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The Post-9/11 US-Led State-Building in Afghanistan

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Abstract: Following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, the US shed much blood and spent enormous funds in the country as part of its “War on Terror” as well as for reconstruction and institution-building there. As the US intervention in Afghanistan mainly focused on dismantling Al-Qaeda and toppling the Taliban regime, it also aimed at establishing a functioning state. Along the way, US policy makers also made a number of mistakes which undermined the US-led international coalition’s own stated mission and goals. Thus, after spending around two decades in Afghanistan, the US failed to fully achieve its desired objectives. Based on a literature review, this paper discusses the reasons why the US-led state-building efforts in Afghanistan achieved limited success. It aims to reveal the US’ miscalculations and mistakes in Afghanistan from the perspective of three major components of state-building, i.e. Security and Peace; Democratization; and Reconstruction & Economic Development.

Keywords: State-building, United States, Afghanistan, security, reconstruction, democratization

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1. Introduction

In response to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States (US) launched its military operation in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 called “Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)”. This has already become the longest war in the history of the United States. According to the then U.S. President George W. Bush, “Our war on terror begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” (Bush 2001) Bush declared that OEF was designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations.

By late 2003, however, the Bush administration became more assertive in its efforts to institutionalize democracy in Afghanistan and began to expand its strategic

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thinking and construct what became known as the 'Freedom Agenda' (FA) (Hassan and Hammond 2011: 511–532). This initiative was part of the wider US' strategy to promote democracy in the wider region.

Years later, on August 21, 2017, President Donald Trump, while announcing the US strategy for South Asia and Afghanistan said, "America will work with the Afghan government as long as we see determination and progress" (Trump 2017). Despite various plans and by different US administrations over the past years, Afghanistan still remains an unfinished project of the US' foreign policy.

The argument I present here explores why the US was not able to carry on a successful state-building agenda in Afghanistan. Although the US spent a huge amount of treasure and blood in the country to help to re-build state institutions and critical infrastructure, the miscalculation of and mistakes by US policy largely undermined the stated mission in Afghanistan. Thus, despite its military and diplomatic role in Afghanistan over the past nearly two decades, a number of factors are revealed in the paper that prevented the US to achieve its desired goals. Based on the literature review, the paper has evaluated the shortcomings of US policy in Afghanistan from the perspective of three major components of state-building i.e. Security and Peace; Democratization; and Reconstruction & Economic Development.

2. Theoretical framework

State-building has several forms when it comes to the theories of International Relations, which include liberal, neoliberal, democratic, humanitarian, etc., however, in general terms, state-building is the activity of building or strengthening the institutions and infrastructure of a weak or failing state, typically by a foreign power. There are some common indicators that are lumped under the state-building i.e. peace-building, post conflict reconstruction, and long-term economic and political development. This process basically encompasses two different types of activities: reconstruction and development. Reconstruction refers to the restoration of war-torn or damaged societies to their pre-conflict situation. While economic development refers to the creation of new institutions and the promotion of sustained economic growth, events that transform the society open-endedly into something that it has not been previously (Fukuyama 2006: 4–5).

There are three distinct aspects or phases to state-building. The first concerns what has come to be called post-conflict reconstruction and applies to countries emerging from violent conflict such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Kosovo, where state authority has collapsed completely and needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Here the issue for outside powers is the short-term provision of stability through infusions of security forces, police, humanitarian relief, and technical assistance to restore electricity, water, banking and payment systems, and so on. If the collapse state is lucky enough to achieve a modicum of stability with international help (as in the case of Bosnia), the second phase

comes into play. Here the chief objective is to create self-sustaining state institutions that can survive the withdrawal of outside intervention. The third phase has to do with the strengthening of weak states, where state authority exists in a reasonably stable form but cannot accomplish certain necessary state functions (Fukuyama 2005: 135-136).

State-building is not just a creation of a monopoly over power in a territory; it is also to develop a particular form of authority that will fulfil specific, market-supporting tasks. The blurring of weak/failed/collapsed states means that this vision can be applied anywhere: whatever the problem, democratic state-building is the solution. The problem with this, of course, is that it telescopes state development, democratic development and market development into simultaneous, or near simultaneous, processes (Robinson 2007: 13).

The context in which the contemporary agenda for state-building has developed is the post-Cold War world. The evolving international system after the Cold War has both created the perceived need for state-building and has given state-building its particular, simplified character. The boundary between cause – what has led to state-building's increased prominence in international politics – and effect – what state-building is imagined to be in the theory and practice – is often not all that distinct (Robinson 2007: 2-3).

2.1. State-building vs. nation-building

There is much confusion over the terms State-building and Nation Building both in the academic literature and political scenario. Some authors use these terms interchangeably while others use with different meanings. Europeans often criticize Americans for the use of the term nation-building, reflecting as it does the specifically American experience of constructing a new political order in a land of new settlement without deeply rooted peoples, cultures, and traditions. Nations – that is to say, communities of shared values, traditions, and historical memory – by this argument are never built, particularly by outsiders; rather, they evolve out of an unplanned historical-revolutionary process. What Americans refer to as nation-building is rather state-building – that is, constructing political institutions, or else promoting economic development (Fukuyama 2006: 3).

As Afghans are generally of the view that they have been a nation for centuries, therefore, the term state-building is usually used in order to remove any confusion. This refers to the developmental strategies to not only restore and rebuild the institutions and state apparatus to the pre-war level before the conflict began with the Soviet invasion in 1979 but also to develop and sustain the security, and political and economic growth of the country. However, the post 9/11 US involvement in Afghanistan is highlighted in the paper from the perspective of state-building process.

2.2. Components of state-building

State-building is one of the most important issues for the international community because weak or failed states are the source of many of the world's most serious problems, from poverty to AIDS to drugs and terrorism (Fukuyama 2005: xvii). Security is an essential precondition for a successful state-building. Money spent on infrastructure and development will be largely wasted if people, goods, and services are subjects to high level attacks. Soldiers are among the first elements of any state-building mission to arrive. Their first priority, however, should be to establish a modicum of security in what may be a chaotic situation. Once a minimal level of security has been established, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants should be the next priority. Armed units should be broken up, and individuals should be offered alternative livelihoods (Dobbins et al. 2007: xxiv–xxv).

As regards physical infrastructure, the intervening authorities should give priority to fixing those related to security, finance, humanitarian aid, health care, education, power, water, and sanitation in an effort to raise these services to something approaching pre-war level (Dobbins et al. 2007: xxxiii).

State-building intervention should leave behind a society at peace with itself and its neighbors. In this context, the process of democratization should be seen as a practical means of redirecting the ongoing competition for wealth and power within the society from violent into peaceful channels, not as an abstract exercise in social justice. National and local elections; the growth of civil society; the establishment of independent media; the development of political parties; and key state institutions such as military/police, judiciary and parliament needs to be ensued as part of state-building (Dobbins et al. 2007: xxxvi–xxxvii).

3. US-led state-building in Afghanistan

The US has led a number of state-building initiatives in various parts of the world for more than a century starting in Cuba from 1898 and followed by many other cases including Afghanistan and Iraq. Starting in 2001, the state-building in Afghanistan remains the US' unfinished project. The early major goal of the US-led state-building efforts, in most cases, has been strategic. In its first efforts, the US usually decided to replace or support a regime in a foreign land to defend its core security and economic interests, not to build a democracy. Only later did the US' political ideals and its need to sustain domestic support for state-building abroad impel it to try to establish democratic rule in the target nations. The deployment of large number of US ground troops is the US's second criterion of state-building. The third criterion of American state-building is the use of U.S. military and civil personnel in the military and political administration of target countries (Pei, Amin and

Garz 2006: 64–65). Afghanistan, as a US state-building case study, lies in the third criterion.

The post 9/11 US intervention in Afghanistan was the beginning of the US’ “War on Terror” rather than a humanitarian intervention. The US’ prime target was to defeat and dismantle the Al-Qaeda network and topple the Taliban regime which had provided safe havens to the former group. Part of the reason for the lack of interest in humanitarian intervention stemmed from the fact that, to a large extent, the issue was no longer *should* an intervention take place, but rather what should be done *post*-intervention. Hence, state-building replaced humanitarian intervention – the issue around which the debate regarding the merits, morality and legality of Western interventionism coalesced (Hehir 2007: 186). Thus, the US state-building policy in Afghanistan was evidently secondary to the requirements of the military actions against al Qaeda and the remaining Taliban (Spanta 2005: 75). The US led state-building process had several shortcomings from the very beginning thus the paper has analyzed the US’ miscalculations and mistakes in Afghanistan from the perspective of three major components of state-building ranging from the security and peace to the democratization and the reconstructions & economic development.

3.1. Security and peace

State-building in Afghanistan is directly linked to stability, development and ensuring peace. Achieving peace requires an overall strategy that takes equal account of the elements of state-building, the economy, the social situation, the environment and peace. Any one-sided emphasis on a single component will create further problems now and for the future (Spanta 2005: 79).

At the Group of Eight (G8) major donors’ conference in Geneva in April 2002, the Security Sector Reform agenda for Afghanistan was formally set with the establishment of the lead-nation system, which consisted of five pillars each led and supported by a major donor state. The US took on the role of building the Afghan National Army (ANA), while Germany became the lead nation for reconstructing the police force. Similarly, Italy became the lead country for judiciary, Japan for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants and the UK for counter-narcotics. However, no proper mechanism was established to harmonize the activities of the lead nations or to build synergies among them (Hodes and Sedra 2007: 52).

There is no doubt that a mantra of nation-builders is “security first,” but in Afghanistan, too few troops on the ground pursuing a mission that was too narrowly defined (winning the global war on terror rather than fostering successful state-building) allowed various warlords, opium and heroin smugglers, retro- and neo-Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamist militants, as well as concomitant corruption to return (Goodson 2006: 148–149).

A first rule of warfare is to know one's enemy, his strengths and weaknesses, as well as his assets and liabilities. A second might be to know thyself: to frankly assess one's biases and assumptions and to evaluate their impact on both goals and tactics. In Afghanistan, the US followed neither rule well (O'Connell 2017: 7–8).

The state-building endeavors of the international players in Afghanistan also suffer from conceptional problems and do not display any uniform strategy. While the US makes its overall policy dependent on the military requirements of the war on terror – also seeking close cooperation with the warlords in this respect – and sees the state building project as pushing through the principles of a neoliberal market economy, the Europeans, especially Germany, place their faith mainly in the NGOs. This means that an attempt is being made to accomplish state-building with inappropriate instruments and players acting against each other. The declared goal of the international community is to strengthen the central government, enabling it to assert its monopoly of force throughout the country and carry out its responsibilities. However, its power is very limited, restricted primarily by that of the warlords, who are paradoxically supported by the US (Spanta 2005: 77).

3.1.1. US' support to warlords

The US provided huge sums of money and weapons to the former *mujahideen*-turned warlords after 9/11 as part of its war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The US assistance to Afghan warlords continued after the fall of the Taliban regime and the dismantling of the al-Qaeda network in the country. With the US' support, these warlords, who had been defeated or expelled by the Taliban, came back to power after fall of the Taliban regime and started intimidating the people and corrupting the newly built state institutions.

The anti-Taliban coalition of Afghan commanders was commonly known as the Northern Alliance (NA) due to its location and operation in the north of the country. General Tommy Franks, the then Commander-in-Chief of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) writes in his book, *American Soldier*, that NA commanders were more than eager to work with the Americans. General Franks states: "Our plan hinged on combining these tough, highly motivated opposition fighters with the Coalition's massive air power. To do so, however, we had to have a Special Forces team—Operational Detachments Alpha (ODA)—with each of the local Northern Alliance commanders." (Franks 2004)

After the death of the NA's most powerful commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud, on 9 September 2001, its leadership devolved on four tough, mutually suspicious commanders. Muhammad Fahim Khan, seconded by Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, headed the eastern Tajiks. Ismail Khan in the west (mainly Herat) commanded a second Tajik contingent. Abdul Rashid Dostum led the Uzbek militia. Karim Khalili and Mohammad

Mohaqq ran the Hazara element. Together, they mustered around 20,000 fighters (Bolger 2014: 41–42).

On 27 September 2001, a CIA officer named Gary led ten paramilitary officers into Afghanistan and took with him \$3 million in nonsequential \$100 bills that he carried in a large steel suitcase. He would place bundles of cash in front of these anti-Taliban commanders and ask for their help in preparing the way for US Special Forces. He wanted the positions of enemy forces and intelligence on their communications, arms, and structure in exchange for money (Kessler 2003: 237). Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the official name given by the US government to its Global War on Terrorism in Afghanistan, started on 7 October, 2001. By 7 December 2001, it was almost all over. The CIA had spent \$70 million on getting the NA commanders and a number of tribal elders to promote to Agency's goals (Kessler 2003: 238–239).

The coalition armed and funded Afghan commanders to seize and hold ground after the Taliban and al-Qaeda fled the U.S. air offensive. Some of these commanders used the money and arms they received to invest in drug production and engage in land grabs, predation, political intimidation, and ethnic retributions—a major source of insecurity for Afghans (Rubin 2013: 229).

Warlordism was perhaps the most persistent challenge of the post-Taliban period in Afghanistan. As Zalmay Khalilzad, the former US envoy and later ambassador to Afghanistan during 2001–2005 writes in his book, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey Through a Turbulent World*, that President Karzai vented with great emotion about the threat of warlordism. Karzai worried that as people tired of insecurity or oppression by their local strongmen, they might again welcome the Taliban or others who promised them justice and peace. The difficulty was that the United States was working with the warlords. The warlords had carried the burden of the ground campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda and, in the absence of anything like an effective national army, were still needed to take on the insurgents (Khalilzad 2016: 136–137).

Then in Spring 2002, Pacha Khan Zadran, a tribal elder and warlord in Afghanistan's eastern Paktia province had threatened President Karzai to launch a civil war if he was not recognized as the provincial governor by the central government. Karzai rejected his demand and issued an ultimatum to Zadran on 30 April to surrender or face the consequences. However, the US Department of Defense was apparently not ready to support Karzai against a local warlord. The US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sent a memo to President Bush and wrote that if Karzai could not prevail against local forces without American military assistance, he could not survive politically anyway. According to Rumsfeld: "I was convinced Karzai needed to learn to govern the Chicago way. In the 1960s, Mayor Richard J. Daley ruled Chicago – a city of many diverse and powerful elements- using maneuver, guile, money, patronage, and services to keep the city's fractious leaders from rebelling against his authority. President Bush agreed with my

recommendation, and I told Karzai he would have to resolve the dispute without the promise of rescue by the American military.” (Rumsfeld 2001: 407)

US officials’ determination to legalize warlord authority against the wishes of the Afghan political leadership and general public was one of the most fatal mistakes he was to make in Afghanistan. Karzai considered Rumsfeld’s statement an insult to all Afghans, and from that time on, he saw the secretary of defense as being completely out of touch with reality. As the war continued, the Bush administration was faced with two policy choices. It was clear by the summer of 2002 that the warlords were becoming stronger while the Karzai regime lacked the resources to compete. The unstated US strategy was to leave Karzai ineffectual in the capital, protected by foreign forces, while relying on the warlords to keep Pax Americana in the countryside and the US Special Operation Forces (SOF) to hunt down al Qaeda. It was a minimalist, military intelligence-driven strategy that ignored nation-building, creating state institutions, or rebuilding the country’s shattered infrastructure. By following such a strategy, the United States left everything in place from the Taliban era except for the fact of regime change (Rashid 2008: 133).

It gave the Taliban enough reasons to reorganize and launch an insurgency against the Afghan government and its international allies. In March 2002, disgruntled aid officials at the American embassy said that the CIA’s one billion US dollar budget was being used to pay off warlords and their militias, carry out quick-impact development projects, find al Qaeda leaders, and conduct classified operations against extremists. By the early summer 2002, 45,000 Afghan mercenaries were being paid by the CIA (Rashid 2008: 135–136).

The United Nations Special Representative for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi (2001–2004) wanted international troops rather than various militia forces to patrol Kabul and other major population centers. By contrast, Rumsfeld’s preference, which General Franks shared, was to continue to rely on the local warlords (Dobbins 2008: 128).

According to Kai Eide, the UN’s Special Representative to Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (2008–2010), President Hamid Karzai’s lack of power instruments and limited financial resources, and the clear message from his powerful ally – the US – that Washington would not engage, meant that he would have to move with great care. Karzai himself was aware of this fact and said: “We understood that the West would not help us free Afghanistan from an environment of warlordism. On the contrary, some were promoted and allowed to keep their militias, to enrich themselves, and to intimidate Afghan villagers. That led to my first disappointment with the West after the fall of the Taliban.” (Eide 2014: 9)

Gradually, they became more than warlords and military leaders. As foreign aid began to flow into the country – after a slow start – warlords and corrupt local leaders were the first to enrich themselves. Karzai added, “They formed contracting companies and received foreign contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars.” (Eide 2014: 9)

However, senior US officials and generals persisted in treating the warlords as the “heads of states”, inflating their egos even further. In September 2002 alone, The US Treasury Secretary, John Taylor, visited Ismail Khan (the former Mujahideen commander & the then Governor) in Herat; Under Secretary of defense and chief financial officer for the US Department of Defense Dov S. Zakheim met with Abdul Rashid Dostum (The Uzbek commander & the then Deputy Minister of Defense) and Atta Mohammad Noor (Tajik commander of Northern Alliance & the then Commander of 7th Corps of Northern Afghanistan) in Mazar, while Lt. Gen. Dan K. McNeill, the commander of US led Coalition forces, met with them all. In retrospect, the new US ambassador, Robert Finn, wondered if the U.S. could have done things differently: “We should have moved away from the warlords much earlier and we should have stopped visiting them. We should have supported the government more visibly. I stopped visiting Ismail Khan and Dostum, but Rumsfeld visited them several times.” (Rashid 2008: 142–143)

3.1.2. Standing on two watermelons

The US began another project in Iraq in 2003 when Afghan project was still in its beginning stages and was unfinished. This affected the state-building process, especially the security in Afghanistan.

The Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq was not just a disaster for Iraq and for the US, it also diverted military and intelligence resources and aid experts from Afghanistan and allowed the Taliban to regroup and resume the war. Sadly, we will never know what might have happened had the US and NATO kept their eyes on the ball back in 2003 (Walt 2014). The US’ neglect of Afghanistan from early 2003 allowed the Taliban to gradually seize control of key areas of the country, particularly in southern and eastern provinces (Zakheim 2011: 37). As it turned out, unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was not a “war of necessity” rather it was a “war of choice” for the US. In 2008, the then presidential candidate Barack Obama had run pledging to put Afghanistan back on course and win what many came to call “the good war,” in contrast to the disastrous war of choice in Iraq (Kerry 2018: 416). President Obama’s Secretary of State, John Kerry, described the invasion of Iraq as “the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.” Kerry (2018: 336)

3.1.3. Taliban’s safe havens in Pakistan

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were the only three countries that had recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Following the September 11 attacks, and the subsequent War on Terror (WoT), Pakistan was pressurized by the US to either join them in their WoT or to be prepared to be bombed and sent back to the stone-age (Synovitz 2006). Pakistan agreed to side with US and provided land routes, air space and other facilities to the US forces. Relations between Islamabad and Washington

strengthened after the US began pouring not only billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan but also naming it as a major non-NATO ally in 2002.

After the US began Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) on October 7, 2001 in Afghanistan, a large number of Taliban and Al-Qaeda commanders and the Al-Qaeda head, Osama Bin Laden, fled to neighboring Pakistan (Gall 2014: 61–62). The Pakistani spy agency ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) was accused of creating, supporting and financing various militant groups including the Taliban and LeT (Lashkar-e-Taiba) and use them against neighbouring countries especially Afghanistan and India. As various US officials themselves noted later, after 9/11, the ISI continued clandestine partnership with such groups while simultaneously assisting the US (Woodward 2010: 89).

The ISI helped the Afghan Taliban to reorganize and pushed them to go and fight inside Afghanistan. First hand interviews and eyewitness accounts say that ISI officials were threatening former fighters and commanders and their families with arrest, telling them that they would be handed over to the Americans and sent to Guantanamo Bay if they did not start an insurgency in Afghanistan (Gall 2014: 74). Even as the evidence mounted, neither President Bush nor any of the principals in the US administration were willing to acknowledge, much less act on, evidence of Pakistan's double game (Khalilzad 2016: 183–184).

The US Secretary of State Robert Gates writes in his book *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* that while the US was preoccupied with Iraq between 2002 and 2005, the Taliban reconstituted in western Pakistan and in southern and eastern Afghanistan. He writes: "Commander of ISAF General David McKiernan had been on ground in Afghanistan less than three months when I met with him in Kabul in 2008. He told me that if he could take care of the safe havens in Pakistan, "we could secure Afghanistan in six months." Gates (2014: 217)

A highly classified report on Afghanistan in 2007 by US Army Lieutenant General Douglas Lute identified Pakistan as a much more strategically troubling problem than Afghanistan, because the sanctuaries there for al Qaeda and other affiliate groups were more of a threat to the US (Woodward 2010: 43).

Pakistan always wanted to benefit itself of the circumstances ongoing in Afghanistan. If the Americans stayed, Pakistan would enjoy control of the US supply conduit, earning money and exerting pressure as needed. If the Americans left, as Islamabad leaders suspected they would, then Pakistan's keeping good relations with the Taliban ensured its influence in Afghanistan when Karzai's regime succumbed (Bolger 2014: 367). Robert Gates says he knew that they [Pakistan] were really no ally at all (Gates 2014: 477),

Richard Holbrooke, the US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan (2009–2010) often said that the true key to ending the war was to change Pakistan (Nasr 2013).

After travelling thousands of miles and meeting several times with the then Pakistan's military chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen also came to the conclusion that the Pakistani military chief used to deceive him each time and had no intention to abandon the proxies. About to retire in 2011, Mullen told a US Senate panel that Pakistan was supporting the Taliban's Quetta Shura and the Haqqani network despite getting aid from the US. "The actions by the Pakistani government to support them – actively and passively – represent a growing problem that is undermining US interests and may violate international norms, potentially warranting sanctions." (Gall 2014: 261)

Unable to secure reliable, large-scale Pakistani cooperation, the Americans resorted to drone strikes and some SOF missions by the CIA and the Task Force, culminating in the May 2, 2011, raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan's garrison city of Abbotabad (Bolger 2014: 368). Later the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour was also killed in a US drone strike in the southwest Pakistan in 2016 (BBC 2016).

As former Pakistani ambassador to the US, Husain Haqqani noted, the \$21 billion in funding under the Obama administration could not change Pakistan, just as \$12.4 billion given to Pakistan under the Bush administration failed to shut down its terrorism incubators. Haqqani (2016) Looking at the behavior of Pakistan, the US President Donald Trump also came forward and criticized its partnership with the United States and its role in the war on terror in his first tweet of 2018: "The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!" (Trump 2018)

3.1.4. Civilian casualties and disregarding the local culture

As Gates says, long before issues such as civilian casualties in US air strikes, the actions of private security contractors and intimidation of local population, night raids mainly conducted by the CIA, and disrespecting local traditions and cultural norms prompted President Karzai to repeatedly and publically condemn the US, he had regularly raised these matters in private but the Americans were far too slow in picking up on these signals and taking actions (Gates 2014: 201).

One of the earliest major events of civilian casualties was reported on June 30, 2002 when the US-led coalition forces bombed a wedding ceremony in Afghanistan's southern Uruzgan province which killed 48 civilians including women and children and wounded more than 100. Later several other wedding ceremonies were also bombed by the US forces (Engelhardt 2013).

Apart from several other like-wise incidents, the US faced much criticism after a NATO airstrike on the evening of 17 February 2011 in the Ghaziabad district of eastern

Kunar province killed 65 civilians, including a number of children. Though NATO admitted that some civilians may have been wounded, it claimed the airstrike targeted combatants. When the issue was raised in a meeting with Karzai and other Afghan officials at the presidential palace, top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan General David Petraeus suggested that Afghans caught up in this attack might have burned their own children to exaggerate claims of civilian casualties. Several Afghan officials present, including Karzai took his comments to be a grave insult to the Afghans. Reacting to General Petraeus' statement, An Afghan official said, "Killing 60 people, and then blaming the killing on those same people, rather than apologizing for any deaths? This is inhuman. This is a really terrible situation." (Partlow 2011)

Apart from several other incidents of civilian casualties, the killing of men, women and children in a village in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province shocked and angered the Afghans. A US soldier named Robert Bale, killed 16 civilians including women and children and wounded five others on March 11, 2012 in Panjwai district of Kandahar province after entering homes of villagers. Locals told the media that he had also set on fire the dead bodies of male villagers before leaving for his base. This incident occurred a month after the anti-US sentiments were already high in Afghanistan after US soldiers burnt copies of the Muslims' holy book, the Quran (BBC 2012).

US airstrikes targeting civilians became a regular phenomenon. The frustration among the population was growing further. Karzai began to complain that the US/NATO were targeting the Afghan public but ignore to take any action against what he called the source and training camps on militants which he said were in Pakistan. As the dispute between Karzai and the US over civilian casualties grew, the United Nations began gathering data and information about civilian casualties and produced reports that showed much higher casualty rates than the US-led military coalition was acknowledging (Gall 2014: 103).

The US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald E. Neumann (2005–2007) says that another persistent problem was the failure of Americans to listen to the people they were attempting to influence: "I saw an increasing blindness among American policymakers to how US policies appeared to Afghans and a concomitant deafness toward Afghan concerns. During my 2010 trip to Afghanistan, I heard regular refrains from American officials and soldiers in the field that Kabul doesn't matter." (Neumann 2017: 63–64)

The US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is of the same opinion and highlights the US mistakes: "Our troops were not always as respectful of Afghans as they should have been, including our vehicles barreling down the roads scattering pedestrians and animals. I heard, anecdotally, about an Afghan elder who showed up at the gate of the main coalition base in Kandahar to complain about some insult to his family by troops. He was ignored for three days, returned home – and his three sons then joined the Taliban.... I knew that some abusive and insulting behavior by troops was inevitable." (Gates 2014: 219)

3.1.5. Lack of coordination

The US policies were fluctuating not only due to politics at home but also lack of coordination among key US government intuitions such as the Pentagon, White House and State Department contributed to the failure of the mission. One of the most prevalent characteristics among senior policy makers in Washington is a complete inattention to the details of implementing policy in Afghanistan. As several US officials and observers have noted, below the level of the president, no agency, department or institution could even agree on who was in charge of the war. (Neumann 2017: 44–45) Just within the Pentagon and the Joint Staff, a plethora of offices under different generals and assistant secretaries competed by direction of the war (Ballard, Lamm and Wood 2012: 181–182).

The US Secretary of State Robert Gates writes in his book *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* that there was a divide over Afghanistan from time to time between State and Defense on one hand and the White House and the National Security Strategy on the other. “During my tenure as secretary (2006–2011), there were three US ambassadors to Kabul; none did well. Even Secretary [of State Hillary] Clinton would speak of [Karl] Eikenberry’s insubordination, that he would not do what she directed. Though both Clinton and I wanted Eikenberry replaced – because his relationship with [Afghan President Hamid] Karzai was beyond repair and his relationships with both Defense and State were so poor – and repeatedly told [the National Security Advisor Jim] Jones so, the ambassador was protected by the White House.” (Gates 2014: 371)

The US funding policy to Afghanistan was carried out both by the US Department of State (DoS) and Department of Defense (DoD) but both of them rarely coordinated their efforts. The DoD comptroller for Afghan funding Dov S. Zakheim later said he didn’t know that DoS had designated Richard Haass for a similar role (Zakheim 2011: 173).

On political side too, when the Obama administration took over, the atmosphere deteriorated dramatically. The newly elected President sent his Vice President-elect, Joe Biden, to Kabul in January 2009 before the inauguration. Biden told Karzai that Pakistan was 50 times more important to the US than Afghanistan, a statement that offended the Afghan president and increased his suspicion of US intentions (Eide 2014: 28).

The White House had an upper hand in Afghan policies and was not much entertaining the recommendations of the Department of State (DoS). Sometimes, it was even bypassing the DoS officials. The US ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry, in particular became a handful for the DoS. In November 2010, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went to Lisbon for a NATO summit, planning to meet with Karzai there. When Eikenberry asked to go as well, Clinton turned down his request and instructed him to stay in Kabul. He ignored her and showed up in Lisbon (Nasr 2013).

The American newspaper, *Washington Post*, in December 2019, through a three-year long legal battle, received hundreds of confidential interviews with key figures

involved in prosecuting the 18-year US war in Afghanistan. The 2,000 pages of documents known as “Afghanistan Papers” reveal that the senior *US officials* failed to *tell* the truth about the war in *Afghanistan* and US public has been consistently misled about an unwinnable conflict (Washington Post 2019).

3.1.6. Downgrading diplomacy and reconciliation

Ending the war and building a functioning Afghan government required a reconciliation process that would integrate the Taliban back into the Afghan political community. However, the US didn’t get serious about a peace process until it was too late. As U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan, James Dobbins later acknowledged that it was a mistake to delay a serious effort at reconciliation. The US also failed to engage regional powers that might have helped put together a stabilization deal, in part because it wasn’t even talking to some of them (e.g., Iran) (Walt 2014).

Soon after their regime was toppled, several high-level Taliban leaders offered to withdraw from political life in exchange for immunity but US turned a deaf ear to their request. President Karzai also favored the Taliban’s offer but the Pentagon was against it and continued to kill or capture them and raided their houses across the country. To complicate Karzai’s efforts further, the US blocked the reintegration of key Taliban leaders who wanted to stop fighting. Many of these Taliban members, who had been rejected, subsequently played crucial roles in the return of the Taliban (Abbas 2014: 81).

But the US military thought talk of reconciliation undermined America’s commitment to fully resourced COIN. On his last trip to Afghanistan, in October 2010, Richard Holbrooke (who was appointed as the US’ special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009) pulled aside General David Petraeus (the top US commander in Afghanistan) and said, “David, I want to talk to you about reconciliation.” “That’s a 15-second conversation,” Petraeus replied. “No, not now.” (Nasr 2013)

On the other hand, Pakistan’s cooperation was also absent. Pakistani authorities detained several dozen Pakistan based Afghan Taliban leaders that President Karzai’s government was trying to reconcile. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, often described as Mullah Omar’s second-in-command, was the most prominent among them. He was seized in early 2010 in a joint US-Pakistan operation and was kept in prison for more than eight years before releasing him in late 2019 (Gall 2014: 161).

The first serious sign of US’ willing to talk to the Taliban was given in February 2011 when the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed US’ readiness to talk to the insurgent group (Coll 2018: 562–563). The Taliban were earlier reluctant to talk to the Afghan government but later agreed that following US-Taliban talks, the group will sit with the Afghan government. President Karzai approved the establishment of an office for the Taliban in Doha. However, when the Taliban office was about to be opened officially in June 2013, Karzai insisted that it should not become an instrument for the Taliban to

obtain any form of international recognition. He said he had received written assurances from President Obama that this would not be the case. When the Taliban representatives held their opening press conference, however, it was in front of their old flag – the flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. “The Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” was inscribed on a plate on the front wall of the Taliban’s office in Doha. To Karzai it was an unacceptable breach of confidence. Thus, the office was shut down after Karzai’s protest. He blamed the US for what happened in Doha (Eide 2014: 31).

However, many years later, the President Donald Trump administration began peace talks with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, in October 2018, aimed at resolving the Afghan conflict peacefully and finally signed a peace agreement on February 29, 2020 (US Department of State 2020). The agreement set a timeline of 14 months for the withdrawal of all US and NATO troops from Afghanistan and in return a Taliban guarantee that Afghan soil will not be used as a launchpad that would threaten the security of the US and its allies. The agreement also stated the launch of intra-Afghan negotiations by March 10, 2020 and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

3.2. Democratization

Democracy in general is a form of government where there is “rule of the people, by the people and for the people”. It was the Greeks who coined the term *democracy*, or *demokratia*, from the Greek word *demos*, the people, and *kratos*, to rule (Dahl 2000: 11). For people in the West, democracy means “liberal democracy”; a political system marked not only by free and fair elections but also by the rule of law, separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and the right to own property (Zakaria 2003: 17). Ever since September 11, 2001 and the subsequent “war on terror”, promoting democracy has returned forcefully to the foreign policy agenda of the United States (Bogdandy, Wolfrum and Philipp 2005: 592).

At a time when Operation Enduring Freedom was in its beginner stages, the United Nations convened a conference in Bonn, Germany, from 27 November to 5 December 2001 on the future of Afghanistan. The decision was made in the conference that 16 of the 29 ministries in the interim government would be given to members of the “Northern Alliance” while Hamid Karzai would preside as head of the interim government. The NA did retain control over the ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs among others (Khalilzad 2016: 127). The new settlement was somehow in contrary with President Bush remarks to the National Security Council meeting on November 12, 2001 that “Politically, we need to send a signal that the Northern Alliance will not run post-Taliban Afghanistan.” (Woodward 2002: 306)

Hamid Karzai was sworn in as the head of the interim Afghan administration on 22 December 2001 for a period of six months while he was elected as President for two years transitional set up by the traditional *Loya Jirga* (grand assembly/council) in Kabul

on 13 June 2002. Later, he won the race in the first-ever direct presidential elections of Afghanistan in October 2004 and was elected for the term of five years. The very next year, on September 18, 2005, parliamentary elections were held for the *Wolesi Jirga* (House of the People) or the Lower House and Provincial Councils. After the completion of first 5-year-tenure of Afghan Presidency, presidential elections were held again in 2009, 2014 and 2019 respectively while parliamentary elections were only held in 2010 and 2018 respectively.

On the recommendations of the 2001 Bonn Agreement on Afghanistan, the Constitutional *Loya Jirga*, which comprised 502 Afghan elders and local dignitaries met for three weeks in Kabul and approved the final draft of the Constitution on 04 January 2004. The 2004 Constitution was mostly based on the 1964 constitution and consisted of 12 titles and 160 articles. Although the Afghan constitution includes almost all features of democracy, the act on all of them are yet to be done.

In 2009, the Afghan constitution required that the presidential election be held by May 22, when Karzai's term would legally end, but the US and its coalition partners were pressing hard to postpone the election to August to August 20. The US Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke argued that a May election could undermine the opposition's ability to compete and ISAF's ability to provide security. During the National Security Council meeting on February 13, for Holbrooke and others at the table, it provided the time necessary to identify a viable alternative to Karzai, who they thought had to go. If the Afghan constitution was an impediment to achieving this goal, the hell with it (Gates 2014: 340–341).

Holbrooke was doing his best to bring about the defeat of Karzai in the August 20 elections. What he really wanted was to have enough credible candidates running to deny Karzai a majority in the election, thus forcing a runoff in which he could be defeated. Unlike the 2004 Afghan presidential election, when the US offered Karzai unqualified support, in the months leading up to the 2009 election, our public position was one of neutrality among the candidates. But Holbrooke and US ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry were encouraging the other candidates, meeting and being photographed with them, attending their rallies, and making suggestions (Gates 2014: 358).

Later in 2014 run off presidential elections between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, each side accused the other of widespread rigging. Both were claiming victory ahead of results which needed to be announced by the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan. In order to prevent unpleasant circumstances and tensions in the country by the Abdullah team, the then US Secretary of State John Kerry bypassed the Afghan constitution to announce the future set-up for the country. Kerry writes in his book *Every Day is Extra* that they were nearing a critical moment in the negotiations when, in a surprise move, Ghani picked up on the idea of forming a unity government. In contrary to make them obey the law and procedures and waiting for the announcement of results by

the election commission, Kerry formed the first-ever National Unity Government of Afghanistan.

I then turned to Ghani, put my hand on his shoulder and said, “Ashraf, you are going to be president. Abdullah will help you implement a common agenda. But you have to be willing to transfer real power to him and give him the opportunity share in governance, because it is in the interest of the country.” (Kerry 2018: 422)

Thus, it was a 50-50 government run by Ashraf Ghani along with his two vice presidents and Abdullah Abdullah along with his two chief executives. Chief Executive was a newly-created role for Abdullah with prime ministerial powers which didn't have place in the Afghan constitution. This was an unsuccessful experience as both leaders carried on their differences and controversies throughout their five-year tenure till 2019. This also affected several decision-making processes and developments in the country. Each one had due shares in federal ministries, provincial offices and foreign missions.

The former Afghan President Hamid Karzai had told his aides that the US administration (Richard Holbrooke and Karl Eikenberry) also took several tactical measures and inserted pressure to make him share the government with his run-mate Abdullah Abdullah in 2014 presidential elections but he stood fast and turned a deaf ear to them.

A number of Afghans think that democracy is an externally imposed liberal and non-Islamic phenomenon. Some of them view some elements of the current process of democratization are similar to the reforms imposed after the 1978 communist coup by the Soviet backed regime. They consider democracy as an alien concept which poses a danger not only to their religious beliefs but also to their traditions and cultural values. Democratization has, however, become the best global practice for international state-building interventions, and yet in Afghanistan, democracy now carries negative connotations for many people (Larson 2011: 11).

There is still space for the development of democracy in Afghanistan. Democracy can flourish in peace and development, therefore, a renewed focus on peace-building economic development is required. The locals need to be on board and they need to see the benefits of economic aid.

The institutions of “Assembly Democracy” existed around 2500 BC in the Middle East, Greece and Rome, and Afghanistan's traditional *Jirga* is the best example of it in the contemporary history. (Kean 2009: xv) Lessons from local Afghan culture and traditions will also prove helpful as they contain a lot of aspects of democracy. Afghanistan has a long history of *Jirgas* (Elders' Councils) and *Loya Jirgas* (Grand Councils) which have democratically resolved a number of issues throughout the old and contemporary history.

3.3. Reconstruction and economic development

The World Bank estimates that between 1978, when the Communist coup took place, and November 2001, when the Taliban were overthrown, Afghanistan lost \$240 billion in ruined infrastructure and vanished opportunities (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 75).

Soon after the Bonn Agreement, an international donors' conference was held in Tokyo in January 2002, where out of \$5 billion raised, the US pledged only \$290 million for one year while the promised aid from other countries was often intended to be spread over a longer period. The US approach led other governments to lowball their contributions as well. While \$5 billion may sound like a great deal, it is less so when one divides it among more than 25 million (now 35 million) impoverished Afghans. In their first year of reconstruction, Bosnians received 16 times more international assistance than Afghans, while Kosovars received eight times more (Dobbins 2008: 120).

Between FYs 2003 and 2004, spending by the US Congress for assistance for Afghanistan went from \$740 million to \$1.9 billion, most of the latter in a supplemental appropriation. With donors at the Tokyo conference having failed to deliver fully on their pledges, a second conference was convened in Berlin in March-April 2004 where \$8.2 billion in bilateral aid was committed for the year 2004–2006, of which \$4.5 billion was promised up-front in 2004. For the full period, the US pledged \$2.9 billion in non-military assistance (Weinbaum 2005: 170).

It was the inaction, the sheer stubbornness, of the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) leadership that resulted in America's denying sufficient and critical economic assistance to Afghanistan during 2002 and 2003. While American forces were still cleaning the Taliban out of southern Afghanistan, OMB was negotiating with State over how much assistance should be requested from Congress for that country. Had OMB provided the government in Kabul with what the US would later spend on Iraq in just one week - \$3 billion - Afghan farmers might have been given, and then chosen, alternatives to poppy production as the war wound down; critical roads linking the country could have been completed in a matter of a year or two, and consequent economic growth might have helped pull the country together and more effectively thwart a Taliban resurgence (Zakheim 2011: 285–286).

The then US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann saw that the US draft budget for 2006 added only \$37 million for road programmes (Neumann 2009: 39–40, 50) Half-hearted and only modest international engagement in building Afghan institutions limited President Karzai's ability to project power and deliver services to the Afghan people (Eide 2014: 7). Meanwhile, the Afghan government's 'Donor Financial Review' at the end of 2009 raised the problem of donors bypassing the Afghan authorities. According to the review, the international community has pledged to provide USD 62 billion in assistance to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2009. Based on available information, 77% (\$29 billion) of the actually spend amount (\$36 billion) has been

disbursed on projects and programs designed and implemented by the donors themselves with little or no input by the Government of Afghanistan. The remaining development assistance (\$8.7 billion) has been delivered directly through the treasury of the Government of Afghanistan using the national budget, but of this amount, only \$770 million has been placed fully at the discretion of the Government of Afghanistan to determine where it will be allocated and spent (Donor Financial Review 2009: 1).

In addition to bypassing, the lack of US authorities' communication and coordination with Afghans consistently hindered the state-building project in Afghanistan (Gates 2014: 359).

In Afghanistan in 2002, World Bank and UN officials insisted that the government should not invest in higher education and moreover should invest very little in secondary and vocational education despite the fact that Afghanistan had seen its professional class decimated by war, disease, and flight. Citing the focus of the millennium development goals (MDGs) on primary education, they considered higher education and vocational training a luxury that Afghanistan could ill afford. But without training doctors, teachers, engineers, and managers, it was not clear at the time whether Afghanistan could get back on its feet. Five years later, the fact that the country's operational budget is overshadowed by the cost for technical assistance to make up for the "poor capacity" of the government testifies to the debilitating expense of failure to invest in the training of professional staff, future leaders, and administrators (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 142).

Moreover, having promised the government of Afghanistan that it would build several hundred schools (and in one meeting USAID said that it would build eleven hundred schools within two years), it asked other actors to discontinue their programs. However, the agency ended up building only eight school buildings within this time frame—of which six have already collapsed. The costs are not just financial but can also be measured in terms of loss of trust and hope, which are far more significant. Afghan citizens interviewed in the spring of 2007 expressed their sense of betrayal by the international community because of the waste, inefficiency, and corruption (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 95).

British author and journalist Jack Fairweather points to the plan to repair the Kajaki hydroelectric dam in country's southern Helmand province as a specific example of the lack of communication between the various organizations attempting to rebuild Afghanistan. In 2003, the new US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalizad, slated \$20 million to study the repairs that would be necessary for the dam, with the repairs themselves estimated to amount to \$125 million. Unbeknownst to the Americans, the new finance minister (and current president) of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, had already conducted a study on the necessary repairs and found that they would cost only \$500,000 (Fairweather 2014: 101).

The US and UN spent each time hundreds of millions of dollars during both presidential and parliamentary elections since 2004. Had this process been electronic or

biometric, it would not only save money but also prevent fraud and rigging in elections. Thousands of people registered to vote multiple times and acknowledged to the press that they had voted more than once in 2004 presidential elections. The same process was repeated during the parliamentary elections in 2005 at a cost of approximately \$400 million. The alternative electronic system could have been put in place for \$140 million and would have generated an estimated \$80 million in its first year by issuing passports, drivers' licenses, and identity cards (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 78). Although partial biometric process was adopted during parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019, it had several shortcomings and technical problems.

Despite its good intentions, the "aid system" evidently suffers from an inherent resistance to transparency and accountability and often cannot provide coherent advice and solutions to national governments. The US reconstruction policy lacked coordination and appeared ineffective. Despite a desire to bolster the central government, Washington was reconciled to having NGOs as the main conduits for aid (Weinbaum 2005: 168). As witnessed in many parts of the world, resources for necessary long-term undertakings are used by NGOs for projects with a short time span. Larger projects of particular importance for the national economy – road-building, education, healthcare, dam construction, power stations and mining projects – have up to now been the classic responsibilities of the state. As long as the NGOs spend most of the reconstruction funding on their small and local projects, the country's devastated infrastructure will remain weak or dysfunctional (Spanta 2005: 77).

When the international donor conference took place in Paris in June 2008, the US refused to include in the concluding statement a specific commitment that the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) ran by foreign military forces would provide the Afghan government with information on their activities. President Karzai said in reaction to it that any mention of the PRTs in an international context of this nature was unacceptable (Eide 2014: 17).

PRTs were small, civilian-military units that aimed to assist provincial and local governments to govern more effectively and deliver essential services. There were 26 PRTs in Afghanistan, 12 of which were under US command, and 13 other coalition countries were leading the rest. President Karzai frequently urged the allied governments to stop using private security companies, contending that they, along with PRTs - the civilian-military reconstruction teams, were an impediment to the central government's expanding its authority throughout the country. To an audience of foreign ministers and defense experts attending the annual Munich Security Conference in 2011 Karzai said that his administration did not want any competing parallel structures: "It prevents the growth of the Afghan government and they provide a challenge to the Afghan government. Their role confuses people — they ask who is in charge. As the Afghan government takes more responsibility and relieves you of the burdens and responsibilities, the parallel structures should be ended." (Dempsey 2011)

The Afghan government's 'Donor Financial Review' of 2009 revealed that only 15 out of 34 donor countries provided complete data of their assistance. The US was among those that provided incomplete data (Donor Financial Review 2009: 6). Most of the donors in Afghanistan including the US spent a big portion of funds on international salaries, luxury cars and chartered airplanes. A foreign consultant who was hired to work in the Afghan Ministry of Finance said that he received a salary of \$22,000 per month and that there were consultants who were receiving even higher salaries (Eide 2014: 20–21).

Building a new Afghan state and fighting a counterinsurgency war required outsiders to pour billions of dollars into an impoverished country, but the flood of poorly managed money merely fueled corruption and ensured that much of the aid money was wasted (Walt 2014). Usually the Afghan officials are blamed for corruption. However, the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai blames the US for encouraging a culture of corruption in Afghanistan through spending hundreds of millions of dollars over the past two decades without accountability. In an interview with the Associated Press on 10 December 2019, Karzai responded to findings from a trove of documents which revealed that successive US administrations misled the US public about the war in Afghanistan (Gannon 2019).

The cumulative appropriations for reconstruction and related activities in Afghanistan between FY 2002–2019 totaled approximately \$132.6 billion. The amount provided to the nine largest active U.S. funds represents more than 86.1% (nearly \$114.17 billion) of total reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan since FY 2002. Of this amount, over 92.9% (nearly \$106.11 billion) has been obligated, and nearly 89.2% (nearly \$101.80 billion) has been disbursed. An estimated \$5.80 billion of the amount appropriated for these funds has expired and will therefore not be disbursed. As of September 30, 2019, cumulative appropriations for reconstruction and related activities in Afghanistan totaled approximately \$132.55 billion. This total can be divided into four major categories of reconstruction and related funding: security, governance and development, humanitarian, and oversight and operations. Approximately \$8.94 billion of these funds support counternarcotics initiatives that crosscut the security (\$4.57 billion) and governance and development (\$4.37 billion) categories. The Department of Defense reported in its latest "Cost of War Report," dated June 30, 2019, that cumulative obligations for Afghanistan including warfighting had reached \$764.5 billion. The cost of Afghanistan reconstruction equaled 16% of this amount at that date (SIGAR 2019: 46).

In hindsight, it seems that most of those dollars did not produce enduring and sustainable gains due to mismanagement, non-coordination, unnecessary projects, and militarizing the development agenda, etc. (Coster 2017: 186).

Four reasons may be identified why attempts at state-building fail. First, the resources made available have been insufficient. Second, donor policies have been hampered by a lack of knowledge of local conditions and unwillingness to adapt policies to local context. Third, the model of state-building on which the effort has been based has

been flawed and contradictory. And fourth, the attempts at state-building have run counter to the interests of key domestic actors (Eriksen n.d.: 1). In the case of Afghanistan, the US made all of the above mistakes.

Conclusion

In 2001, state-building was not the priority of the US and its coalition partners in Afghanistan. However, security and peace-building in the country should have been the outcome of their “War on Terror”. They intervened in Afghanistan to dismantle Al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban regime as part of their policy to secure their own homelands. Later, when the US began the state-building agenda in Afghanistan, it had very limited success. The US state-building process empowered a variety of warlords by financing them and helping them get key military and political positions. This act not only affected the security and peace but also paved way to chaos and rights violations. Had the US strengthened the Afghan central government and supported it in the implementation of the rule of law, the state-building initiative would have had a much better outcome and implications not only on security sector but also on good governance, democratization and economic development.

The building of security institutions and demobilization of formal and informal private militias were an antidote of a successful political set up. However, the inconsistency in economic aid, military and civilian surge, lack of coordination among various US institutions involved in Afghanistan and bypassing the local government and local elders on policy priorities and implementation were among the other drawbacks in the state-building process. Getting locals on board and implementing cohesive and coordinated economic, military and political policies would have brought the much more success in Afghanistan.

Apart from turning a deaf ear to the Afghan concerns, civilian casualties and disregarding the Afghan culture; the low footprint; not addressing the issue of terrorists’ sanctuaries; and ignoring the reconciliation with the Taliban were some other reasons that made Afghanistan the longest war in US’ history. As a result, the US, on one hand, through its policies during the past over 18 years of presence in Afghanistan could not achieve its desired goals to bring peace and security, a successful process of democratization and an economically stable Afghanistan, and on the other hand, it could not win the hearts and minds of local Afghans.

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