hassan & Hammond, 2011).

Under these very conditions, curious questions could be posed: what was to be done, and what was not to be done? The international nation-building forces found that the most important and most overwhelming task was to restore the territorial limits of the country as well as to affirm its sovereign authority. While the provision of emergency was also a significant issue, they were to deal with, but this paled in comparison to the questions of reestablishing territorial limits and confirmation of sovereignty. The US and its allies thus convinced themselves that

the rendering of emergency assistance could be achieved devoid of nation building, concluding somehow that they are mutually exclusive. Consequently, the reestablishment of Afghanistan's sovereignty was embraced with much fervor due to its significance, while the rest of the other issues that were desirable, especially in the political, economic, and social realms were considered secondary issues until sovereignty was sorted out (Starr, 2006).

Meanwhile, both practical and theoretical considerations dominated the nation-builders' thinking. On a practical level, there were significant worries that Afghanistan might fragment into autonomous fiefdoms ruled by tribal warlords and their subordinates of fanatical followers, sympathisers, and supporters. This argument gained traction due to the suspicion that Afghanistan, in real and actual terms, was neither a state nor a nation-state, but rather a mishmash of ethnicities that a resourceful monarchy inherently lacking in political dynamism amalgamated through the process of concession, all shattered after a century of conflict. In contrast, on the theoretical side, the emphasis on sovereignty was justified by the histories of Europe, particularly France in the seventeenth century, Germany, and Italy in the nineteenth century. For both epochs, the most pressing question and the call to heroic action was the construction of sovereignty at the national level, thereby instrumentalizing national identity for the purpose of consolidating national identity (Starr, 2006).

According to Murtazashvili (2016), the rapid collapse of the Taliban regime as a result of the US military intervention paved the way for the implementation of a two-pronged approach to nation building: one, a bottom-up initiative aimed at bolstering the legitimacy of the state by bolstering citizen support at the local level through the provision of enormous public goods concurrently with top-down institutional building at the national level. The strategy was predicated on efforts to subdue or co-opt non-state sources of authority in order to bring them under the sway of the state. In addition to former warlords and political parties that represent and advance their agendas, there has been a laundry list of non-state actors, including customary authority (Murtazashvili 2016). A key aspect of the strategy was to strengthen institutions by emphasising the establishment of political organisations at the national level, which included holding a full slate of national elections and bolstering ministries and agencies in Kabul. In light of this, newly created formal bodies in the country's periphery could be linked to Kabul's strengthened

bureaucratic ministries. The bottom-up aspect of the strategy involved establishing connections between the central government and communities through government- and donor-supported organisations.

In addition, Murtazashvili (2016) stated that proponents of the two-pronged strategy were adamant that the Afghan people would make the connection between the massive amount of aid they received and their renewed sense of state legitimacy. The goal of this strategy is for the state to increase its legitimacy and win the favour of the populace, which could be achieved by delivering vast quantities of public goods and services. Thus, foreign aid could have been a significant factor in enhancing the legitimacy of the state, provided that it was challenged and implemented with a sense of decency and propriety, thereby convincing citizens and individuals that the state was worth supporting and risking their lives to defend and protect. In order to break the vicious cycle of mistrust between the individual and the state, if the state is deemed to be exercising its fiduciary responsibilities and also addressing issues such as the provision of social welfare, then citizens will pledge their allegiance and play by the state's rules. This also requires citizens to be willing to pay taxes because they received a government that is deserving of support because it provided for the people. Donor funds are therefore a stopgap measure designed to enhance the legitimacy of the state and its popular support (Murtazashvili, 2016).

It is a truism that nation-building activities in Afghanistan were predicated on aid support and its efficacy, with the expectation that aid would then provide domestic tranquilly, allowing nation-builders at the national level to address institutional challenges and possibly resolve them by enhancing the capabilities of ministries in Kabul. This was then bolstered by the belief that the establishment of new political organisations and the distribution of goods would stimulate national revitalization and modernization. In 2006, however, the country's nation-building strategy underwent modifications. This was due to the resumption of hostilities in the south and east of the country. The new strategy for nation-building was developed by an unlikely source: the US military. The military believed that efforts at nation-building, especially with a fundamentally corrupt government, resulted in a backlash from rural citizens (Murtazashvili, 2016). In 2010, nine years after the events of September 11, the Afghan state displayed signs of atrophy and stagnation under these conditions. The state became financially unsustainable as a result of the centralization of power. The government could not exercise its force monopoly

nationwide. Instead, it was more comparable to a city-only municipality (Edwards, 2010).

As stated previously, reconstruction efforts began in December 2001 in Bonn, with stakeholders agreeing to a broad nation-building strategy. As Afghanistan demonstrates, nation-building efforts included road reconstruction, immunisation programmes, aid assistance, the holding of elections, the creation of a new constitution, and a variety of other initiatives to revive a failed state. Many in the West, including the US government, judged the enterprise's success by its adoption of a constitution and the conduct of two federal elections. On December 20, 2001, the UN Security Council approved the formation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in support of the reorganisation plans (Rupp, 2006). The ISAF consisted of European forces and was intended to provide a multinational peacekeeping mission in Kabul and the surrounding area. Three months later, in March 2002, the Security Council would expand United Nations responsibilities in Afghanistan by establishing the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). There was palpable optimism that nation-building would be a realisable success due to the large number of NGOs helping to rebuild the Afghan government and the laser-like focus on managing the initiatives of 16 UN agencies. As the example of Afghanistan demonstrates, nation-building is conducted on multiple fronts. Many in the West, including the US government, measured the enterprise's success by its adoption of a constitution and the holding of two federal elections (Rupp, 2006).

In conclusion, nation-building in post-Taliban Afghanistan proved to be an arduous task. The Bonn conference established the framework for the restoration of certain forms of order, which resulted in the creation of a new constitution, the formation of a parliament, and the holding of regular elections. Nation-building efforts were hampered by a number of factors: the perception that the two post-Taliban administrations, especially the interim arrangement, were western impositions; the looming threat of the Taliban's reemergence; ethnic divides; the US's approach to the Global War on Terror; the distraction caused by the invasion of Iraq; and the lack of foresight to consider the consequences of the invasion of Iraq (Keane, 2016). Numerous academics have cited reasons for the failures of nation-building in this context. One scholar attributed the failure of nation building to enduring ethnic cleavages, a poor human resource base, poor governance in an increasingly narco-mafia state, and regional power (Weinbaum, 2006, pp. 128–134).

According to Daron Acemoglu (2021), with more than 100,000 lives lost and two trillion dollars spent, the United States' nation-building efforts resulted in an embarrassing scene at the Kabul airport as the Taliban assumed power. He criticised the flawed social engineering strategy employed by the US to stabilise Afghanistan. In opposition to conventional theories of nation-building, he argued that the influx of foreign resources, aid, and transfer expertise, as well as the prevalence of NGOS in a society as heterogeneous as Afghanistan, were a recipe for disaster. Moreover, he implied that the top-down approach to nation-building may have worked in other societies, such as during the Qin dynasty in China or the Ottoman Empire, but that many states were built not through force and coercion but through cooperation. For him, this did not imply that the USshould have collaborated with the Taliban, but greater local participation in decision-making could have been crucial in turning the tide.

Geographical factors, according to Gareth Price (2021), were crucial to the failure of nation building. Iran and Pakistan, two of the Taliban's primary backers, decided to embarrass the USby arming and arming the Taliban to undermine US-led efforts, he added. In addition, he stated that the international community's attempts to convince Pakistan and Iran that Afghanistan's stability is crucial for the region were unsuccessful because both countries viewed the issue as secondary and were more concerned with geopolitics. The economy was the second factor he cited for the failures. Afghanistan possessed no comparable advantage in legalised trade, with the exception of its unexploited mineral wealth. Families supported themselves through narcotics, illegal mining, and illegal logging. The failure was also due to the heterogeneity of society, which required nation-builders to deal with complex dynamics. In contrast, Fintan O'Toole (2021) adopted a cultural and orientalist viewpoint, attributing the failure of nation building to the backwardness of the Afghan people, their adherence to outmoded tribalism, and their outdated religion. According to Alicia Roberts (2021), the failure of US military operations in the Central Asian nation demonstrates that of the US's limitations and serves as an eloquent caution against allowing military operations to expand beyond their initial objectives.

Democracy Promotion in Afghanistan

Having cultivated a reputation as a foreign-policy realist during the 2000 election campaign, mocking nation-building and US democracy promotion, few observers anticipated that promoting democracy around the world would become one of the administration's primary foreign policy objectives. Bush and his advisors made it clear during the campaign trail that their foreign policy orientation prioritises great-power realism over nation-building and democracy promotion. In this regard, the foreign-policy gurus of the new administration broke sharply with the Clinton administration's policies. Consequently, some analysts feared that democracy promotion would be consigned to the dustbin of history. 9/11 fundamentally altered this perspective, however (Carothers, 2003).

To clarify, while the second Bush administration was initially disinclined to promote democracy, the US' preference for democracy promotion predates the September 11 attacks. The promotion of democracy has been at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy for the majority of the twenty-first century. First, it was intended to thwart European imperialism, and finally, it proved useful during the ideological conflicts between communism and fascism. It is not an exaggeration to say that it was crucial to the US' rise to hegemonic status. Perhaps its eloquent expression of American values and ideals has contributed to its dominance in the American political imagination (Cox, Ikenberry, & Inoguchi, 2000). In 1992, at the dawn of the unipolar interlude, Larry Diamond, the preeminent scholar of democracy in the Global North, published an article titled "Promoting Democracy" in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* magazine (1992). The article is essentially a distillation of US democracy promotion in the Global South and post-war societies. In the introductory paragraphs of his article, Diamond writes, "We stand at an extraordinary moment in history, a time of unprecedented progress toward democracy" (1992, p. 25). Diamond screams, "Democracy has won the epic ideological struggle of the Cold War!" and added, "the extinction of global communism presents a once-in-a-century chance to restructure world politics" (p. 25). Diamond posits a more "grandeur vision". He saw a "democratic moment" and believed that even though a few cold-war relics such as authoritarian regimes remained in place, the global impulse for democracy would prevail (Diamond, 1992, p. 25).

While George Kenan criticised US foreign policy practitioners for prioritising moral and legal formulations over a meticulous consideration of national interests (Cox, 2000), a number of scholars attribute the democratic impulse in US

foreign policy circles to the rise of Woodrow Wilson and the attendant crises that plagued the international system after World War I. (Cox, 2000; Hill, 2012; Jahn, 2012). His analysis explains the origins of the belief that the US is the agent of significant historical change, bringing freedom and democracy, despite the tendency of its citizens toward isolationism. Jonathan Monten (2005) traced the origins of the United States' quest to promote democracy and spread liberal free society to three factors, including the widespread Calvinism of the seventh century in the US, the effects of the Enlightenment, and the allure of universal liberalism, which was a historical or functional necessity. In the meantime, this US preference for democracy has been shared by both parties, albeit with slight variations in emphasis and approach.

Certainly, the September 11 attacks and subsequent Global War on Terror have elevated democracy promotion to the forefront of US foreign policy. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the view that fanatical Islamic terrorists pose a threat to the US on its own soil could be attributed to the United States' colossal responsibility for democratic deficits in the Middle East and the Arab world. Consequently, democratisation is the antidote to the threat of terrorism. A position bolstered by Western democratic sensibilities can also be attributed to the popularity of the democracy-peace theory, which has been promoted by liberal forces in both political science and international relations. The theory asserts, among other things, that democracies do not resort to war; instead, they provide channels for resolving conflicts and thus the most stable foundation for lasting peace (Ottaway, 2003; Rosato, 2003). Likewise, the participation-modernization hypothesis revived faith in democracy in the post-cold war era. It argues that if Islamicists were included in the democratic process, they would be dissuaded from perpetuating terrorism and adopt a more liberal interpretation of Islam. During the period when neoconservatives dominated the second Bush administration, these views gained widespread support in Washington, in policy circles as well as among commentators, and became crucial to the formation of US foreign policy (Dalacoura, 2010).

In this context, the Bonn Conference, which resulted in the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions, which laid the groundwork for democratisation, was convened after the Taliban's ouster. The Bonn document was based on the premise that a free, democratic government in Afghanistan would end the vicious cycle that

has fueled underdevelopment, macabre armed conflict, natural disasters, and grave underdevelopment, thereby fostering regional stability and depriving terrorism of a suitable habitat. This view then added fuel to the democratic fire, as the process of democratisation received a massive boost at the Tokyo ministerial conference, where key funding pledges were made, resulting in the accumulation of nearly $4.5 billion in pledges (over a several-year period). The conference also outlined five areas to be addressed: building the Afghan government (led by the US), judicial training (led by the Italian/European Commission), building the National Police (led by Germany), counter-narcotics (led by the United Kingdom), and demobilisation (led by the UN) (Tadjbakhsh & Schoiswohl, 2008).

The road map established by the Bonn Agreement concluded with significant achievements, such as the adoption of a new constitution that laid the groundwork for the establishment of institutions for democratic governance through the exercise of the franchise. On September 18, 2005, provincial parliamentary elections were held, and 249 individuals were elected to the Wolesi Jirga (House of People, the lower house of the Afghan parliament). The Meshrano Jirga (the House of Elders), whose members were appointed by the presidency, district councils, and district councils, supplemented this lower house. About 27 percent of the seats in the lower chamber and 17 percent of the seats in the upper house were reserved for women, marking a significant milestone for women's rights. With the participation of women came the protection and standardisation of human rights, particularly women's rights (Shah, 2006). In addition, the Afghanistan Compact, the successor document to the Bonn framework, further defined the scope of the international community's participation in the democratisation process in Afghanistan. In addition, the compact outlined a shift toward a more substantive strategy and emphasised the need for a national development strategy (Tadjbakhsh & Schoiswohl, 2008).

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), which was launched in 2010, aimed to achieve both peacebuilding and promotion of democracy. In general, APRP assumes that peacebuilding and democracy promotion foster cohesion, so a two-pronged strategy would achieve both objectives. According to the US agenda, the purpose of democratisation in Afghanistan was to establish state institutions of bureaucracy and state security, ensuring a monopoly of force by the government, the democratisation of political institutions, including those of political elites, and the flourishing of civil society. ensuring the establishment of institutions

that respond to the needs of the people and that political elites believe they can participate in electoral processes and be treated fairly (Quie, 2012). In conclusion, the UScould claim some successes on many fronts of democratisation in Afghanistan, based on certain metrics. Political organisations and parties were unrestricted in their ability to organise, host events, and engage in democratic activities without fear of retribution from state officials. Additionally, media freedom has contributed to the proliferation of media institutions. Despite everything, there have been numerous drawbacks. For instance, the 2009 State Department report on human rights indicates that arbitrary and unlawful killings have become commonplace, only slightly better than during the Taliban's rule. While media freedom was better than under the Taliban, there were reports of journalists being harassed, arrested, and intimidated for providing objective criticism of central figures or local and central leadership (Katzman, 2010).

Regardless of the outcome of the US' efforts to promote democracy in Afghanistan, it is evident that there have been setbacks. Sirvan Karimi (2021), argues that the return of the Taliban to the helm of leadership in Afghanistan provides lessons for forces hell-bent on implanting democracy in a country plagued by tribal loyalty and sectarian affiliation, and it is an epitaph to the neoconservative project that was promoted by George Bush Jr. As for Jamakhan Rahyab (2019), corruption and political dysfunction undermine not only democratic institutions but also the rule of law. The author noted that after the fraudulent elections of 2014, the National Unity Government made few attempts to restore faith in the democratic process, which further eroded Afghan faith in democracy. The same NUG also disregarded social media. Mirwais Wakil (2019) identifies a number of causes for the failure of democracy promotion. One, the poor quality of information about the country available to U.S. intelligence agencies, particularly the lack of current data on the country's demographics, which provided information on the political, religious, economic, and social spheres. The constant threat posed by the Taliban to the citizenry has engendered apathy and contributed to low election turnout. Thirdly, the excessive reliance on international aid has impeded the organic growth of democracy. Third, the dominance of the opiate industry, which accounted for 20–32 percent of the country's gross domestic product and 354,000 full-time jobs.

For Stephen Walt (2016), employing the U.S. military to promote democracy in distant nations is delusional, regardless of how persuasive the idea may be. He

argued that there is much more to ensuring liberal democracy than writing a constitution and holding periodic elections. In addition, it must be accompanied by a broad commitment to promoting democratic pluralism, providing a decent education and income, and ensuring that those who lose the election have a stable future outside of government. Second, the use of military force to spread democracy almost always elicits violent resistance, as nationalism can work against the efforts of foreign governments to plant democracy in another nation. Thirdly, foreign forces attempting to establish democracy are rarely familiar with the internal dynamics necessary to select local leaders. He concluded that the spread of democracy in a foreign country necessitates massive social engineering efforts, and that it is not a good sign to request assistance from outside powers. In short, there are no quick fixes for transforming a post-war country into a democracy that can be implemented by outsiders. The process must be organic, indigenous, and led by the population's agency and political elites willing to play by the rules and accept defeat.

Security Sector Reform

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has been a pillar of post-war reconstruction, nation-building, and democratisation. The concept of SSR stems from the international community's belief that insecurity and conflict are detrimental to social development, economic growth, and human flourishing. Socioeconomic and security dynamics must be addressed simultaneously if states are to have a better path to social prosperity and thus escape the paroxysms of insecurity, underdevelopment, and persistent fragility (Gurra & Manning, 2008).

SSR contrasts with conventional notions of security by redefining it to include not only state stability and national security, but also the welfare and safety of the masses of people. The awareness that security and development are intertwined is intended to promote the idea that security is a matter of public policy and governance, requiring extensive public scrutiny. Suffice it to say that a security system must, in the first place, be democratic and transparently accountable to the people, reduce the risk of conflict, and foster development. This is the recurring theme of the 2005 document Security Sector Reform and Governance, which has been instrumental in providing donors with the necessary comprehension of the relationship between security and development. In addition, it has challenged conventional notions of how Security Sector Reform is designed, implemented, and

evaluated, as well as how resources allocated to government agencies can be utilised most effectively to support the SSR mechanisms (Gurría & Manning, 2008).

In recent years, Security Sector Reform has been an integral part of post-conflict strategies to eliminate state fragility, revive pariah states, and end conflicts. SSR has been implemented in numerous nations, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia, and Solomon Islands. The strategy to implement SSR in a sustainable manner, to support poverty reduction strategies, to facilitate service delivery, and to develop secure and accountable systems of justice and security is the international community's answer to the question of how to breathe fresh air into conflict-ravaged communities. According to the OECD (2008), DAC handbook on security system reform, the international community must assist partners in achieving four strategic goals: the establishment of effective governance, oversight, and accountability in the security system; the improvement of the delivery of security and justice services; the development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process; and the sustainability of justice and security service delivery. (The OECD, 2008, p. 21).

Since its inception in 2002, the Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan has served as the foundation for nation-building, democracy promotion, and national reconstruction. The high degree of insecurity, inadequate or dysfunctional institutional capacity, and apparent brain drain Nonetheless, over time, attempts to shift the agenda of the SSR have eroded the process of a comprehensive vision, with the emphasis shifting from ensuring democratic governance and accountability of the sector to maximising the effectiveness of the security apparatus (Sedra, 2007). In the ten years following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the SSR received substantial international support and billions of dollars in investments. Even though the country was unable to address its security issues until the Taliban's reemergence at the heart of the Afghan state, it was unable to do so (Murray, 2011).

In reality, donors from eight countries launched the SSR process in Afghanistan at a meeting in Geneva in the spring of 2002. The meeting established the framework for SSR's agenda and thus embarked on a multisectoral path. The SSR process consisted of five pillars, each of which was supervised by a donor nation. While the USwas in charge of military reform, Germany was at the forefront of police reform, Italy was in charge of judicial reform, Japan was in charge of the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants into society as productive citizens,

and the United Kingdom was responsible for counter-narcotics (Sedra, 2007). In addition, the process consisted of three distinct phases. The first one began in 2002 and concluded in 2007, and during this time there were multiple leaders in the sector. It concluded with the US declaring success in training the Afghan National Army (ANA) and moving on to train illiterate patrol-level police. Germany was also well-advanced in the reconstruction of the National Police Academy, despite the fact that police reform was not yet complete. Beginning the second phase was the admission that the focus should not be solely on rebuilding the army. However, reorganising the police was equally essential and crucial to the counterinsurgency mission. In 2007, the US shifted its focus to the police and invested two billion dollars in the police. The third phase also focused on police reform, beginning in 2008 after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the USincreased training initiatives after realising that the Afghan army lacked capability and was unable to operate independently, and that the police were in a state of disarray. This prompted international trainers to infuse the police with more vigour and develop a more systematic approach to military and, in particular, police training (Murray, 2011).

As part of the military reform, efforts were made to establish an ethnically diverse and faction-free Afghan National Army (AMA). 14 May 2002 marked the beginning of recruit training at the former military academy on the outskirts of Kabul. Approximately 28,000 ANA recruits had completed the programme by September 2005. The army was stipulated to have 43,000 ground troops, 3,000 air force personnel, 3,000 general staff personnel, 21,000 support staff, and 70,000 ANA personnel. In the case of police reform, Germany went to great lengths to reinvent the existing police force, which was predominantly composed of untrained Mujahidin fighters. Germany renovated the National Police Academy, which provided training for commissioned and non-commissioned officers lasting, respectively, 2,5 years and 90 days. The UScreated a Constabulary Training Programme to train rank-and-file police at a Central Training Centre established at the beginning of 2003 and at seven Regional Training Centres located in Jalalabad, Paktia, Kunduz, Mazar-i Sharif, Kandahar, Bamiyan, and Herat (Sedra, 2007).

In addition, the anti-drug campaign began when the Afghan government, along with the United Kingdom and the US, introduced a comprehensive anti-drug plan with eight pillars. For judicial reform, it began in December 2003 with the creation of a new constitution that emphasised the importance of an activist and

independent judiciary. The reform also resulted in the adoption of an Interim Criminal Procedure Code, a Juvenile Code, and a draught Penitentiary Law; the completion of a collection of laws; the training of more than 500 judges and prosecutors; the renovation of strategic court facilities; and the promotion of significant reform in the institutions of justice. The objective of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDR) process was to eliminate active military outlets in order to foster an environment conducive to development and reconstruction. Another objective of the process was to demilitarise the country and facilitate its transition from a wartime economy to a peaceful economy by demobilising ex-combatants and reintegrating them into civilian life (Sedra 2007). Regardless, the SSR process in Afghanistan was plagued by both endogenous and exogenous flaws. Numerous commanders incorporated their tribesmen into the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), and National Directorate of Security (NDS) (NDS). Consequently, a disproportionate number of ethnic Tajiks and former *Jamiat-e-Islami* militias were disproportionately represented within the ANA and ANP. This occurred despite the fact that there was a policy prohibiting the institution from being populated by a single ethnic group and mandating that ethnic groups be proportionally represented. The Afghan army had more than 1,000 generals, which resulted in the Afghan army having a far more advanced and superior army than the US (Arif, 2017). This was exacerbated by the fact that in 2014, attrition rates among the Afghan police skyrocketed as rebel forces targeted police officers by planting roadside bombs or by improvising explosive devices (Allen, 2021). In 2012, more than 70 military personnel were murdered by their Afghan allies, marking a new low point.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

In the immediate weeks following the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, mainstream US media suddenly realised what alternative media, such as left-leaning outlets, women's rights organisations, and large portions of the media in Europe had been saying for five years: that the Taliban regime not only oppressed but also murdered women. President George W. Bush subsequently referred to these women under Taliban rule as "cover women." The New York Times magazine (in a feature article that said nothing about women), Business Week, Newsweek, Time, and other publications featured burqa-clad women as victims of the Taliban regime's abuse on their pages. In many ways, the serious attention given

to women by these legacy media outlets was a massive shift, given that the plights of Afghan women had not been featured in their outlets nor received serious attention from Washington policymakers for a very long time (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 765).

Meanwhile, the question of what role women should play in Afghan society has been the subject of a protracted tug-of-war between forces from two opposing ideologies: the urban-based elite with modernization tendencies versus the more conservative forces, led by the Islamic Ulema (religious leaders) and the various tribal formations bound by customary law. This ideological conflict reached a fever pitch in the 20th century, particularly during the communist drift in Afghanistan, when the emancipation of Afghan women was at the forefront of that regime's agenda. With the defeat of the communist forces against the mujahidin, aided by the US and its allies, the conservative forces seized control of Afghanistan, ushering in a period of unprecedented lawlessness and flagrant violation of human rights. The Taliban forces, composed primarily of ethnic Pashtuns who account for more than 40 percent of the country's population, overthrew the mujahidin-dominated regime and subsequently implemented the most conservative version of Sharia law. Under the Taliban regime, women were denied the right to work, relegated to the margins of society and confined to their homes, and denied access to education, healthcare, and the ability to earn a living. Under these circumstances, the US-led NATO intervention of Afghanistan in 2001 occurred, displacing the Taliban and installing an interim government (Kolhatkar, 2002; Kabeer & Khan, 2014).

Unquestionably, the US-led intervention altered the outlook of many Afghan women. Despite the fact that women were selected by male delegates in an undemocratic manner to participate in the Bonn Conference, the mere fact that they were at the table and exercising their agency was a watershed moment, as women who opposed the Taliban and went to great lengths to defend women's rights added dynamism to the discussions (Kolhatkar, 2002). The agreement resulted in a constitution that protected the rights of women and outlined the principles of equality. In 2002, both a Ministry of Women's Affairs and an Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) were established. Donor-targeted projects also help to instil confidence in women (Kabeer & Khan, 2014). This was also bolstered by loans granted to women to combat poverty and foster entrepreneurial growth. These were also extremely significant interventions, albeit interest rate-related. In 2009, a bill was proposed that would criminalise violence against women. Millions of Afghan

girls were enrolled in school by 2014. According to a report by the United Nations (UN) Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 26% of Afghanistan's population was literate, of which 12% were women. During the same time period, 28 percent of Afghan parliament members were female, a higher proportion than in the parliaments of the United Kingdom and Ireland (Paul, 2014). Despite the fact that the US-led intervention brought some sanity to Afghan women, full-scale emancipation, which the rhetoric from George Bush, Jr. and his wife Laura Bush, the latter of whom was drafted on US airwaves to exaggerate the positive effects the intervention would have for women, thus declaring "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" did not achieve, has yet to occur (McBride & Wibben, 2012, p. 201). In the period between the two wars, the literature on gender equality has not provided a ringing endorsement of gender equality for the average Afghan woman. For instance, according to the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (AFDHS), 80% of women and 72% of men (aged 15–49 and married) believed that it was acceptable for a woman to be beaten by her husband in certain circumstances, especially if she leaves the house without informing her husband. An early estimate of psychological IPV derived from research conducted with 4,700 women in 16 of the 34 provinces revealed that 73.9% of women had experienced physical IPV in the preceding year. The study also found that being in a forced marriage, being in a polygamous marriage, being married at age 15 and living in a rural area, among other risk factors, led women to experience IPV (Gibbs, Shafiq, Marofi, Mecagnu, Mann, & Jewkes, 2018).

Afghan nationalism a fundamental problem for US-led Liberal Interventionism

Afghanistan has been dubbed the "graveyard of empires" due to the failures of foreign interventionist efforts, including British, Soviet, and, most recently, US efforts since the Global War on Terror. Although the motivations for foreign intervention in the country vary depending on the intervening countries: the British to advance their imperial ambitions; the Soviet Union to install a pro-communist government; and the US to flush out Al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime that sheltered them; and also to ensure that Afghanistan is not used as a safe haven for terrorists to launch attacks against the US and its facilities around the world. However, the majority of the literature on this intervention has focused on the structure of the Afghan state: its geographical unsuitability, ravaging tribal divisions, backwardness,

and, at times, Afghan nationalism. Even if foreign forces achieve initial success and continue to make inroads, it is only a matter of time before nationalist Afghan resistance turns the tide against the interventionist forces (Pillalamarri, 2017). Foreign interventionists are not the only victims of these realities of the Afghan state. These facts prevent the Afghan state from conforming to Max Weber's classic definition of the state as a human community that exercises the monopoly of violence within a specific territory (Lieven, 2021).

According to Benjamin Hopkins (2022), in Afghanistan, nationalism is a potent social and political identity current. In contrast to other societies, Afghan nationalism is horizontal and independent of the state. As a result, it is not identified with the state, which explains why the state is fragile. This fragility, however, is the reason why foreign intervention initiatives have not penetrated the country. Afghanistan's government has been conceptually and physically constrained. In the beginning, its responsibilities were interpreted in a narrow sense, primarily in the context of taxation and security. This indicates that the state asserts its authority without exercising it, knowing that doing so would expose its weakness. In the second instance, the Afghan state did not extend its authority to the countryside until 1978, during the Saur Revolution. In light of this, excluding the communist parenthesis, the gulf between the Afghan political state and the Afghan people has become glaringly apparent. It was the assertion of state power in the name of the people that sparked widespread resistance and precipitated the December 1979 Soviet intervention (Hopkins, 2022). For Prakhar Sharma (2020), Afghanistan is indeed a pluralistic concept. Throughout the years of political transitions and experiments, a conglomeration of contradictions and collusions has reached a crescendo. This country's "imaginary nature" explains its ability to combine opposing forces.

The US invaded Afghanistan to crush al-Qaeda, remove the Taliban, and ensure that the country was not a safe haven for terrorists by spreading democracy against a backdrop of a long history of resistance to foreign intervention. The US failed to achieve this objective to a significant degree, resulting in the loss of countless lives and the destruction of the political and social fabric of the country. It was challenging in nations with strong nationalist sentiments whose leadership has been deposed. To add insult to injury, the US had to deal with a culture that had no credentials for practising liberal democracy. In terms of how the US and its NATO

allies engage in social engineering, this fueled nationalist sentiment and increased resistance against the occupying forces (Mearsheimer, 2019).

In addition, the US intervention was doomed from the beginning. The notion that one political form would dominate the entire world, which would be imposed by a global hegemon, was so counterintuitive and fantastical, as there is no consensus on which political form is optimal for human flourishing and social progress. During the 1930s, when various forms of government—communism, socialism, fascism, and liberal democracy—spread across the globe, this stark reality was on full display. Different states continue to experiment with various forms of government. Iran is modifying a theocracy. North Korea is a totalitarian state. Eastern Europe is experiencing a resurgence of illiberal democracies. China and Russia each have their own political systems. In addition to this distinct political structure, half of the world's nations have never been liberal democracies. This diversity of perspectives regarding which system is most compatible with Afghan nationalism made it difficult for the US to impose liberal democracy on a population that had achieved international renown for its fervent nationalism (Mearsheimer, 2019).

People with nationalist fervor have resisted foreign intervention throughout history. 1953 saw a rise in antipathy between Iran and the US as a result of US support for the Shah. This would cause anti-American sentiments to fester, resulting in the hostage crisis. When the US intervened in Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai became the country's leader (Mearsheimer, 2018). Afghans had the impression that his emergence as a leader did not occur naturally. He was instead elected president and supported by foreigners. In fact, when the Taliban were deposed and guerrilla warfare was initiated, the Taliban used the issue of resistance to occupation to recruit new members. They explained that the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan constitutes an assault on what it means to be an Afghan. Others decided that joining the Taliban was the best way to defend their honour, country, and religion. In addition, nationalism, the source of self-determination, encourages countries and their citizens to resist foreign intervention (Mearsheimer, 2018).

In this analysis, attempts to impose democracy on a country that was not already democratic have typically failed. Andrew Enterline and J. Michael Greig examined 43 instances of democratic regimes between 1800 and 1994. According to the study, approximately 63 failed. From 1946 to 1996, Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny examined the effects of the democratisation initiatives of foreign

interventions by liberal democratic states. They concluded that liberal intervention in democratisation has been rare since 1945. Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten argue that it is possible to impose democracy on a foreign nation if internal conditions are favourable. (2018) (Mearsheimer).

In conclusion, nationalism is a potent force that unites people under the banner of a nation but can tear nations or states apart in an international context. However, nationalism creates bonds among citizens, leading them to feel superior to others. In this perspective, outsiders are perceived as threats. In contrast to liberalism's universalist worldview, nationalism prioritises particularism. Nationalism is driven by the human tendency to prioritise the group, which has both neurological and evolutionary roots. These two factors contribute significantly to the tendency to view outsiders with suspicion. Nationalists believe that those who are different are more dangerous and threatening (Powers, 2022). Perhaps its true virtue is its vice. Its sense of brotherhood among strangers who are considered citizens is irresistible (Farer, 2003).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In international politics, the US' history is rife with efforts to maintain order and stability in the post-Second World War era. However, these Cold War policies have not progressed as planned, as their objectives have not been met. Two basic examples of these policies include the most recent efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Taliban, the very group the US-led intervention was intended to eliminate, returned to power as the US and its allies were in the midst of evacuating Afghanistan 20 years after the intervention began, with many lives lost, billions spent on projects, and initiatives that failed to achieve the desired results.

Afghanistan is consequently once again in a dire strait. In numerous ways, the withdrawal from Afghanistan conforms to the well-established pattern of US policy toward the global South. Since the 1940s, when the US became a global superpower, Washington's policy toward Asian, African, and Latin American nations has oscillated between two extremes. In the first instance, the US has moved heaven and earth to socially engineer countries in those regions in order to transform them into liberal societies with a democratic form of government, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Notwithstanding, during the Cold War, when realpolitik was the only game in town, the US supported illiberal and dictatorial regimes in order to maintain stability in those regions (Manela, 2022).

The 9/11 attacks provided the impetus for the intervention in Afghanistan, which led to the launch of Operation Enduring Action. The initial objective of the operation was to eliminate the terrorist threat and overthrow the regime that provided it sanctuary. Then, the US provided Afghans with humanitarian aid and support of some sort. Bush's initial opposition to nation-building, which was the hallmark of the Clinton Doctrine and dates back to the Wilsonian tradition in US foreign policy circles, was rooted in his political realism, a tradition strongly associated with traditional Republicans. However, the administration's perspective shifted when it became widely understood that exporting liberal democracy and nation-building would prevent the resurgence of terrorists and bring Afghanistan into the fold of civilised nations. In pursuing this objective, as it did in the 1980s, the US selected its allies on the basis of their willingness to assist in the eradication of US enemies and the transition to stability and security in the country (Rubin, 2007).

In reality, the US-led intervention had numerous positive aspects: the efforts to revive the country following a protracted civil war were commendable. It was also commendable to ensure that the state began to function and exercise a monopoly of violence over the country's territorial integrity. While some were more interested in imposing predetermined templates and employing one-size-fits-all strategies without regard for the unique circumstances and conditions of the people, the concept of assisting the nation in finding its footing in transformation is, in principle, commendable. Human rights and development indicators improved in the central Asian nation under US oversight (Paris, 2013). Consequently, Charles A. Kupchan (2021) asserts:

The case for withdrawal is also buttressed by the reality that even if the US has fallen short on the nation-building front, it has achieved its primary strategic goal: preventing future attacks on America or its allies from Afghan territory. The US and its coalition partners have decimated al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The same goes for the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, which has demonstrated no ability to carry out transnational attacks from Afghanistan. The US and its allies are today much harder targets than they were on Sept. 11, 2001. Al-Qaida has not been able to carry out a major overseas attack since the bombings in London in 2005 (Kupchan, 2021, para. 6).

Although there are some positive aspects to the US-led intervention, a quick examination of the expenditures raises questions about the strategic reasoning behind these expenditures. A recent report by the Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found that between 2001 and 2021, the US invested approximately $946 billion. There was close to $1 trillion in expenditures that benefited only a small number of people. This is due to the fact that $816 billion (or 86 percent) of the $946 billion was designated for military expenditures for US troops (Sachs, 2021). The Afghan people only saw a small portion of the $130 billion, as $83 billion was spent on Afghan security forces. Ten billion dollars was spent to combat drug trafficking, while fifteen billion dollars went to US agencies operating in the central Asian nation. This indicates that only 21 billion dollars were available to support economic recovery. Despite spending that amount of money, the Afghan economy was in a deplorable state when the US left. In a nutshell, less than 2% of US infrastructure spending or policies aimed at ensuring economic dignity reached Afghans. After 20 years of intervention, the US left the country with a life expectancy of 63 years, a child stunting rate of 38%, and a mortality rate of 638 per 100,000 births (Sachs, 2021).

In terms of economic strategy, US policy adhered to neoliberal prescriptions, with an emphasis on free market promotion, which has been crucial to the Western paradigm of economic thought and has so aggravated the cultural, political, and economic marginalisation of countries of the South (Greeta & Nair, 2013). Despite the fact that this strategy helped to connect the population to international markets, it had a number of drawbacks and hampered efforts to promote indigenous, organic economic growth and development. For instance, the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) approach to the cotton sector in Afghanistan exemplifies

such ideological rigidity toward economic transformation. USAID rejected requests to invest in Afghanistan's cotton industry because it lacked confidence in the country's ability to compete in the global market. First, the policy did not result in the Afghan people exercising economic freedom or in the formation of an indigenous bourgeoisie. FDI was prioritised for extractivism through the mining of minerals, as was the case in the majority of post-colonial states. Consequently, 97 percent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product was derived from international donor-related activity (Dodge, 2021).

Meanwhile, even on the democratic front, the record of the US and the administrations that it supported were found wanting. This is even against the backdrop that the quest of peace and stability were shared by considerable section of the Afghan society, at least in the urban areas. However, the democratic project suffered from some setbacks. As like all externally driven democratization process against hazy timetables and established institutions, it was never grounded in the traditional institution of the Afghan state and the process itself was conducted when hostility was also going on, with also the benefits of democracy promotion failing to reach the ordinary people. Part of the problem was also because the US intervention relied on one-fit-in-all prescription rather than focusing on the peculiar condition of the Afghan society. In light of this, procedural processes such as the holding of regular elections, no matter how flawed and fraudulent, was shown as signifier of democratic process. The asymmetric of reconstruction and the lack of transformation in the lives of the ordinary Afghan masses led to wanning of support for the democratic project and thus for the intervention, thereby playing into the hands of social forces hellbent on scuttling the democratic march (Tadjbakhsh & Schoiswohl, 2008).

Another reason why the democratization failed was because the international consensus failed the liberal peace framework, which since the mid-1990s took it bearings from the Kantian notion for the simultaneous opening up of the economic and political spaces, highlighting the connection between economic interdependence and political democracy, favorable for promoting international peace. With this notion of liberal peace, the reform measures rather were in line with international consideration than domestic proclivities. So, the reforms were not organic but imposition from outside based on the formula of liberal democracy, liberal market

economy, and good governance, with no or with little or no regard to local context (Tadjbakhsh & Schoiswohl, 2008).

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Michael Schoiswohl (2008), early on identified four impediments to US-led democratization in Afghanistan. The two authors named the absence of popular endorsement of the project, the absence of socioeconomic development, the absence of reconciliation, and the continuation of war. For the first problem, they argued that while periodic reports have been churned out, the lack of domestic institution driven by the Afghan people, a problem which emerged as a result of the Bonn Framework, the Afghan Compact and all other blueprints on democracy in the country was more about process rather than substance thereby creating a disconnect with the social realties of ordinary people and thus became top-down approaches. On the question of the second, they decried the lack of middle class to midwife the democratic process and point also to rampant inequalities as banes against the democratic breakthrough. The third point for their argument is that the US and the international coalition adopted total ambivalence towards the Taliban, including the ally of the latter, the Mujahedin. The four issue they raised that the continuation of war and the way the counter-insurgency operation was embarked on undermine any attempt at long-term democratic consolidation. Part of it also lie with the changing themes of the intervention in Afghanistan, as overtime objective mutated.

But as Thomas A Koelble & Edward Lipuma (2008) stated in their piece, the problem with Western democracy promotion, premised on liberal peacebuilding, in the postcolonies, including Afghanistan is that it is both a-historical and a-cultural because such paradigm doesn't take into consideration different cultures and histories produce different democracies. And that conventional measuring standards don't offer sufficient grounds to measure progress concerning the march towards democracy in the post-colonies. Hence suffice it to mean that one of the reasons that the US-led democracy promotion and, by extension, liberal interventionism failed because it did not take into consideration conditions on the ground for the germination of democratic governance across the postcolonial states vary from the realties in Euro-America. It thus also follows those key values of democratic states, specifically citizenship, belonging, inclusivity, moral support that serve as the bedrock of Euro-American democracy cannot just be presupposed in the manner and form that they are used in the orthodox measuring model.

Ensuring that women regain their dignity, reclaimed control over their bodies, and participated constructively in the democratic process was definitely the stuff of development. However, the gender empowerment rhetoric or the gender question was founded on a hegemonic discourse and an approach that objectified the burqa-wearing Afghan women as lacking agency. The prominence of the burqa as a sign of oppression, showing a lack of agency, and the following attempt to portray the intervention on removing the head covering as crucial to women's liberation served to maintain the stereotype of Muslim women of the South. This story played a significant role in gaining support for the US intervention and was a fundamental component of the misguided strategy to empower Afghan women. Although Afghan women were obliged to wear the burqa, the Taliban's abhorrent sexist practises did not begin and finish with the burqa. Therefore, using the burqa as a stand-in for other forms of violence is a verbal and visual synecdoche (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). Chandra Mohanty argues that the practise of merely veiling women in a number of Muslim countries depicts the universal subjugation and oppression of women through the act of sexual segregation, which is both analytically reductive and ineffective as it relates to the development of an oppositional political strategy (Ayotte & Husain, 2005).

While the Taliban required women to wear the burqa to demonstrate piety and religious devotion, other women wore it voluntarily and utilised it to further emancipatory acts. In the narrative, for instance, such a distinction was not made, hence the attempt to address the women's question. The western approach did little to address the overall issues that Afghan women faced, other than focusing on covering, without examining fundamental issues such as structural imbalances, which are a result of the egregious patriarchal practises that permeate the country's economic realm and are exacerbated by neoliberal economic practises. Realistically, the pursuit of gender security and equality must address the various ways in which globalised finance capital and asymmetrical interactions between the North and the South have led to inequality and the bestalization of women. During the height of the Cold War, the USsponsored Islamic fundamentalists who opposed the Soviet Union and enacted severe laws that stripped women of their dignity, which contributed to the deterioration of women's living conditions (Ayotte & Husain, 2005).

A second reason why gender empowerment did not produce the desired results was that the entire approach to women's empowerment was Ngoised, and thus

iNGOS set the tone and framework for the approach, largely without the participation of Afghan women and also without regard for the reality on the ground. The usage of templates created by neoliberal think tanks that were thoroughly established in western society contributed to the overall failure of the women empowerment strategy. The lesson from other post-conflict nations preceding Afghanistan is that the material oppression of women cannot be reduced to a mere collection of floating signifiers (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). It is precisely this method that the postcolonial approach confronts head-on, allowing us to oppose prevailing narratives of representation and engendering counter-hegemonic for representation (D'costa, 2016).

Considering the number of lives lost during the years of US-led intervention and the number of Afghans uprooted from their villages and towns, it was anticipated that the dark period of authoritarianism would soon be a thing of the past. That their lives would improve as a result of the US rescuing them from the monstrous Taliban regime and replacing it with a liberal democratic order that respects the rule of law, political pluralism, and civil liberties. Some individuals became optimistic and looked forward to a future of love, prosperity, and equality in light of this promise. As a result of the dawn of a new day, women and girls have attended school, and some have earned advanced degrees. However, after twenty years in Afghanistan in which liberal norms such as humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect have been utterly discredited (Paikin, 2021), the Afghan population has been given a country in which the Taliban have returned to power, which is *not*, in fact, a liberal democracy.

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Appendix A
Ethics Committee Approval Form

YAKIN DOĞU ÜNİVERSİTESİ

BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMALAR ETİK KURULU

26.10.2022

Dear Alfred KİADİİ

Your project **"Revisiting Us Liberal Interventionism In Afghanistan: Challenges And Prospects"** has been evaluated. Since only secondary data will be used the

project it does not need to go through the ethics committee. You can start your research on the condition that you will use only secondary data.

Prof. Dr. Aşkın Kiraz
Rapporteur of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B

Turnitin Similarity Report

Revisiting US Liberal Interventionism in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospect

Yazar Alfred Kiadii

Gönderim Tarihi: 23-Eki-2022 01:20PM (UTC+0300)
Gönderim Numarası: 1932758437
Dosya adı: Alfred_Kiadii_Thesis_22.10.22.doc (332K)
Kelime sayısı: 30825
Karakter sayısı: 179950

ALFRED P. B.
KIADII

REVISITING US LIBERA
INTERVENTIONISM IN
CHALLENGES AND PRO

NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Revisiting US Liberal Interventionism in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospect