

## International Intervention and State-building in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

*Historically, Afghanistan has remained a fragile and destabilized region due to its strategic geographic location. State building efforts are not new to the Afghan people, especially by various governments and international forces. Some tried to build a strong centralized state on the model of secular and western democracy, others tried to impose a theocratic political system based on Islamic law. All failed due to consistent international intervention and the idea of a strong centralized government. International interventions are seen in dominant Western literature as a tool for state-building in Afghanistan; however, it turned out to be catastrophic. The state-building project in the post 9/11 intervention has made Afghanistan a rentier state. Afghanistan's economic and military dependence upon international powers forced the Afghan government to pursue policies in the light of international dictation. Problems of government legitimacy, corruption and insurgency were also factors arising from international intervention. All this leads to the conclusion that international intervention in Afghanistan continues to be the dominant factor in the failure of state-building processes and not an instrument of state-building.*

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### **Introduction**

The review of the historical efforts of state building in Afghanistan reveals that political leadership has continuously failed to establish and maintain legitimate government within the territories through the right use of force and a system of accountability. Experiments failed to use Islam as a tool to mobilize citizens for the creation of national unity through reforms. The secular model of government also failed in the country and resulted in violence. The sectarian and ethnic divides in the country are the leading factor in causing the failure of state-building projects in all the times. The external interventions remained a continuing menace in the country, which led to the civil wars and crises of central power. The British influence, Soviet interventions, Taliban's attempt to mobilize people through Islam and lastly the United States intervention are all the attempts of state-building in Afghanistan, which failed.<sup>2</sup>

Afghanistan has never existed as a full-fledged established state in its history. Throughout its history, the country faced international interventions and civil wars. Various ethnic and power groups continuously tussled for power, which resulted in the absence of a strong central government in Afghanistan. Various experiments of state-building on religious, secular and western models failed in Afghanistan. The reasons for the failure of state-building projects in Afghanistan are numerous.

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<sup>2</sup>Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Revisiting the category of fragile and failed states in international relations." *International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2009): 271-294.

The major international intervention and subsequent state-building efforts in Afghanistan can be observed in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. Subsequent to the US-led intervention in Afghanistan to change the current regime, the international interveners stepped up with regards to making a democratic structure for the country in the post-Taliban rule. The outrageous dependence of the new Afghan state on outside aid gave a huge space to international political players, yet the contrariness of the objectives prompted contention over the policies. Most evident was the strain between political reforms and security issues. This offered ascendance to the commonplace dilemma of inclusion or exclusion during the process of democratization.

To secure the procedure, the Afghan establishment perceived the inclusion of various groups into parliamentary politics as a vital strategy. The Afghan establishment was never autonomous in their decisions. The international powers insisted on the exclusive strategy and the establishment of a strong central government. It expected to help move social clash from the military to the political stage. It foresaw a conceivably more boundless war staged in reverse in the primary objective of the US-driven coalition: to dispose of the Taliban and the Terrorists. This however could never be done in practical means.

### **Early Efforts of State-building in Afghanistan**

Afghans have inhabited the same territory for centuries, but de jure nation-state existed only after 1919.<sup>3</sup> The foreign rule and domination ended in 1747 when Ahmed Shah laid down the foundations of the Durrani Empire in Afghanistan. Since 1747, the native people have never come under the direct rule of foreign states and the local rulers managed to deter the external

<sup>3</sup>Amin Saikal, AG RavanFarhadi, and Kirill Nourzhanov. *Modern Afghanistan: a history of struggle and survival*. (Ibtauris, 2012): 43-220

interventions of Persian, British and Russian invaders. The cost of countering foreign invasion was so high that Afghanistan remained underdeveloped and isolated. Foreign interventions were not the only problem, rather civil war, revolution and terrorism, all added in shaking the national unity in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a mountainous region, where different regions are governed by local traditions through the feudal system. This is the main reason, why a central legitimate rule is difficult to be established in Afghanistan. Islam is a widely common factor throughout Afghanistan, which can possibly, binds the divided Afghans; however, the sectarian factor within Islam prohibits this unity.<sup>4</sup>

Habibullah Khan was the key person in securing the independence of Afghanistan and establishing a centralized government through an inclusive approach, where local tribal lords were given a share in the local governance. The inclusion of local tribal leaders in the country's politics had greater influence in lowering military conspiracy at the local level; however, the formula went wrong. The local tribal leaders started undermining the rights of minorities and started blocking unpopular decrees. On average, the Habibullah reforms were beneficial and to some extent, the local problems were resolved at the local level by the political elite, who were part of the government. Habibullah also resisted against the encroachment of the British Empire from India and secured an independent foreign policy in Afghanistan. The era of Habibullah came to an end, with his assassination in 1919. This event led to the deterioration of the political atmosphere in Afghanistan.

Habibullah was succeeded by his son, Amanullah. Amanullah had a clear set of goals to build and modernize

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 71-111

Afghanistan on secular lines. He was inspired by the Turkish Kemal Ataturk model of governance and hence initiated a gross nation-building effort on similar grounds. Along with many challenges, he mainly wanted to separate politics from religion. This was indeed one of the most difficult challenges for his government in a conventional Afghanistan. It was only the Amanullah rule when Afghan women were openly allowed to appear in the public and travel for their needs with no fear. Women were encouraged to get an education and come in the employment sectors. One another important effort was to alienate the justice system from religious scholars and establish an independent western style court system. For this, new civil and criminal laws were formulated and penal codes were set for different cases. Amanullah was of the view that military spending is counterproductive and hence reduced their salaries and other incentives. He failed to realize that such large-scale changes in the country will result in the rebellious reaction. Only the military could have saved him against the rebellious actions, which he already undermined by initiating major cuts in their pays and incentives. Strong conventional religious personalities in Afghanistan started accusing him of anti-Islamic sentiments and abandoning Islam from politics. Amanullah imprisoned and executed some key Mullahs and Peers, including the chief religious judge in Kabul and Hazrat Sahib of Shor Bazaar.

The reforms of Amanullah were hard to accept by the religious community and hence, large-scale resistance movements started in Afghanistan. The movements were so strong and wide that Amanullah had to free all political prisoners and allowed his half-brother, Inayatullah Khan to take over the government. Irrespective of this change, the resistance movements kept on gaining momentum and resulted in the exile of the royal family. The military of the country had no capacity to stop the anti-Amanullah movements. Already rare in the country, it further packed up after

the strict regulations of the Taliban's. This resulted in the fall of the government, leaving space for Habibullah Kalakani to take over. Kalakani cabinet comprised of his family and friends and expanded the network along Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

The support and promotion of patronage networks in the country had further widened the gap along with ethnic, sectarian and tribal groups in the country. The government reversed many of Amanullah reforms; abolished the court system and transferred it back to the religious scholars, closed many girls' schools and libraries were burned. Many female students, who were studying in Turkey on scholarships, were called back, thus leaving their education unfinished. Unlike, Amanullah, Bacha mainly used Religion to mobilize and unite the country. However, the ethnic and tribal division in the county never allowed his government to establish a strong central government with the consensus of the majority.

Nadir Shah, who was a military general, had taken over the government by overthrowing Kalakani. He again tried to modernize Afghanistan through the promotion of education and the establishment of educational institutions. The first university in Afghanistan was established during the reign of Nadir Shah. He also introduced a set of rules and procedure for the accession to the throne in the country. Along with modernization, he tried to promote the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam in the legal orders of the country. A Loya Jirga was authorized to bring the Sunni Islamic provisions in the Constitution of Afghanistan and also to decide on the legitimacy of the ruler. Nadir Shah had made very careful and democratic efforts for state-building in Afghanistan through the creation of a more representative government; however, the efforts never proved fruitful.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The established constitution in Nadir Shah's Government had little room for minorities' participation. The government was overrepresented by his family and friends, which undermined the idea of creating a participatory and representative government. Irrespective of the Nadir Shah's intentions to create a democratic form of government in Afghanistan; his tyrannical form of rule disallowed it. The end of World War II was the start of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. This period has also impacted the state-building process in Afghanistan.

During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the United States supported Afghanistan through economic aid and infrastructural projects to win its support. The dual aid helped in the democratization of Afghanistan from 1950 to 1960. A more liberal constitution was implemented in the country after stepping down of Muhammad Daoud by the royal family. The power was decentralized to resolve the autocracy of the central government. The reforms towards achieving democracy in the country have again brought traditional forces in conflict with the new authorities. In a ten years period, from 1950 till 1960, students at Kabul University and those studying abroad were given incentives to work with the government ignoring the illiterate traditional stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> Apart from that, the new constitution had a clause, which prevented Daoud to retain power again. He allied with the Soviet Union and staged a coup in 1973 to reclaim its power in Kabul. After that, he made many reforms with the purpose to build Afghanistan on the footprint of representative democratic governance. During the regimes of Daoud and Zahir Shah, power was greatly decentralized but in a non-democratic way. Daoud was not democratic in nature and hence adopted autocratic practices in giving representation to the population across the country. The

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

government failed to establish neither federative nor integrative mechanisms for the participation of the population.<sup>7</sup>

Although the state-building and democratization efforts in the 1960s were on a small scale, they created a loop of intellectual individuals who propagated the idea of modernizing Afghanistan through promoting education. Many scholars within and outside Afghanistan promoted the idea of the necessity of education for both Afghan boys and girls. The 1960s era witnessed the propagation of western ideas of governance in main cities of Afghanistan, which raised concerns among religious groups. However, this time the modernization of Afghanistan was different from the earlier attempts. This time, instead of making Afghanistan complete secular state, modern Islamic scholars tried to find the compatibility of Western democracy with the Islamic principles. They tried a coup in 1975 but failed. For the next couple of years, the modern Islamic faction remained underground in Afghanistan and the ruling elite adopted the policies of repression. They kept the population away from political participation.

After the failed Islamic modernist coup, Daoud made large-scale imprisonment of the communist leaders and other educated individuals. The actions were counterproductive, as the supporters of communism made a violent takeover in 1978, followed by the Soviet Union invasion in 1979. The pro-soviet rulers tried to introduce large-scale modernization reforms in the country, which were not acceptable to the traditional Islamic leaders in the country. The religious leadership in the country called upon a war (Jihad) against the Soviet invasion and the existing government. The long, violent war between the Soviet troops and Mujahedeen has

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<sup>7</sup>Sultan Barakat, H. Atmar, and A. Strand. "From Rhetoric to Reality: the role of aid in local peace building in Afghanistan." *York University Toronto*, (1998), 8-14.

greatly devastated the already weakened Afghanistan. From 1979 onwards, the state-building efforts in Afghanistan were stalled.<sup>8</sup>

Summarizing all, it can be concluded that the state-building efforts in the early times were unstructured and lacked a general public consensus. The will of the people was not taken on board before introducing new reforms in the country. All efforts made to create national unity in the country have further widened ethnic, tribal and sectarian divisions. Efforts were made on two different extremes; to establish a secular Afghanistan and to make Afghanistan a religious country on the basis of Sunni Islam. The decentralization of power was not based on the true federalist principles and hence led to the rise of local insurgencies. All of these things contributed to the crisis of legitimacy of power in the politics of Afghanistan, which allowed the foreign powers to come and execute an international agenda of state-building in the country.

### **Efforts of State-building during the Taliban's Rule**

After the Soviet troops faced a deadly defeat from the traditional religious groups (Mujahedeen/ Taliban's), the Taliban established their de facto government in Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> During the Taliban's rule, the state-building efforts continued, which were mainly based on religion. Islam gained more and more influence in both national and local politics of Afghanistan. The Taliban leader, Mullah Omer adopted coercive measures to force people to obey the religious obligations in the country. Generally, the overall emphasis in the Taliban government was on theology, rather than state-building. Islamic teachings were spread to purify the Afghan nationals. The challenge of unity in the country was tackled through the program

<sup>8</sup>AstriSuhrke, "Reconstruction as modernization: the 'post-conflict' project in Afghanistan." *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 7 (2007): 1291-1308.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

of Islamization, both through peaceful and violent means. Mullah Omer was at the top of the Taliban's ranking and was instrumental in making directions for the policymakers. The only source of legitimacy for his supremacy and rule was Islam. To avoid disunity and fragmentation of the local politics, the Taliban's used coercive measures to silence voices and bring people under their organizational structure.

The coercive approach of Taliban's resulted in the brain drain and educated individuals preferred leaving the country. Similarly, women were again deprived of modern education, limiting them to the boundaries of the house. Implementation of strict Shariat laws during Taliban's government led to the destruction rather than the building of the state. This not only undermined the democratic model of state-building but also hindered international assistance. Both the non-governmental organizations and the UN state-building missions were discouraged. Negotiations on the matter with the international community were also refused.

In fact, the Taliban rule was self-destructive for the state-building efforts because large-scale ethnic conflicts emerged in Afghanistan over the issue of power. The Taliban's did not adopt an inclusive strategy to bring all ethnic, sectarian and tribal groups in confidence rather influenced their own agenda through forceful means. Similarly, their rule was seriously challenged by the World powers for the large-scale human rights violations and failure to fulfill international obligations. Thus, the overall period of the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan proved ineffective, rather destructive for the state-building process. The 9/11 attacks and refusal of Taliban to detach themselves from Al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin

Laden brought them in direct conflict with the world powers, leading to the intervention of NATO in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>10</sup>

### **Post 9/11 International Intervention and State-building Efforts in Afghanistan**

The post 9/11 time is considered to be very complicated in the history of state-building efforts in Afghanistan. The state building process in the post 9/11 era is mainly comprised of three basic areas; the political, military and the security sector reforms.

The primary tool used by the Western powers in Afghanistan was the military operation under the banner of operation enduring freedom (OEF) through the International security assistance force (ISAF). The important factor of the OEF was the authorization of ground forces to fight the Taliban. The fight against the Taliban was carried out through assisting the local disparate Tajik groups with cash and military tools. The airstrikes against Taliban's outlets further strengthened the American influence in Afghanistan. After securing a stronghold in Kabul, the Americans started large-scale reforms and efforts towards state-building in Afghanistan. The first and important move was the Bonn framework.<sup>11</sup>

Many international political leaders led by the United States, United Nations representative and certain local Afghan political elites met in Bonn on December 2001 to discuss the framework for state-building in Afghanistan. Discussions and negotiations between these leaders concluded with the signing of an agreement, setting the provincial arrangements in the country and the re-establishment of the government institutions. In short,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Lucy Morgan Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan: a case showing the limits?." *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92, no. 880 (2010): 967-991.

the Bonn agreement was the initiation of the US-led state-building process in Afghanistan.

The agreement looked forward to establishing an interim government in Afghanistan, with a subsequent call for Loya Jirga to establish a transitional administration until the regular elections for the presidency and parliament in 2004.<sup>12</sup> The interim government was established which set a constitutional drafting committee with a purpose to make arrangements for the constitutional Loya Jirga. The proposed constitution of the country was intended to be based on the three branches of government; the executive, legislative and the judiciary. The new criminal justice system was to be set up in accordance with the Islamic principles, modern international standards, and the local traditional values.

The results of the Bonn process were not so convincing due to the fact that its major Pashtun leaders, including the Taliban, were not included in the entire course of the agreement. The agreement sowed the feeling of distrust and alienations among the Pashtuns groups against the mainstream government. The Bonn process tried to resolve all problems in Afghanistan through a top-down approach but with no or less participation of the important actors undermined the desired results. The influence of specific groups in the Loya Jirga resulted in their empowerment and thus secured ministerial positions in the country with international political legitimacy. The group in power maintained to secure the interest of their own elite groups throughout the country and lacked the support of the major Pashtun warlords. The Karzai government, thus failed in the complete reformation of the government structure and the judicial system, as agreed in the Bonn agreement.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The international community was quite optimistic about the elections in Afghanistan and was enthusiastic about the positive change in the county; however, security of the country remained poor. The Taliban's continued to fight with the government and international troops, resulting in the destruction of property and precious lives as collateral damage. The government was not even able to control the illegal Narco trade in the country, which served as the main financing source for various militant groups. The ministers and other government officials were busy in making money through corruption in every possible way.

Alongside the Bonn process, the second important thing in the state-building efforts was the security sector reform in 2002. The G8 member countries divided responsibilities in the greater security sector reforms. Germany was assigned to help Afghanistan in making large-scale police reforms throughout the country. The United States took on the responsibility to bring in the military reforms. Italy had the judicial reform agenda. The United Kingdom was mainly tasked to introduce reforms in countering narcotics activities in Afghanistan. Lastly but not the least, Japan took the responsibility to demobilize, disarm and reintegrate the militants in the country. The security sector reform was also meant as a last resort to state-building process in Afghanistan so that the external powers can safely exit from Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Known as the Afghan new beginning program, it however, failed to achieve its goals, which is evident from the fact that the targeted number of DDR was reduced from 140000 to 10000.<sup>14</sup> The unofficial militias continued to operate under the leadership of various strongmen throughout the country. The military reforms under the security sector reforms badly failed and were criticized for making ethnic

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sayed Zia Sais, *Who is Winning the War in Afghanistan?* (Xlibris Corporation, 2011): 11.

imbalances in the Afghan national army since it was mainly dominated by the Tajik sect of the country and Northern Alliance generals. They generally undermined the dominant Pashtun sect.

Apart from the failure of the military reforms, the judicial reforms were also not satisfactory. The targeted deadlines for the desired reforms in the judicial sector were also not met. Some of the leaders in the government ministries had fundamentalist leanings, who resisted the reforms in the judiciary on secular grounds. For instance, Abdur Rashid Saif was part of the government, who was formally the part of Mujahideen. He had a fundamentalist ideology and thus played a key role in the appointment of Mullah Shahrani as the chief justice of Afghanistan highest court. Similar incidents resulted in the failure of security sector reforms in the country. The security sector reforms would have been the game changer in the state-building efforts in Afghanistan; however, lack of required attention by the international community and the influence of local strongmen hampered the process.

### **Priorities of Bonn Agreement and its Outcomes**

The main emphasis of the Bonn agreement was the establishment of a strong centralized government. It was intended to establish a strong national institution with the representation from all regions and groups. However, the intentions to establish a strong central government has marginalized some ethnic groups, while selected warlords and a political elite dominated the national institutions. Thus, the agreement was merely Kabul-centric, which undermined the basic democratic principle of inclusive participation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Tonita Murray, "Police-building in Afghanistan: A case study of civil security reform." *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (2007): 108-126.

From the organization of Loya Jirga to the first democratic elections in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005, the international financial, political and other technical support from the international community was critical in the state-building process.<sup>16</sup> With this support, the Bonn agreement intended to shift the traditional governance model in Afghanistan to new modern democratic governance through the establishment of institutions. For instance, the first Loya Jirga, held in 2002 under emergency circumstances proposed a hybrid model for the selection, representation, political transition and governance processes in Afghanistan. The hybrid model was aimed to accommodate the existing traditional practices with the new modern democratic model. The divergence of the Bonn agreement on a single political strategy led to the arrangements for elections and creation of some new institutions. It was considered a victory of the Bonn agreement agenda; however, the new institutions were weak and fragile, which did not demonstrate the complete vision of the state-building through democratization.

It is worth noting that during the course of four years from the Bonn conference to the London conference (2006), significant changes in the governance system took place. Establishment of the interim government, working on the new constitution and election process for the president was some of the evident achievements. After the presidential elections in 2004, election for the members of the parliament was held in 2005, adding more value to the achievements of the Bonn agreement. In 2006, London conference was held in Afghanistan by the Afghanistan compact and interim national development strategy (I-ANDS) (Compact, 2006). The conference was mainly held to establish new relationships between the Afghan government and international partners and donors. The

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Reynolds, "The curious case of Afghanistan." *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 2 (2006): 104-117.

London conference was also aimed at analyzing the achievements and shortcomings in the state-building efforts since 2001. The conference was convinced at the fact that the establishment of new institutions and governance practices in the country lacked in the participation of all groups within the country, thus limiting the achievement of the end goal.

US intervention in Afghanistan toward the end of 2001 carried with it a procedure of formal democratization and state-building, the formation and declaration of another constitution, and the election of a parliament and a president on the basis of Western models.<sup>17</sup> However, the United States and other international participants disregarded the fact that this was a diversion of the past. This time the level of outside support was something new and the procedure of reform of the new state was set up. The outcome was a procedure described by strain, which gave more frame than democratic substance and which had the counterproductive results for the country.

The US-led intervention and subsequent state-building projects resulted in tensions, which emerged primarily for a few reasons.<sup>18</sup> To start with, the fundamental purpose behind the US-driven intervention in Afghanistan had not been to introduce a political majority rules system, but rather to take out terrorists and to build up a steady and helpful administration for the "war on terrorism." The prerequisites forced by this technique did not generally concur with the advancement of the vote based system; one of the most referred to illustrations is the power that the

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<sup>17</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, "Respectable warlords? The politics of state-building in post-Taliban Afghanistan." *Crisis States Research Centre working papers series*, 1, 33. (2003).

<sup>18</sup> Hamish Nixon and Richard Ponzio. "Building democracy in Afghanistan: The statebuilding agenda and international engagement." *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (2007): 26-40.

United States provided for associated warlords in their battle against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Second, after the destruction of Afghanistan following quite a while of fierce battling, enormous international aid came into the country to modify the state and economy, and reestablish security. In the meantime, there was an extraordinary reliance on the outside military finances and powers. The very premise of the majority rules system as a framework was designed in which the national institutions set the needs, implemented approaches and considered themselves responsible for their citizens.

The complexity between the truth of high dependence on international powers and the theory of majority rule government was additionally underlined by the rhetoric of democratization. The individuals who offered validity to this rhetoric believed that reforms were a joke. The rhetoric of democratization was not just a system of legitimization. Albeit driven by the US security interests, the 2001 regime change in Afghanistan must be set inside a more extensive structure of democratization. It mirrored the overarching technique of the UN after the end of the Cold War for "post-struggle" recreation, which was to present (or re-build up) institutions of the liberal majority rules system. There were additionally some particular conditions in Afghanistan. The principle elucidation so far had been the West's relinquishment of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, trailed by common war, the run of a fundamentalist Islamist development and the disappointment of state facilitating international terrorists. This grouping of occasions proposed the requirement for a dynamic international responsibility to build up another request for peace and soundness. In such a manner, the delegate government was

viewed as the focal fixing and was particularly specified in a few UN Security Council resolutions in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

### **Post-Trump's South Asia Policy and Conflict Resolution Efforts**

The conflict in Afghanistan is at a military-political impasse. The possibility of a military solution to it - whether in favor of government forces enjoying the military support of the U S and NATO or in favor of the main force of the armed opposition (Taliban) - has not been seen for a long time. The combination of military pressure on the Taliban with the support of the U S and NATO with other Western aid to Kabul for decades did not lead to stabilization, much less peace, even when this assistance was at its peak. The escalation of violence continued after the Obama administration announced the completion of US military (but not anti-terrorist) operations and by the end of 2014 withdrew the majority of the US contingent from Afghanistan. In 2019, government forces retained control of major population centers and all the capitals of the Afghan provinces, while the Taliban controlled large rural areas and actively attacked the district centers. In 2002–2018, that is, after the military intervention led by the US in Afghanistan in 2001 and the overthrow of the de facto ruling Taliban regime, only the main line of conflict is between the central government with the support of the US and NATO on the one hand, and the Taliban, on the other hand, claimed the lives of more than 140,000 people. And these are only those who died directly as a result of the clashes, without taking into account the numerous, mostly civilian, victims of regular terrorist attacks, the

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, and Robert O. Keohane. "Legalized dispute resolution: Interstate and transnational." In *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*, Rutledge, (2003): 166-204.

number of which also continued to grow throughout the period since 2001.<sup>20</sup>

In a deadlock, unpromising for all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan, the Trump administration by mid-2018 made a choice in favor of an “exit strategy” through a negotiation process with the Taliban.<sup>21</sup> A search for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan in one form or another has been interrupted and resumed since 2010, on different, often intersecting lines and tracks, including a number of regional formats. A qualitatively new stage in this process began with the start of direct negotiations in July 2018, so far only between two direct combatants - the US and the Taliban. The first results of nine rounds of these negotiations were recorded in Doha in August 2019, when the US and Taliban delegations finally finalized, signed and handed over to the host country (Qatar) the draft preliminary agreement.<sup>22</sup> It contained a timetable for the phased withdrawal of the US troops, a ceasefire clause, and counter-terrorism commitments. However, the first year of direct negotiations with the US did not change the Taliban’s refusal to directly negotiate with the Afghan government and did not lead to the de-escalation of the armed confrontation: moreover, in 2018, the highest level of combat losses was recorded from the beginning of the conflict (more than 22800 people killed). However, the dynamic combination, interaction and mutual influence of negotiations and ongoing armed violence is typical of most modern peace processes, especially at an early stage.

<sup>20</sup> Shawn Snow, “Report: US Officials Classify Crucial Metrics on Afghan Casualties, Readiness,” *Military Times*, October 30, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Dan Lamothe and Josh Dawsey, “Trump Wanted a Big Cut in Troops in Afghanistan. New US Military Plans Fall Short,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Stewart, Jonathan Landay, and Hamid Shalizi, “In US pursuit of peace talks, perilous rift opens with Afghan leaders,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2019.

Despite successful nine rounds of negotiations between the two parties, Donald Trump cancelled talks on the premise of the killing of a US soldier by the Taliban. However, both Taliban and the regional stakeholders reacted positively and kept the options open for future dialogue on the terms of the peace deal. President Trump visited Afghanistan on a short notice, where he expressed his willingness to restart negotiations with the Taliban on a peace deal. Though the prospects of a peace deal seem uncertain but the US deteriorating relations with Iran is further complicating regional dynamics of security and stability.

### **Factors for Failed State-building Efforts**

#### **International Intervention**

International intervention in Afghanistan is always looked and analyzed in the perspective of a tool to the state-building projects, rather than a cause of the failure of state-building. The international intervention in Afghanistan created a rentier and dependent government, which never has the capability to build a strong state.<sup>23</sup> The main tool employed by the interveners was to provide military and economic assistance for the state-building project in Afghanistan. However, the international assistance further weakened the government and subsequently the state by creating internal tensions within the groups. It made Afghanistan dependent on the assistance that the government's ability to establish self-sustained institutions was diminished.<sup>24</sup> An important negative impact of the international intervention on the state-

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<sup>23</sup> Sultan Barakat and Anna Larson, "Fragile States: A Donor-serving Concept? Issues with Interpretations of Fragile Statehood in Afghanistan," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 8, no. 1 (2013): 15-40.

<sup>24</sup> Hamish Nixon, *Aiding the State?: International Assistance and the Statebuilding Paradox in Afghanistan*. (Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, 2007): 3-18.

building projects in Afghanistan was the weak legitimacy, which caused the lack of efficient utilization of international aid.<sup>25</sup>

The terrorist attacks in Washington and New York that occurred on September 11, 2001, have produced an extremely solid outfitted response from the United States (and, to a lesser degree, from UK and Northern Ireland) against Afghanistan. Afghanistan was a hideout for the Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, which has even gone similar to replacing the political administration in power in that nation. The international forces have supported international intervention by invoking collective self-defence or the natural right of the individual in the light of article 51 of the Charter of the UN.<sup>26</sup>

The international mission in Afghanistan comprised of the UN and its agencies, NATO through ISAF, international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, Japan, European Union and other regional actors as well.<sup>27</sup> This international unity was referred as an international community. All of these international actors differently participated in the state-building projects in Afghanistan. However, result of the internationally driven state-building project can best be illustrated by the public admission of formal President Hamid Karzai in May 2005, if the foreign forces leave Afghanistan, the country will go into chaos, and the country may not be able to stand on its own feet. Among different consequences of intervention in Afghanistan, economic dependency stands the most prominent one.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Goodhand, "Aiding violence or building peace? The role of international aid in Afghanistan." *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (2002): 837-859.

<sup>26</sup> Timor Sharan, "The Network Politics of International Statebuilding: Intervention and Statehood in Post-2001 Afghanistan." *University of Exeter* (2013): 40-105.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Ruttig, *Some Things Got Better-how Much Got Good? A Review of 12 Years of International Intervention in Afghanistan*. (Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2014): 2-13.

## Economic Dependency

Initially, foreign donors accorded high priority to the provision of humanitarian assistance, and in 2002 the government received almost no tax revenue, which is less than 10% of the national budget. In three years, the collection of taxes on the domestic market has approximately doubled and amounted to about 280 million dollars. The ratio of income to GDP was only 5%, which was far below the level even in other very poor countries. The overall level of expenditure has also increased, as a result of which it is expected that domestic receipts will account for only 8% of the total national budget for 2004-2005. In other words, the ratio of domestic and external sources of funding was almost the same as in 2002. According to President Karzai and the IMF, it was assumed that this trend will continue, at least during the next five-years period.<sup>28</sup>

The economic dependency on foreign powers went to the extent that 90% of the country's budget for 2004-2005 was based on the international assistance fund.<sup>29</sup> Although the international financial institutions tried to increase the national revenue but the increase till the recent past are not optimistic. In the post-2004 time, the budget structures in Afghanistan got changed; now there were two types of budgets for the country, an internal and an external budget.<sup>30</sup> The internal budget was primarily controlled by the national financial institutions but the external budget was used under the auspicious of international donors. The internal budget

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<sup>28</sup> Fatima Ayub and Sari Kouvo. "Righting the course? Humanitarian intervention, the war on terror and the future of Afghanistan." *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 641-657.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra. "Who owns the peace? Aid, reconstruction, and peacebuilding in Afghanistan." *Disasters* 34 (2010): 71-90.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Hogg, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd, and Andrew Beath. *Afghanistan in transition: Looking beyond 2014*. (The World Bank, 2013): 75-92.

of the Afghan government was much less in comparison to the external budget. The external budget was \$ 2.5 billion in 2004 and 2005, which was much more than the budget controlled by Afghanistan at that time (\$ 865 million for operational and development costs). The external budget comprised both operational costs for the army, health, education, police, some national programs, such as the National Solidarity Program, electoral costs, and some other development projects. From the perspective of the Afghan government and IMF, these sectors were not in the financial control and were recorded as extra-budgetary positions in the key planning documents, which induced the Afghan National Development Strategy for 2006-2010.<sup>31</sup>

Questions arise as, how this income ratio is compared to the indicators of modernization regimes in the country over the past decades. The Afghan political leaders have depended on international aid for a long time; however, in the past two decades, the level of dependency increased enormously. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the time of Mohammad Daud and communist rule in Afghanistan were the periods, when international funding was on the rise. These periods are the best illustrations for comparison with the Karzai government. Right from the start till the end of Daud's presidency, the domestic revenue remained unsatisfactory and it accounted for just over 60% of total government expenditure, although Daud launched mega schemes of development that were largely financed by the US and the USSR.<sup>32</sup> Statistical data for the first years of the Communist regime indicates the same range (52% to 71%), although the government dependence over the USSR has significantly increased due to the invasion and escalation of the war

<sup>31</sup> Ibid: 47-66.

<sup>32</sup> Shahida Aman and Shagufta Aman. "Building Capacity to Build Dependency Institutional Paradoxes in Post 2001 State Building in Afghanistan." *Journal of Political Studies* (2015): 5-11.

with the mujahidin, who were supported by the West.<sup>33</sup> For comparison, four years later the government of the post-Taliban state was able to collect sufficient domestic revenues to contribute 8% of the total budget and about 30% of another small core budget (Edelstein, 2009). The smaller core budget basically covered the wages for the government officials more often, both officials at the provincial and local level, but none of the projects was of significant development.

Both the Government of Afghanistan and the World Bank recommended that the allocation of more external aid via the core budget of the government would only reduce the state's dependence on foreign donors. Thus, it would be very difficult to close the gap in sovereignty as called by the former finance minister of Afghanistan. Until the money for help remains the main source of income, the main dependence on donors will continue, and the conditions of quasi-sovereignty will prevail.<sup>34</sup>

The consequences of dependence on external aid for the survival of the state were widely discussed with respect to the state-building in Africa, in the notion of Jean-François Bayart "extraversion."<sup>35</sup> The dependence on external aid is also understood in another political phenomenon, known as the rentier state. The state of rentier is the complete opposite of what can be called the goal of the process of state-building. The case of Afghanistan expressed in the formal objectives of the policy is mentioned in the documents, particularly of the Bonn agreement.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Morgan Edwards, Lucy Helen. "Western support to warlords in Afghanistan from 2001-2014 and its effect on Political Legitimacy" *University of Exeter* (2015): 593-619.

<sup>34</sup> Shahida Aman, "Building Capacity to Build Dependency..." 15-21.

<sup>35</sup> Willemijn Verkoren and Bertine Kamphuis. "State building in a rentier state: how development policies fail to promote democracy in Afghanistan." *Development and Change* 44, no. 3 (2013): 501-526.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

President Daud's rule usually stands out as an example of an ideal rentier state. However; their modernist's rulers also gained significant foreign aid. The British imperial officers supplied Afghan rulers with funds at the end of the nineteenth century of foreign foundations. Rentier, as manifested in Afghanistan and elsewhere, has been carefully studied and has come to a clear conclusion, does not contribute to economic development and the evolution of democratic government accountability.<sup>37</sup>

Arguing for democratic development, accountability is linked to the flow of resources. Since Afghanistan's national budget is mainly financed by the international governments as well as institutions, the main responsibility of the Afghan government for accounting for these funds rests with donors, not with its own people. A similar observation was made with regard to the formal Afghan regimes, which largely depended on external financing. Barnett Rubin in his fundamental research on the political development of Afghan concludes that Daud's finance from the foreign aid and revenues from the sale of natural gas had adequate administrative consequences. The external revenues freed Daud from any incentives that he could make his government answerable to the Afghan citizens. He changed very little the way of the government to match the means that he mastered.

Many of the donors insisted on the inclusion of democratic reforms in the new government in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. In the long term, democratic responsibility for the contribution to stability, legitimacy, and order is expected, and this has given rise to the fact that the new Constitution and Bonn Agreement (2003) provided for the Parliament.<sup>38</sup> The new parliament elected in 2005, straightaway began to flex its muscles.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid: 215-300.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Hove Kathleen. "A Struggle for Hearts and Minds: Statebuilding and Origins of Political Legitimacy in Post-2001 Afghanistan." PhD diss., 2015.

Nevertheless, it is not clear what his sources of power would be if it did not have the power of a purse. Following this background, large flows of aid, especially if they make up 90% of the total Afghanistan budget, will tend to sideline the parliament, as the donors will play a crucial role, at least de facto, in the policy definition and implementation.<sup>39</sup> The government is accountable for its use of funds. The strength of donors in this regard was highlighted in the Afghanistan Compact, which was accepted in 2006 at the London conference.<sup>40</sup> The effective use of enormous aid flows can lead to the strengthening and stability of economic development to some extent. But this is clearly at probabilities with the long-term objective of establishing democratic practices and endorsing a democratic government in Afghanistan. The democratization of Afghanistan is also central to the state-building agenda, and less strengthens the legitimacy and authority of the current government.<sup>41</sup>

Two factors are extremely important to comprehend the effect of extensive foreign aid flows over government legitimacy: the extreme disintegration of the political power and the poppy economy. When the new government of Karzai was established, the central state turned out to be only one among many armed groups. Although the government exercised control over the capital, it was heavily fractionated in the first two years and had only a minor impact on the provincial official administration. The central government phenomenally survived the years of unrest and war. It was not only the Karzai government that had the great advantage of being an internationally recognized party and hence received international aid, but rather many other groups within the country also had outside supporters. This added advantage to

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<sup>39</sup> Goodhand, "Who owns the peace? Aid, reconstruction...:34-61.

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen, "A Struggle for Hearts and Minds...

<sup>41</sup> Siân Herbert, "State legitimacy in Afghanistan and the role of the international community." *Helpdesk report. Birmingham: GSDRC* (2014).

exercise authority and control on their different areas. They have access to the important capital through the illegal opium trade. As the production and trade of poppy rapidly grew and extended to new extents, it created a number of corresponding structures of authority and power.<sup>42</sup> This decreased the ability of external aid to obtain the support for the central government. Although the government has the ability to utilize its resources in order to provide assistance and receive political backing, it can also compete with groups that have additional sources of wealth. In the talks on political alignment and support, the fact that the government depended on foreign money was undoubtedly weak in two respects. The external element was a responsibility in the political climate, increasingly characteristic of anti-government and anti-trust protests. This is also problematic when observed from the rational point of view. The heavy dependency on foreign aid highlighted the government weakness as an independent and sovereign state.<sup>43</sup> This increased the risks and uncertainty for other participants in the rapprochement with the government. Consequently, a noticeable hedging effect in the negotiations between the center and local authorities was observed.

The Afghans are keenly conscious of their past history; international donors often turned out to be instable or acted in contrast to the interests of the local population.<sup>44</sup> The politics have traditionally been based on convenient links and the change in alliances. The early Karzai administration was not an exception. The parties to the Afghanistan situation at the central as well as local levels raised questions about how long the US will keep supporting

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, *The Resilient Oligopoly: A Political Economy of Northern Afghanistan, 2001 and Onwards*. (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2012): 5-9.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen D Krasner, "Sharing sovereignty: New institutions for collapsed and failing states." *International security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 7--112.

<sup>44</sup> Philipp Münch, "Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention" *AAN Report*, 12 (2013).

the Karzai government. If Karzai accomplishes the deal and the foreigners violate it, the other local party to the agreement has few opportunities for circulation. The anti-government factions use the same logic based on the lack of development and the constant presence of government forces in areas in which they do not feel themselves. Hedging between the centre and local authorities often manifested itself in the form of reluctance to pay taxes to the government and violating the ban on cultivation and trade of poppy. Whenever the government seeks compliance, it was usually temporary. An illustrative example is a case in early 2005 of ceasing the production of poppy in Nangarhar province.<sup>45</sup> There was a strong pressure from the central as well as provincial governments who compelled Nangarhar's governor and the local Silovik to introduce a temporary ban on the production of the poppy.<sup>46</sup> Resultantly the production fell by 96% which had a significant impact on official statistics, as Nangarhar was the main poppy growing area.<sup>47</sup> However, this reduction was temporary and after the end of one season, the poppy farmers again started cultivation. The exact reasons for the re-growing of poppy are not clear, but the main argument was indicating the decline in foreign aid.<sup>48</sup> Representatives of donors, in turn, argued that the provincial population harbored unrealistic expectations. Assistance is in any case necessary for proper training and project cycles. Karzai was silent. He signed a contract and could not fulfill it. The foreigner's role eclipsed the deal eventually. The farmers also complained about the non-cooperation of "the other side" "which led them to reconsider the ban on the cultivation of poppy".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Giustozzi, *The Resilient Oligopoly...*: 5-9.

<sup>46</sup> Philipp, "Local Afghan Power Structures ...

<sup>47</sup> Roger Mac Ginty, *International peacebuilding and local resistance: Hybrid forms of peace*. (Springer, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

While aid provides resources in the short term that enable it to fulfil some of the functions of the government, excessive economic dependency on external aid results in the political weakness that negatively impact the state-building processes. In economic dependency, the rentier government actually acts as an agent, not just one patron owner, to use the statistical demands of the institutional economy, its authority with regard to the implementation of political agreements in the long-term with potential rivals, supporters and participants are being questioned. Despite this, the spot contracts predominate-special arrangements that are subject to a sudden shift. Such arrangements may well be typical of customary Afghan politics. Nevertheless, this, of course, differs from the predictable relations and the development of stable rules that constitute the essence of organizational construction and are associated with the creation of an efficient state marked by "honesty and competence ", as stipulated in the Bonn Agreement.<sup>50</sup>

### **Military Dependency**

In the post-2001 era, the state-building projects in Afghanistan are primarily based on military intervention, which managed to replace the Taliban government with a new regime. The new regime under the leadership of Hamid Karzai was so dependent on the international interveners that, they rarely had any self-generated agendas. The international military in Afghanistan used the government in Afghanistan to fulfill their own agendas.<sup>51</sup> The state-building project in Afghanistan starting from 2001 to the present time has not succeeded in bringing stability and peace in the country. The internationally driven state-building efforts during this

<sup>50</sup> Anthony King, "Coalition challenges in Afghanistan: the politics of alliance. Edited by Gale Mattox and Stephen Grenier." (2016): 298-345.

<sup>51</sup> William Maley, *Transition in Afghanistan: Hope, Despair and the Limits of Statebuilding*. (Routledge, 2018).

long period prove that international intervention is not a solution for building states, rather a dominant factor in the failure of state-building projects.

Afghanistan cannot stand by its own military forces; rather it is dependent on the foreign military for security purposes. A government cannot be expected without an active army to protect territories of the state. The military really played a decisive role in the state-building after the fall of the Taliban regime, but it was also a fact that the military troops were not national. They were rather international. At the local level, the new Afghan National Army (ANA) was established, however, it's making and building up process was slow. The number of soldiers in ANA reached only 22,000 by the mid-2005.<sup>52</sup> This number was less in comparison to the presence of international forces, which at that time were around 30,000. Building up the national military capabilities of Afghanistan was initiated by the interveners, where ISAF sought to accomplish the three main goals of the state-building project; disarming the militants, limiting rivals and unleashing a militant opposition to the central state.

The basic aim and objective of the ISAF mission was to deter its rivals and make conditions to encourage the disarming of the militants. After the fall of the Taliban regime, ISAF secured the capital and worked for the prevention of the military rivalry between different Afghan groups over the capital. Different small teams of ISAF were deployed around the capital to realize the local authorities that external powers are fully backing Kabul in their civil and military affairs. The United States tried to deter the militant groups by ensuring the presence of a much more powerful US military force. They used B-52 diplomacy, at the strategic points of

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<sup>52</sup>David M Edelstein, "Foreign militaries, sustainable institutions, and postwar statebuilding." In *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*, (Routledge, 2009): 95-117.

conflict to inform that potentially much larger forces could be attracted to Afghanistan. However, the deterrence strategy of the international forces proved counterproductive in the state-building projects. The policy of decentralization through the help of regional strongmen failed due to the deterioration of the regional warlords of the US deterrence approach, especially Ismail Khan in the West and Dostum in the North.<sup>53</sup> Regional integration was crucial for the state-building in Afghanistan, as the country was divided over the share of power and authority in the government for decades. Any attempt to deteriorate the provincial integration and unity was fatal for the future of Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup>

Initially, presence of the international military troops was seen as a blessing and shield against the militant groups, and their contribution to safeguard the capital and help the central government was welcomed. However, with the passage of time, the anti-US forces demonstrations started throughout the country due to their failure to control terrorist activities and safeguard the lives of common citizens. Further, the collateral damages as a result of the ISAF actions against the Taliban proved fatal for their presence in Afghanistan. The situation kept worsening to the extent that, the people missed the Taliban rule and showed the willingness to welcome their rule again. The core reason for the shift in people's sympathies from the foreign troops was the worsening insurgency in the country.<sup>55</sup>

The US military forces were primarily focused on the destruction of Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan and the subsequent defeat of the Taliban. The results were mixed; the

<sup>53</sup>MatilkaKrow, "A State in Limbo: Afghanistan, Warlords and International Intervention (1979-1992, post-2001).*DalhousieUniversityHalifax* (2011).

<sup>54</sup>Timor, "The Network Politics of International Statebuilding...:9-186.

<sup>55</sup>NajibullahLafraie, "Resurgence of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan: How and why?" *International Politics* 46, no. 1 (2009): 102-113.

Taliban were removed from the government, and were pushed into mountainous regions of Afghanistan; however, on the other hand, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda started offensive attacks against the international as well as local military forces. When the military became a difficult target for the militants due to increased precautionary measures, they started targeting the soft targets, such as the civilians, workers, and humanitarian agencies. The more the NATO initiated offensives against the Taliban, the more civilians were killed. The system continued and the Afghan forces remained dependent on the foreign troops. One of the major drawbacks of the increasing dependency on foreign troops was that the local traditional societies did not show acceptance to them. Consequently, the state-building process in Afghanistan was more disturbed by the dependency on international military forces, rather than any improvements.<sup>56</sup>

The increased insurgency in the country due to the presence of international forces was not possible for the national forces of Afghanistan to control. Therefore, reliance on international forces increased. The operations of the international forces continued to intensify the hatred within the local population. The local military forces remained weak and dependent on the international forces, thus leaving a major gap in the future state-building process. The failure of ISAF forces in building a national Afghan military force, strengthening democratic institutions and overcoming insurgency proves that the international intervention failed in its goals to build a strong and stable Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Michael J Williams, "Empire lite revisited: NATO, the comprehensive approach and state-building in Afghanistan." *International Peacekeeping* 18, no. 1 (2011): 64-78.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The main agenda of the US state-building project in Afghanistan was to create a strong central executive power that would unite the nation under a unified government or a strong parliament that could unite through the principle of separation of power. However, in addition to the executive branch, Parliament has shown itself to be a weak body, which reflects its constitutional restrictions, stagnant political parties with little power and much more in accordance with the constitutional framework and social environment that favours clientelistic governmental issues. A much more significant limitation arises from the structure of the international power and basic leadership on issues that are central to the state, for example, in economics and security. The country's almost excessive dependence on international donors for money undermined the autonomy of the government as a whole or, according to Stephen Krasner, forced "to share sovereignty". For a few, this is basically undemocratic - a government that has no influence over its financial plan or over the armed forces. More prominent national control over the financial plan and the armed forces would build "sovereignty," yet not really "vote based system." The executive body of the Afghan government has to some extent a few prerogatives to consult with the outside donors in terms of monetary and military exchanges. In any case, Parliament is, for all intents and purposes, prohibited from this exchange. It has exceptionally constrained powers to control the executive, including the prospering military chain of importance, and to impact political issues, for example, economy and security. In such a manner, the democratic institutions of Afghanistan have been obliged by the international powers. In the oddness of destiny, the international group has claimed to empower democratization, yet in the meantime making a state so reliant on foreign aid that it denies the governing body of its centrality as an

essential foundation of the liberal vote based system. The coherent reaction of the assembly has been to bargain generally with typical subjects or just to annoy. The bargains made and the solid international intervention in the political reforms were opposing with the guarantee of self-governance, portrayal and reasonable procedures offered by the democratization and state-building program. By verifiably undermining or devaluing the institutions it tried to advance, the state-building procedure has had conceivably counter-productive impact.

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