



T.C

ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT**

**OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL AND LAST 6
YEARS OF NATO IN AFGHANISTAN: A DEBACLE OR
VICTORY?**

Kadir KALAY

MASTER'S THESIS

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Burçin DEMİRBİLEK

Çankırı-2024

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SCIENTIFIC ETHICS STATEMENT

I affirm that, throughout the entire process from the proposal stage to the conclusion of my Master's thesis titled "*Operation Freedom's Sentinel and Last 6 years of NATO in Afghanistan: A Debacle or Victory?*" I have diligently adhered to scientific ethics and academic standards. I declare that all information within the thesis has been obtained within the framework of scientific ethics and tradition. In preparing this work in accordance with the rules of thesis writing, I have provided proper citation for every direct or indirect quotation, and I acknowledge that the sources cited in the bibliography are consistent with those referenced in the text.

... / ... / 2024

Signature:

Kadir KALAY

THESIS ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL
ÇANKIRI KARATEKİN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES DIRECTORATE

This thesis, titled "*Operation Freedom's Sentinel and Last 6 years of NATO in Afghanistan: A Debacle or Victory?*" prepared by Kadir KALAY, was found successful by unanimous/majority vote during the thesis defense examination held on 25/07/2024 date. The jury, in the field of Political Science and International Relations, has approved and accepted this work as a Master's thesis.

THESIS JURY MEMBERS

Supervisor	: Assoc. Prof. Burçin DEMİRBİLEK	Signature:
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Member	: Assist. Prof. Hilal ZORBA BAYRAKTAR	Signature:

APPROVAL

This Thesis has been accepted by the jury determined in the session of Çankırı Karatekin University Social Sciences Institute Administrative Board, dated .../.... /..... and numbered

Prof. Dr. Coşkun POLAT

Director of the Institution

PREFACE

This thesis delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding Operation Freedom's Sentinel and the last six years of NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, exploring whether the mission can be characterized as a debacle or a victory. The decision to undertake this research stemmed from a profound interest in understanding the complexities of international interventions in conflict zones and their implications for peace, security, and governance.

The motivation for this study arose from witnessing the ongoing debates and discussions surrounding Operation Freedom's Sentinel and NATO's presence in Afghanistan. Questions about the effectiveness of the mission, its achievements, and its long-term impacts prompted a deeper examination of the subject matter. Furthermore, my dedication to this research project was driven by my desire to contribute to the academic conversation on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

The objectives of this thesis are twofold: first, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Operation Freedom's Sentinel and NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, drawing on a wide range of primary and secondary sources; and second, to critically evaluate whether the mission can be deemed a success or a failure, considering the diverse perspectives such as peacebuilding theory and narratives surrounding the intervention.

As I embarked on this research journey, I experienced various challenges and obstacles along the way. Navigating through complex historical narratives, deciphering conflicting accounts, and synthesizing vast amounts of information required careful attention to detail and rigorous analytical scrutiny. Nevertheless, the process of handling with these challenges has been immensely rewarding, offering valuable insights into the complexities of international interventions in conflict-affected regions.

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Assoc. Prof. Burçin DEMİRBİLEK for her guidance, support, and invaluable feedback throughout the research process. Her knowledge and guidance have been greatly helpful in determining the course of this thesis and improving its analytical structure.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my colleagues and friends who have provided encouragement, understanding, and moral support throughout this journey. Their unfaltering belief in my capabilities has been a source of strength and motivation during challenging times. Finally, I extend my gratitude to my beloved family for their unwavering support, which has kept my spirits high throughout my work.

Finally, I would want to dedicate this thesis to the courageous people of Afghanistan, whose will to overcome adversity generates hope for a more peaceful and hopeful future. As we work for a society free from injustice and conflict, may their voices be heard, their sacrifices recognized, and their dreams realized.

25 / 07 / 2024

Kadir KALAY

ABSTRACT

Thesis Title : Operation Freedom's Sentinel and Last 6 years of NATO in Afghanistan: A Debacle or Victory?
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Following the September 11 attacks, U.S. President Bush demanded that the Taliban immediately give back al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden to the United States; the Taliban refused and the U.S. declared Operation Enduring Freedom against Afghanistan. The U.S.-led coalition remained in Afghanistan, forming a security mission (ISAF)—sanctioned by the United Nations— as a part of NATO with the goal of creating a new democratic authority. But in 2015, NATO formally ended ISAF combat operations in Afghanistan, changed the operation name as Operation Freedom's Sentinel and gave all responsibility to Afghan security forces; and started to prepare the withdrawal of all NATO. In this study, a qualitative research method of document analysis was applied, highlighting both significant achievements and encountered challenges when assessing the success of the operation.

NATO significantly contributed to the training and capacity building of Afghan security forces. It conducted crucial operations against terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, thus reducing the terrorist threat in the region. Furthermore, NATO provided substantial support for infrastructure projects and humanitarian aid activities in Afghanistan, contributing to the improvement of local living conditions.

Following NATO's withdrawal, Afghanistan experienced rapid deterioration in security, leading to serious security issues such as the Taliban's takeover of the country. Sustainable political stability could not be achieved in Afghanistan, as the nation faced various political conflicts and instability. Additionally, Afghan security forces proved inadequate in effectively combating the Taliban after NATO's withdrawal.

In conclusion, while NATO achieved significant successes in Afghanistan, it also faced various challenges. Long-term sustainable success was not attained. For future operations, it is crucial to consider these challenges and adopt more effective strategies, which could enhance NATO's success in future missions.

Keywords: NATO, Afghanistan, Operation, successes, challenges, Taliban



ÖZET

Tez Adı : Freedom's Sentinel Operasyonu ve Afganistan'daki NATO' nun son 6 yılı: Bozgun mu yoksa zafer mi?
Tezin Yazarı : Kadir KALAY
Danışman : Doç. Dr. Burçin DEMİRBİLEK
Anabilim Dalı : Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler
Tez Türü : Yüksek Lisans
Tarih : 25/07/2024

11 Eylül saldırılarının ardından, ABD Başkanı Bush, Taliban'ın hemen al-Qaeda lideri Osama bin Ladin' i ABD' ye geri vermesini talep etti; Taliban bu teklifi reddetti ve ABD Afganistan' a karşı Enduring Freedom Operasyonunu ilan etti. Bu tarihten itibaren ABD liderliğindeki koalisyon, yeni bir demokratik otorite oluşturmak amacıyla NATO' nun bir parçası olarak Birleşmiş Milletler tarafından onaylanan bir güvenlik misyonu (ISAF) oluşturarak Afganistan' da kaldı. Ancak 2015 yılında NATO resmi olarak Afganistan'daki ISAF savaş operasyonlarını sona erdirdi, operasyonun adını Freedom's Sentinel olarak değiştirdi ve tüm sorumluluğu Afgan güvenlik güçlerine verdi ve NATO' nun çekilmesi için de hazırlanmaya başlandı. Bu çalışmada, operasyonun başarısının değerlendirilmesi esnasında görülen önemli başarılar ve zorlukları vurgulayan, belge analizinin nitelikli bir araştırma yöntemi uygulanmıştır.

Operasyonun başarıları: NATO, Afgan güvenlik güçlerinin eğitime ve kapasite geliştirmesine önemli katkıda bulundu. Al-Qaeda ve Taliban gibi terör örgütlerine karşı önemli operasyonlar yürüttü ve böylece bölgedeki terör tehdidini azalttı. Ayrıca NATO, Afganistan'daki altyapı projelerine, insani yardım faaliyetlerine ve yerel yaşam koşullarının iyileştirilmesine katkıda bulunmuştur.

Operasyonun zorlukları ve başarısızlıkları: NATO'nun çekilmesinden sonra Afganistan'da güvenlik hızla bozuldu ve Taliban'ın ülkeyi ele geçirmesi gibi ciddi güvenlik sorunlarına yol açtı. Ülke çeşitli siyasi çatışmalar ve istikrarsızlıkla karşı karşıya olduğu için Afganistan'da sürdürülebilir siyasi istikrar elde edilemedi. Buna ek olarak, Afgan güvenlik güçleri NATO'nun çekilmesinden sonra Talibanla etkili bir şekilde mücadele etmekte yetersiz olduklarını kanıtladılar.

Sonuç olarak, NATO Afganistan'da önemli başarılar elde ederken, aynı zamanda çeşitli zorluklarla da karşı karşıya kaldı. Uzun vadeli sürdürülebilir başarı elde edilemedi. Gelecekteki operasyonlar için bu zorlukları göz önünde bulundurmak ve NATO'nun gelecekteki misyonlarda başarısını artırabilecek daha etkili stratejileri kabul etmek de bir kez daha önem kazandı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: NATO, Afganistan, Operasyon, başarılar, zorluklar, Taliban



ABBREVIATIONS

ANSF	The Afghan National Security Forces
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
DoD OIG	The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General
DoS	The U.S. Department of State
EU	European Union
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OES	Operation Enduring Sentinel
OFS	Operation Freedom's Sentinel
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
U.S.	United States
UAE	United Arab Emirates

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literature Review

Looking at Afghanistan's lengthy history, it is evident that due to its geographical location, the country has been subjected to numerous international interventions. Particularly, the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union symbolizes the beginning of a period that inflicted long-term and profound wounds on the nation. The Soviet intervention occurred as a result of expansionist policies, transforming Afghanistan into a gruesome stage of violence and conflict. In the 19th century, Afghanistan was a focal point of the Great Game, a competition between two major powers. Towards the end of the 20th century, Afghanistan once again became a similar stage for rivalry. When the Cold War came to the end, the influence of external powers intensified in the struggle among various groups in the region. Afghanistan was perceived both as a reflection of ideological conflicts between East and West and as the center of the interests of various countries due to its strategic location (Rubin, 2002, pp. 235-240). This process led Afghanistan to persist as an unstable region, where conflict and violence took root. Today, the Afghan people continue to grapple with the consequences of these historical processes, facing ongoing hardship and suffering. As the international community works to maintain Afghanistan's stability and promote the nation's development, the shadow of the past still looms over their efforts.

The chaos and civil war that ensued after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan mark a significant period in the country's history. The Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989, following the victory of the Mujahideen against the communist regime, did not bring the expected stability. On the contrary, the country descended into further complexity with the outbreak of internal conflict. The Mujahideen's failure to share power led to intensified ethnic conflicts in the country. This civil war escalated tensions not only as a political struggle but also heightened ethnic identity-based tensions. The governance vacuum during this period, coupled with economic crises and famine, severely impacted the lives of the people. The public initially welcomed the emergence of the Taliban as a promise of hope and salvation. However, upon the Taliban seizing power and implementing harsh

and rigid rules, disappointment spread among the population. While initially seen as a force that would bring stability, over time, the hopes placed in the Taliban proved to be in vain.

In the 1980s, Afghanistan saw some of the most intense Cold War battles. The Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 caused significant turmoil in the country (Coll, 2004, p. 56). The conflicts on Afghan soil continued until 1996, when the Taliban seized control. Before the Soviet intervention in 1979, the centralized state structure that existed was not reconstructed until the emergence of the Taliban at the end of 1994. With the exit of Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the aid supplied to the Mujahideen by the United States also came to an end. This situation led to disagreements over power-sharing. Immediately after the United States discontinued support for the Mujahideen, power struggles among these groups resulted in internal conflicts, dividing the once united Mujahideen fighting against a common enemy. Weapons became the source of conflicts between groups that had once fought together, initiating a civil war that would last for years. As mentioned by Tammana (2009), disagreements among the Mujahideen formed the basis of the civil war, influencing Afghanistan for many years (Coll, 2004, p. 293).

The Taliban era is considered a dark period in Afghanistan's history. The confinement of women to their homes, the denial of education rights to girls, and pervasive abuses of human rights have been significant issues that caught the consideration of the global community. The hosting of the Al-Qaeda leader by the Taliban also led to conflicts in international relations. The failure to deliver Al-Qaeda leader Bin Laden to the U.S. and the UK after the 9/11 attacks prompted military intervention in Afghanistan. This intervention aimed to end the Taliban regime and establish a government based on democratic values. However, over the 20-year NATO campaign, the expected success was not achieved, and the billions of dollars spent did not yield the desired results. Despite financial and military support to Afghanistan, the established Afghan Army could not demonstrate the expected resilience, and the central government collapsed due to its weaknesses. This situation highlighted that the international community's efforts to strengthen democratic values in Afghanistan required not only military struggle but also long-term support for social and political reforms.

An important turning point for the United States in the global war against terrorism was the September 11, 2001 assaults. Following these tragic events, the U.S. targeted the leadership of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda and the infrastructure supported by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan under 'Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)'. U.S. forces participated in this operation by joining a coalition known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), with the aim of ensuring the country's security and strengthening Afghan security forces.

These war operations officially concluded on December 31, 2014. However, the United States continued to stay in Afghanistan as part of 'Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS)'. In this new mission, U.S. soldiers actively participated in counterterrorism operations, primarily against the remnants of Al Qaeda, while also offering training, counsel, and support to the Afghan National Defense and Security soldiers.

Throughout this process, the U.S. presence in Afghanistan played a crucial role in achieving international security and stability. Nevertheless, various challenges and complexities were experienced during these operations and the subsequent periods. The situation in Afghanistan involves a complex framework encompassing diplomatic, military, and security issues at regional and global levels.

The conclusion of NATO's presence in Afghanistan symbolizes the end of an era stemming from the September 11 attacks and years of intervention. The United States led the coalition, intervening in Afghanistan due to the Taliban's refusal to surrender Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, with the aim of establishing a long-term democratic authority. Over the years, NATO, through Operations Enduring Freedom and later ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operations, invested significant efforts in securing Afghanistan. However, in 2015, officially concluding ISAF combat operations and transitioning to Operation Freedom's Sentinel, NATO handed full responsibility to Afghan security forces. NATO's involvement in Afghanistan concluded in 2021, a span of 20 years. Throughout this period, significant political and security changes occurred in the country. However, the withdrawal decision sparked criticism and concerns. The complex situation in Afghanistan has prompted the international community to develop

new strategies and provide support to the region. The withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan underscores the complexity of international cooperation in counterterrorism and the challenges associated with long-term commitments. This process represents a crucial juncture for the future of Afghanistan and regional stability, with the international community's approach shaping significant factors that will influence future developments.

The presence of NATO in Afghanistan began in 2001 with the international intervention aimed at overthrowing the Taliban regime and combating terrorism. The primary goal of this study is to understand, assess, and analyze the overall impact, outcomes, and complexity of NATO's presence in Afghanistan. An important aspect for evaluation is the evolution of NATO's role and defined objectives since the beginning of the intervention. The intervention began with the goal of counterterrorism and establishing stability, but it evolved over time as dynamics and strategies changed. The operations' initially clear objectives expanded to include training local security forces, infrastructure projects, and human rights issues.

The complexity of these factors complicates the assessment of the success or failure of the intervention. On one hand, there have been successes in overthrowing the Taliban and effectively combating terrorist organizations. On the other hand, ongoing security issues, political instability, and economic challenges in the country indicate that the intervention has not fully achieved success. This study addresses the assessment of success or failure of the intervention, which is crucial for an in-depth analysis of the lessons to be learned by the international community from this intervention. At the beginning of the study, an extensive document set regarding NATO's presence in Afghanistan was scanned. These documents include academic articles, reports, strategic documents, media news, and NATO's official statements. Documentary analysis refers the selected documents having been thoroughly examined through the qualitative content analysis method. Regarding this, during the analysis process, the focus was on the history, strategies, achievements, and challenges of NATO's activities in Afghanistan. Additionally, important topics such as the effects of international intervention, local dynamics, developments in counterterrorism efforts, and political consequences were addressed.

1.2 Research Methodology

1.2.1 Scope

The scope of this study focuses on understanding and analyzing the overall effects, outcomes, and complexities of NATO's presence in Afghanistan. The scope includes the following elements:

- i. **NATO's Presence in Afghanistan:** This thesis addresses NATO's presence in Afghanistan, starting with the international intervention aimed at overthrowing the Taliban regime and combating terrorism in 2001. This includes NATO's military operations, training missions, humanitarian aid activities, and other relevant efforts.
- ii. **Effects and Outcomes:** The research evaluates the local, regional, and international impacts and consequences of NATO's presence in Afghanistan. This encompasses areas such as the security situation, political stability, economic development, human rights conditions, and counterterrorism efforts.
- iii. **Complexity Analysis:** This thesis provides an analytical framework to understand the complexity of NATO's presence in Afghanistan. It includes examining the relationships among different actors in the conflict, local dynamics, cultural factors, and other complex elements.
- iv. **Time Frame:** This thesis assesses the effects and outcomes of NATO's presence in Afghanistan since 2001. However, the scope will be within an appropriate time frame for determining and analyzing the results.

1.2.2 Methodology

In this thesis, one of the qualitative research methodologies is the document analysis methodology, has been applied to understand, evaluate, and analyze the overall effects and consequences of NATO's presence in Afghanistan.

1.2.3 The design of the research

One of the qualitative research designs, document analysis, serves as the foundation for the design of this thesis. The term qualitative research has become increasingly difficult to define in recent years (Creswell, 2018). In fact, there are different perspectives on this term (Aspers and Corte, 2019). This diversity is associated with the epistemological and axiological attitudes of researchers regarding which characteristics of qualitative research they emphasize. At the same time, although the term qualitative research is singular, it is associated with different methodologies, paradigms, and approaches (Tunçalp, 2021). In summary, the term qualitative research is a concept in which researchers have different perspectives and evaluations. This concept does not refer to a specific research method but rather to a broader methodological approach. This approach emphasizes the use of qualitative data to understand and explain phenomena and values the context and depth of research. While explaining the philosophical background of qualitative research, there are various differences in terminology and approaches. For example, research mentions a range of perspectives and approaches such as positivist, neopositivist, interpretive, humanistic, critical, postmodern, social constructivist, and transformative (Creswell and Poth, 2018, pp. 15-21). Additionally, while some studies refer to qualitative research designs such as phenomenology, ethnography, and case studies, in other words, these terms are discussed as theoretical orientations (Patton, 2018, pp. 56-58) or under the heading of methodology (Tunçalp, 2021, pp. 123-125).

This methodology involves examining and analyzing existing documents, written materials, reports, and other documents. During this analysis process, researchers systematically examine and interpret the data based on predefined key concepts and themes. Document analysis allows for an in-depth examination using existing information and documents to understand and explain a specific phenomenon. This design enables researchers to understand the complexity and depth of the phenomenon based on the information obtained from existing sources. The document analysis methodology is a common qualitative research design used in historiography, policy analysis, social sciences, and other fields. This design aims to answer research questions through in-depth examination and analysis of written information in documents. In this thesis, the document

analysis design was used to understand and analyze the overall effects, outcomes, and complexities of NATO's presence in Afghanistan.

1.2.4 Document Selection

At the outset of the thesis, a wide range of documents related to NATO's presence in Afghanistan was scanned. These documents include academic articles, reports, strategic documents, media coverage, and NATO's official statements. The scanned documents were carefully selected to align with the scope of the research.

1.2.5 Document Analysis

The selected documents were thoroughly examined using the qualitative content analysis method. During this analysis process, emphasis was placed on topics such as the history, strategies, achievements, and challenges of NATO's activities in Afghanistan. Additionally, important issues such as the effects of international intervention, local dynamics, developments in counterterrorism efforts, and political consequences were also addressed. In the analysis process, data obtained from the documents were systematically examined and interpreted based on predefined key concepts and themes.

1.3 Peacebuilding Theory

In order to create enduring peace, peacebuilding is a broad idea that goes beyond simple conflict resolution. Its goal is to deal with the root causes of conflict. It entails a variety of actions intended to address root causes and improve national capacity for managing conflicts in order to stop violent episodes from happening again. Over time, peacebuilding theories and practices have changed to reflect the complexity of today's conflicts and the variety of needs of societies emerging from conflict. Johan Galtung coined the term "peacebuilding," which refers to the process of establishing a lasting peace by addressing the underlying issues that lead to conflict and strengthening social cohesion to prevent violent relapses. Galtung contends that peacebuilding must go beyond the simple end of hostilities and include both positive and negative peace, which is defined as the mending and strengthening of relationships as well as the creation of institutions that fulfill the requirements of the general public (Galtung, 1996, pp. 9-15). "A range of measures

targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development" is how the United Nations (UN) defines peacebuilding (UN Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010). 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)', 'security sector reform (SSR)', political and governance changes, economic recovery, and the advancement of justice and human rights are all included in this all-encompassing strategy.

1.3.1 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)'

DDR initiatives, which work to disarm armed groups, lessen the quantity of weapons in circulation, and assist former combatants in readjusting to civilian life, are essential parts of peacebuilding efforts. In order for DDR processes to be effective, combatants must physically disarm, military organizations must be formally dissolved, and ex-combatants must be given the means to transition into useful civilian roles. These initiatives seek to prevent the spread of violence and create a secure atmosphere that promotes both political and economic recovery. DDR is frequently a protracted process requiring significant funding and concerted efforts from different societal sectors.

1.3.2 Security Sector Reform (SSR)

SSR includes changing security organizations to make them more efficient, responsible, and compliant with the law. The development and reform of the armed forces, law enforcement, courts, and other relevant institutions fall under this category. The intention is to establish security frameworks that can uphold law and order, protect human rights, and aid in the establishment of a stable state. Rebuilding public confidence in the state and guaranteeing that security forces are able to adequately safeguard the populace without feeding cycles of abuse and violence are two reasons why SSR is so important.

1.3.3 Governance and Rule of Law

The establishment of strong governance institutions and the rule of law are also essential components of peacebuilding. This entails creating transparent legal frameworks, promoting political inclusivity, holding free and fair elections, and drafting and upholding

constitutions. Long-term stability depends on the maintenance of public trust and legitimacy, both of which are contingent upon effective governance. It is essential to establish robust institutions that are able to provide public services, enforce the legislation, and protect human rights to prevent a conflict from happening again.

1.3.4 Economic and Infrastructure Development

Rebuilding infrastructure and the economy are necessary for enduring peace. The main goals of peacebuilding initiatives are to guarantee access to essential services, build roads, schools, and hospitals, and create jobs. Initiatives for economic development seek to alleviate poverty, create jobs, and promote economic stability—all of which are essential for averting a return to hostilities. These programs also need to address inequality and ensure that the benefits of the economy are distributed fairly among the different regions and social groups in society.

1.3.5 Human Rights and Social Development

To build peace, social development and the progression of human rights are essential. In addition to protecting vulnerable populations, efforts are being made to advance gender equality, improve healthcare and education. Emphasizing human rights contributes to the development of a just society in which every person can engage fully and equally. Programs for social development seek to mend the social fabric ripped by strife, encourage peacemaking, and foster a feeling of belonging and common identity.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The first chapter established the introduction section as the primary focus. Without detailed information, the history of Afghanistan was examined through a literature review through the social and military processes ranging from the intervention of NATO. Following the methodological research, peacekeeping theory was also included in the first chapter as the basis of the intervention. The second chapter delved deeply into NATO's role in Afghanistan, examining its historical context. The chapter also examined the peace process. Chapter 3 delved into the objectives of NATO intervention informed by the decisions made by the organization. Chapter 4 examined in depth the outcomes of NATO's

activities and their impacts on the country in light of peacebuilding efforts. Chapter 5 covered the successes, failures, and lessons learned from NATO activities, as well as the results of peacebuilding activities. Chapter 6 concluded with an evaluation of all the completed work.



2. NATO'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

2.1 The History of the USA and NATO in Afghanistan

The instability and struggles that Afghanistan has experienced throughout its history have witnessed the interactions of various powers across a vast geography. From the conflict between the Russian and British Empires to a series of geopolitical competitions continuing into the 20th and 21st centuries, this country has been a stage for multifaceted contests (Demir, 2012). Afghanistan became a battlefield during the Cold War as a result of competition between the US and the Soviet Union, leading to a complex situation with the involvement of other global and regional powers. This prolonged internal conflict and instability have profoundly affected the lives of the Afghan people. The country has suffered destruction, economic decline, impoverishment, and loss of life as consequences. Afghanistan has not been a peaceful nation in the past and has long been a region of conflict among various militant groups. This situation is closely related to the country's geopolitical position, ethnic composition, and relations with its neighbours. Today, Afghanistan remains under the influence of various internal and external powers, and instability persists. However, there is still a hope for the establishment of peace and stability through the international community's assistance. This underscores the significance of Afghanistan not only for its own people but also for regional and global stability (Akhtar, 2008, pp. 150-152).

Various factors in Afghanistan's history have influenced the challenging living conditions and its long-term capability for asymmetric warfare. Among these factors, historical experiences, geographical conditions, and the status of local leaders have played a decisive role (Demir, 2010, pp. 88-90). Afghanistan has been subjected to numerous external interventions and invasion attempts throughout its history. In particular, the invasion attempts by the British Empire and the Soviet Union posed serious threats to the country's independence and sovereignty. However, the Afghan people have shown deadly resistance against these invaders (Barfield, 2010, p. 238). The geographical conditions of Afghanistan have also influenced warfare strategies. Its mountainous and rugged terrains have facilitated the use of guerrilla warfare and siege tactics against invaders. This

situation has provided Afghan insurgents with an advantage in their struggle against invaders. The status of local leaders and "warlords" in Afghanistan is also significant. These leaders have established a broad support base by preserving the autonomous status of tribes and regions. This has helped in creating a more organized and effective resistance against invaders (Demir, 2010, pp. 120-122). Another typical feature of wars in Afghanistan is the execution of collaborating local leaders and rulers after the departure of the invaders. This has triggered internal tensions and political instability in the country during the post-invasion period. For example, after the Soviet occupation, Najibullah, who was pro-Moscow, was executed for being seen as a collaborator. These factors have shaped Afghanistan's ability for warfare and resistance against external interventions throughout its long and tumultuous history. The Afghan people have paid significant costs throughout history to preserve their independence and freedoms and continue to endure this struggle (Coll, 2004, p. 498).

The Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in late 1979 symbolized a turning point and led to numerous consequences. This intervention contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union itself and weakened the global influence of communist ideology (Riedel, Bergen, Anderson and Sageman, 2010; Demir, 2010). However, perhaps more importantly, one of the outcomes of this intervention was the emergence of Afghan mujahideen supported by cooperation between the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The organization and financing of resistance against the Soviet occupation were made possible through Saudi Arabia's financial support, the weapons provided by the United States, and Pakistan's training and logistical support. This support enabled Afghan mujahedeen to effectively resist the Soviet Union. However, one of the most significant effects of this resistance was the rise and politicization of radical Islamic ideology. Many of the mujahedeen were affiliated with radical Islamist groups, and this process led to the political and military empowerment of Islamic movements. Furthermore, the impact of the conflict in Afghanistan and the mujahedeen also influenced other Islamic countries. During this period, the spread and strengthening of radical Islamist ideologies affected and shaped Islamic movements both regionally and globally. The emergence of radical elements like the Taliban today is also a result of this process. The Taliban began as a group emerging

from the Soviet occupation and the Afghan civil war that followed, eventually seizing control of the country. In conclusion, the Soviet invasion and the resistance of Afghan mujahedeen led to the rise, politicization, and regional and international influence of radical Islamic groups. This process remains part of the complex and tumultuous regional dynamics still ongoing today (Riedel et al., 2010).

Today's fate of Afghanistan began to take shape in 1978 when the civil war broke out. During this period, the rise of a pro-Soviet government in the country and increasing opposition to this situation formed the basis of internal conflicts. In December 1979, the Soviet Union's military engagement in the nation, upon the request of the Afghan leader further exacerbated the internal strife. The 1979 Soviet Union incursion swiftly increased the civil war and intensified the conflicts. The Soviet occupation sparked significant resistance and clashes in the country. Between 1989 and 1992, conflicts occurred primarily between the Soviet-backed government and Islamist opposition forces in the country. During this period, with the retreat of the Soviet Union and the escalation of internal warfare, conflicts increased, leading to an uncontrollable environment of chaos. These conflicts and the chaotic environment deeply affected Afghanistan's political, social, and economic structure, plunging the country into years of instability and uncertainty. This process laid the foundation for today's complex and tumultuous situation in the country (Sanín and Giustozzi, 2010, pp. 836-853).

Following the Soviet Union's 1989 pullout from Afghanistan, a stable government could not be established in the country. During this period, there were conflicts and disputes among various Islamist and regional groups. From 1993 to 1996, chaos and civil war prevailed in the country with the formation of various coalitions and an escalation of conflicts. The United States perceived this instability as a risk to its own security and re-engaged Pakistan. Pakistan, having previously gained experience in training Afghan mujahedeen, began supporting a new radical religious militant group called the Taliban, using its expertise. The Taliban emerged as a structure predominantly composed of the Pashtun group, which constitutes about 40% of Afghanistan. Strengthened by Pakistan's support, the Taliban quickly grabbed power in certain regions of the nation and eventually overran a sizable portion of Afghanistan. However, the rise of the Taliban caused concern

and anxiety in the international community. Elements such as the Taliban's radical religious ideology, human rights violations, and terrorist activities drew international criticism and further complicated the internal conflict in Afghanistan. As a result, the instability and civil war atmosphere in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union were further complicated by the intervention of the United States and Pakistan's support for the Taliban. This process laid the foundation for Afghanistan's current political and social structure (Webber, 2009, pp. 145-147).

2.2 Afghanistan During the Taliban Era (1996-2001)

The complex history of the nation and the fallout from internal battles contributed to the Taliban's 1996 takeover of Afghanistan. The central state structure that existed before to Soviet involvement in 1979 could not be rebuilt until the emergence of the Taliban in the 1994 (Coll, 2004, p. 14). After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and the cessation of U.S. aid to the Mujahedeen, power-sharing disputes arose, leading to conflicts among Mujahedeen factions (Coll, 2004, p. 236). During years of ongoing civil war, the absence of a central government in the country, the rise of corruption and lawlessness in regions controlled by different Mujahedeen commanders made daily life chaotic, resulting in widespread human rights violations. In this chaotic environment, the Taliban movement emerged as an alternative in response to the insecurity and instability caused by the civil war. During the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001, their implemented rules and policies were based on a strict Islamic state model. Women's rights were restricted, the education system was reorganized based on gender discrimination, and an overall governance approach tightly bound to religious laws was adopted. The U.S. military operation in Afghanistan in 2001 led to the Taliban's downfall. However, the Taliban's return to power 20 years later was shaped by subsequent political and security developments. Afghanistan's complex history and internal dynamics had a major impact in the Taliban's resurgence (Gopal, 2014, pp. 276-280)

While there are various accounts regarding the emergence and empowerment of the Taliban, the statements of Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid shed light on this process. According to Rashid, the Taliban is a group that emerged during a period of internal

turmoil in Afghanistan. Comprising mostly of orphaned and fatherless children left behind during invasions, the group grew up in Pakistani madrasas. The Taliban's objectives were to bring peace to Afghanistan, disarm the population, enforce Sharia law, and defend the country's integrity and Islamic character. In pursuit of these goals, the Taliban quickly achieved significant successes. The ongoing ethnic conflicts in the country, in particular, accelerated the emergence of the Taliban. Simultaneously, the belief among the war-weary population that the Taliban would bring stability contributed to the social support for the organization. The rise of the Taliban is closely linked to factors such as ethnic and religious conflicts, as well as internal instability and a sense of insecurity within society. These conditions made it possible for the Taliban to expand quickly, enabling them to gain control over the country (Rashid, 2001, pp. 112-114).

This situation has raised concerns for the Islamabad administration due to the control exerted by Mujahedeen commanders over the route extending from Pakistan through Kandahar and Herat to Central Asian countries, coupled with arbitrary extortion practices. Particularly, the need to guarantee Pakistan's trade's security with Afghanistan and Central Asia has been an influential factor in the emergence of the Taliban (Swan, 2020, p. 32). In this context, the interplay of political dynamics in the region and the impact on trade security highlights the complexity of regional relations.

The words "talebe" and "talib" generally refer to students engaged in religious education. "Taliban," on the other hand, is derived from the Arabic word "talib" with the Persian plural suffix "an," meaning "students" (Rashid, 2000, p. 22). This organization emphasizes that its name carries religious connotations and underscores that they are a group genuinely implementing religious principles. In this context, the Taliban asserts that every step they take is in accordance with the early periods of Islam. The Taliban movement has consistently pledged to govern the country within the framework of Sharia laws. However, other Mujahedeen groups they engage in conflicts with have also operated under similar claims. Similarly, the Taliban claims that death is permissible, and they deem all forms of oppression, coercion, injustice, and violence as acceptable. They assert that fighting alongside them constitutes jihad, emphasizing that the majority of the society they claim to represent is Muslim (Naimi, 2018, p. 112).

After capturing Kandahar in 1994, the Taliban, led by Mullah Omar, maintained a highly secretive governance approach, with almost all top-level officials refraining from making public statements (Rashid, 2000, p. 43). Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, was elected as the Emir of the Muslims in October 1995 by 1,500 madrasa students (Müşerref, 2006, p. 327). Since that time, Mullah Omar's directives were viewed and implemented by his students as a manifestation of Sharia discourse.

The Supreme Council, predominantly composed of Mullah Omar's close associates, serves as the top decision-making body within the Taliban (Begzad, 2014, p. 45). When the Taliban seized the capital, Kabul, they were initially welcomed by the public as liberators. Consequently, within a relatively short period, the Taliban, controlling ninety percent of the country, brought together former Mujahideen groups in conflict with each other due to their inability to share power, facilitated by internal and external support.

However, the image of the Taliban as saviors was tarnished when they, under the direction of the Kabul office of the United Nations (UN), tortured and executed Dr. Najibullah, the last President of the communist regime in Afghanistan, along with his brother. This event revealed to both the Afghan people and the global community that the Taliban movement did not respect human rights. Once again, this development led to disappointment among the Afghan population, plunging the country into a serious crisis (Ahmadi, 2017, pp. 118-132).

During the Taliban regime, Afghanistan was entirely closed off from the outside world, and as a result of the economic embargo imposed by the United Nations along with a drought in the country, the population faced famine. In fact, in the Herat province, migrants were reported to have died from hunger (Rashid, 2000, p. 189). The Taliban regime was not recognized by any state outside of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The regime struggled with its unique yet outdated style of governance.

Throughout the Taliban's rule, the social, political, and economic rights of men, women, children, and the elderly were stripped away (Naimi, 2018, p. 45). Additionally, the Taliban's support for international terrorism led to the downfall of their own regime and created grounds for the country to be invaded once again.

2.3 The September 11 Attacks and the Overthrow of the Taliban Regime

International relations underwent a great deal of upheaval following the September 11, 2001 terrorist strikes that the United States suffered. Simultaneously, these events triggered significant alterations in American domestic and foreign policies, with counterterrorism becoming the focal point of U.S. foreign policy (Tammanna, 2009). Immediately following the attacks, the Washington administration and international actors declared that the Al-Qaeda organization was responsible.

In the aftermath of the September 11 events, the United Nations Security Council convened on September 12, 2001, to address the issue. The Security Council, in both Resolution 1368 issued on the same day and Resolution 1373 on September 28, 2001, referred to the inherent right of self-defense, stating that international peace and security are at risk due to terrorism. It declared that it was prepared to take all necessary actions to combat terrorism. Responding positively to the calls for cooperation in counterterrorism by U.S. President Bush, NATO and the European Union characterized the attacks as acts of war (Kuğu, 2020; Örnek, 2012).

The United States (US), following the September 11 attacks, claimed that the leader of the al-Qaeda organization, Osama bin Laden, was present in Afghanistan and responsible for the attacks. The US demanded the Bin Laden's extradition and either the surrender or deportation of al-Qaeda members. However, the Taliban insisted that they considered Bin Laden as their guest and, in accordance with their traditions, could not surrender their guests. Countries that recognized the Taliban, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, made efforts to persuade the Taliban to extradite Bin Laden but were unsuccessful. This situation increased expectations of US intervention in Afghanistan (Örnek, 2012).

The US and the UK interpreted these developments within the framework of the legitimate right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter and expressed that they could intervene militarily (Swan, 2020, p. 45). After completing military and political preparations, the US, in collaboration with the UK, initiated Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (Folse, 2022, p. 23). This decision underscores the US's determination in combating terrorism and its efforts to ensure international security.

The Taliban regime's fall following the operation in Afghanistan initially appeared as a victory, but over time, emerging security issues and governance challenges deepened the country's instability. Following the 2001 intervention, Taliban and Al-Qaeda, in small groups, sought refuge in Pakistan. However, the power vacuum in Afghanistan and escalating security problems provided an opportunity for the resurgence of the Taliban. Despite the presence of the United States and NATO forces, the Taliban reorganized in 2007 and launched attacks against the government in many regions of the country. The inability of the newly established government under international auspices to effectively deal with the nations' security problems compounded the challenges, making stability in Afghanistan increasingly difficult to achieve. The new government, under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, failed to resolve problems stemming from ethnic conflicts and establish a comprehensive administration. Despite the support of the international community and the plans outlined in the Bonn Conference, the ongoing instability persisted, and the Taliban strengthened its influence, particularly in rural areas. This situation underscores the necessity for in-depth solutions to the complex political and security problems Afghanistan faces (Dobbins et al., 2008, p. 87).

2.4 Peace Process

It is true that the United States' Taliban policy in Afghanistan should be seen as part of a complex approach intended to bring about stability and peace over the long run. The policy of excluding the Taliban could also be seen as a consequence of the Taliban insurgency. In particular, the human rights violations and international terrorist connections of the regime in the 1990s, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan may have influenced the US decision not to accept the Taliban (Demir, 2010). The pressures from Afghan President Karzai to hold negotiations for peace with the Taliban are also significant. Karzai has supported a path of reconciliation with various political actors to help Afghanistan emerge from periods of civil war and instability. His offers of amnesty and peace to the Taliban could be seen as part of a long-term search for a solution. However, the US approach to peace talks with the Taliban could vary depending on the national security and foreign policy priorities of the time. Particularly between 2000 and 2008, the US strategy in combating terrorism and the Taliban's tendency to provide sanctuary to Al-Qaeda may

have made direct negotiations with the Taliban more challenging. During this period, the US pursuit of a tough military policy against the Taliban could have influenced the conditions for negotiations (Khan, 2016). In conclusion, the US Taliban policy and the peace process in Afghanistan must be approached in a complex and multifaceted manner. There needed to be a balance between Karzai's efforts for reconciliation and peaceful resolution and US security concerns. Achieving this balance could have played a critical role in Afghanistan's progress towards a stable and peaceful future.

The decision by the Taliban to initiate talks with the Afghan government in 2007 was perceived as a promising step towards the peace process. However, the demands and conditions set forth by the Taliban led to the failure of the negotiations. Requests such as the withdrawal of international forces and the establishment of a Sharia regime were difficult conditions for various groups in Afghanistan and the international community to accept. President Karzai's National Peace Consultative Jirga in 2010 was a significant initiative to advance the peace process in Afghanistan (Ziring, 2009). However, the absence of Taliban leaders from the meeting signaled the challenges of the process. Nonetheless, the decisions made during the meeting to establish the High Peace Council and continue negotiations with the Taliban could be considered as important steps towards achieving peace. Throughout this process, negotiations and efforts among various parties in Afghanistan to ensure peace and stability have sometimes made progress but have also faced obstacles. However, the continuation of the process and negotiations involving all parties have been seen as a promising path for Afghanistan's future (Khan, 2016).

While continuing armed attacks, the Taliban's efforts to gain legitimacy on the international stage by visiting global and regional actors are crucial for the organization's acceptance and political empowerment internationally (Akhtar, 2008, pp. 178-180). These visits may aim to solicit support from countries sympathetic to their cause while also seeking to increase their visibility and influence in the international community. Visits to countries including Germany, Japan, Qatar, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, China, Iran, Pakistan, and Norway, alongside negotiations with the United States, are significant in diversifying the Taliban's international relations and seeking support. These visits may have provided an opportunity for the Taliban to enhance their

political and diplomatic weight on the international stage. However, it's essential not to overlook the activities of other radical Islamist groups such as ISIS. Particularly, ISIS's decision to expand into the Horasan region could potentially undermine the Taliban's influence by exacerbating instability in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. This situation could further complicate security and stability in the region. Therefore, it's crucial for the international community to provide more support for the political process and peace efforts in Afghanistan (Webber, 2014, pp. 198-200).

Taliban leaders' concerns over ISIS's expansion into Horasan may stem from the fact that despite having similar goals, the two organizations hold different Islamic radical views. While both aim to establish a radical Islamic state based on Islam, there are differences in their methods, approaches, and ideological beliefs. The Taliban emerged as a traditional and partially local Islamist movement, with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Afghanistan. On the other hand, ISIS originated as a jihadist Islamist movement with broader geographic ambitions, aiming for regional expansion. Ideologically, while the Taliban tends to have a more localized perspective, ISIS adopts a more comprehensive and transnational ideology. Taliban leaders' apprehension about ISIS's expansion into Horasan may arise not only from competition between the two groups but also from ISIS's adoption of more radical and violent methods. While the Taliban generally prefers traditional warfare tactics to establish authority and overthrow governments in the areas they control, ISIS may resort to more violent and radical methods. These differences could lead Taliban leaders to view ISIS's expansion into Horasan as a significant threat and may prompt them to exert more effort to preserve their organization's legitimacy and influence. This situation could further complicate the dynamics of politics and security in the area, highlighting the necessity for the international community to contribute more to stability efforts in Afghanistan (Khan, 2016).

The Taliban's opposition to Western philosophy and its aim to return to pure Islam within the context of rejecting modern Islamic interpretations is influenced significantly by the Deobandi movement (Demir and Varlık, 2012). Deobandi, an Islamic movement that emerged in 19th-century India, focused on reinterpreting and practicing Islam. The Deobandi movement aimed to purify Islam from Western influences by advocating a

return to traditional Islamic values and practices during the period of British colonization in India. This movement resisted modernization and Western influences, emphasizing traditional Islamic education and values. The roots and ideology of the Taliban developed under the influence of the Deobandi movement. Particularly, the leadership and ideologues of the Taliban were influenced by that movement. The Taliban's governance and practices were based on traditional Islamic laws and promoted a pure interpretation of Islam. In this context, the Taliban's opposition to Western lifestyles and modern Islamic interpretations may align with the fundamental philosophy of the Deobandi movement. Advocating for a return to pure Islam and resisting modernization and Western influences are significant elements that shape the ideological and political framework of the Taliban (Smith, 2020, pp. 234-256).

The Taliban's prolonged insurgency and the rise of ISIS in the region may have led to challenges and concerns that could make the organization more open to engaging in peace talks with the Kabul government. Particularly, the increasing influence and entry of ISIS into Afghanistan could have posed a threat to the Taliban. The Taliban may have believed that engaging in peace talks with the Kabul government could serve their interests because it could be a step towards ending the civil war, preventing the spread of other radical groups like ISIS, and ensuring stability in Afghanistan. Such talks could also allow the Taliban to establish a more acceptable relationship with the international community, thereby enhancing their legitimacy. Additionally, peace negotiations could provide the Taliban with an opportunity to participate more effectively in Afghanistan's political process and perhaps even play a political role. However, engaging in peace talks with the Kabul government and reaching an agreement could face various challenges and be a long-term process. Building trust between the parties, ending conflicts, achieving political consensus, and addressing significant issues related to Afghanistan's future will be necessary (Larson, 2018).

An climate that is favorable has been aided by the transfer of security responsibility from NATO and US soldiers to the Afghan National Security soldiers for the peace process in Afghanistan. In this process, the first official meeting held in July 2015 in Murree, initiated by Pakistan, was a significant step between representatives of the Taliban and the

Afghan government. With the US and China also participating as observers, this meeting was conducted with the hope of establishing peace in the future. However, the failure to reach consensus on the level of representation of the Taliban in the government during the meeting indicated the challenges in the process. Especially, the revelation of Mullah Omar's death two years after it was kept secret led to a halt in the ongoing negotiations. Mullah Omar held significant authority as the leader of the Taliban, and his death may have led to a leadership crisis within the Taliban and the cessation of negotiations. This situation illustrates the complexity and uncertainty of the peace process in Afghanistan. Distrust among parties, leadership changes, and conflicts make progress in peace negotiations challenging (Khan, 2016).

The signing of the agreement titled "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America" by the US on February 29, 2020, aiming to legally bind the Afghan Government to fulfill the agreement with the Taliban, is a significant development. This agreement includes commitments from the US to reduce and end its presence in Afghanistan, as well as demands for the Taliban to cease support for terrorist groups and refrain from activities against other terrorists using Afghan territory (Demir, 2010). This agreement has been seen as a crucial step towards the peace process in Afghanistan and a source of hope for long-term stability among the parties. However, there are various challenges and obstacles to implementing the agreement and continuing the peace process. Particularly, political disagreements among the Taliban and the Afghan government are one of the factors that contribute to the continuation of conflicts and make peace harder to achieve. While this agreement could be a significant step towards achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan, sincere efforts and commitments from all parties are essential for the success of the process. The advancement of the peace process in Afghanistan and the creation of long-term stability depend heavily on the assistance of the international community and collaboration from regional players (Tammana, 2009, pp. 165-166).

2.5 The Strategic Importance of Afghanistan

Throughout history, Afghanistan has been situated in the heart of Asia, yet equally at the center of conflicts. These lands, depicted by British Statesman Lord Curzon as the "cockpit of Asia," have been a geography of constant change and intense complex relationships. Curzon's expression reflects Afghanistan's strategic position and the power struggles in the region. Simultaneously, as described by the Indian poet Muhammad Iqbal as the "heart of Asia," Afghanistan possesses a rich cultural and historical past (Barfield, 2010, p. 3). Iqbal's description highlights that Afghanistan is not only geographically but also culturally and historically at the center of Central Asia. These lands have been the crossroads of many great empires and civilizations throughout history. From the Persian Empire to the Arab Islamic States, from the Mongol Empire to the power struggles of Great Britain and Russia, various powers have contended for control over Afghanistan. Today, Afghanistan remains a focal point of international relations due to its strategic location. However, unfortunately, this situation comes with instability and conflicts within the country (Demirel, 2002, p. 5).

Afghanistan's geostrategic position has attracted the attention of various civilizations and powers throughout history. Situated in the heart of Eurasia, this country serves as a bridge. Afghanistan, an important gateway between Southeast Asia and Central Asia, has historically been a crossroads of trade routes and cultural interactions. Referring to Afghanistan as the "Central Asia" and the "Heartland" is not solely due to its geographical location; it holds significant strategic importance (Rashid, 2000, p. 10). Particularly, it plays a critical role in the transportation of the rich oil resources of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the stability and security of the country are not only of regional but also international importance. However, this strategic position has also made Afghanistan a target of conflicts and external interventions throughout history. Ensuring the stability of the country and preserving regional peace requires a process involving international cooperation and diplomacy. Afghanistan's critical position is indispensable for both regional and global peace and stability (Çeçen, 1999, p. 111).

Afghanistan, due to its geographical location and geopolitical significance, is a focal point of world politics. Its location between Iran, the Arabian Sea, India, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia makes it a strategic crossroads, attracting the attention of global powers. Afghanistan's rugged terrain, deserts, and arid mountainous areas make it a formidable obstacle to overcome. Historically, these lands have been a passage for northern tribes towards India and Iran and for southern and western tribes towards Central Asia. Additionally, its location on a route descending to warm seas has increased its strategic importance for Russia. Even today, Afghanistan is being referred to as the Central Region, and its continued strategic significance makes it part of regional and international politics. The stability and security of this country are of great importance for preserving regional and global peace. Therefore, addressing and finding solutions to the situation in Afghanistan is a common responsibility of the international community (Davutoğlu, 2003, p. 113).

The "Heartland Theory" by British political scientist Harold Mackinder and the "Rimland Theory" developed by American geopolitical analyst N.J. Spykman play a decisive role in international relations. These theories provide significant guidance in shaping state policies. Mackinder's Heartland Theory suggests that control over the centrally located landmass would play a crucial role in determining world politics. This theory emphasizes the strategic importance of territories situated at the heart of Eurasia, referred to as the "World Island." Spykman's Rimland Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the strategic importance of territories located at the edges of the landmass in controlling the seas and maritime trade routes. Both theories offer effective guidance in shaping the geopolitical strategies of states. While Mackinder's theory argues that states dominating interior regions could become global powers through land dominance, Spykman's theory underscores the significance of states located on the edges of the landmass in controlling the seas (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1942). As İşcan (2004) expresses, these theories play a significant role in determining state geopolitical goals and analyzing their positions in international relations. In this context, the Heartland Theory and the Rimland Theory are regarded as important tools in understanding international relations and analyzing the strategic choices of states (İşcan, 2004, pp. 47-49). Central Asia and the Middle East are

recognized as highly fertile regions with economically rich resources on Earth. Afghanistan is one of these geographies with the potential for richness. An examination conducted by the Afghanistan Ministry of Mines in 2011 revealed the presence of mineral deposits in 27 different regions within the country. These areas contain various mineral deposits such as rich natural gas, salt, copper, chromium, iron, oil, coal, uranium, silver, nickel, bauxite, lithium, tungsten, sulfur, barite, fluorite, mercury, lapis lazuli, emerald, ruby, sapphire, and magnesium (Gouhari, 2013, pp. 123-125). Afghanistan's abundant natural resources serve as a significant factor determining both the country's internal economic potential and its role in international trade.

3. AFGHANISTAN INTERVENTION

One of the darkest moments in American history is represented by the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. These attacks, targeting two significant symbols of the nation's financial and military power, were recorded as one of the largest assaults on U.S. soil (Sasaoğlu, 2014, p. 45). September 11 not only deeply affected the United States but also reverberated across the globe. These acts of terrorism inflicted deep wounds among international communities and states, shaping global security policies (Halatçı, 2006, p. 80). These attacks not only caused tangible losses but also significantly altered the impacts of terrorism worldwide and the dynamics in international relations.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, created profound shock and panic in the United States. Following these attacks, while a great panic ensued on Wall Street, President Bush, who was meeting with students at an elementary school in Florida, received the sudden news of the terrorist attacks and promptly returned to Washington, the capital, under high-level security measures. Under Bush's leadership, the National Security Council convened with an emergency code, and the U.S. administration heightened security measures immediately after the attacks. All flights were canceled, and aircraft in the air were ordered to land urgently. American Air Force F-16s would rapidly intervene with any aircraft not complying with the directive. The Mexican border was closed, and President Bush was included in a special protection program. Following the terrorist attacks, the American Senate declared New York City a disaster area, underscoring the severity and urgency of the situation (Vatandaş and Aydın, 2004, p. 25). These swift and resolute responses were a reflection of the measures taken by the United States to protect national security, but they also marked a significant turning point in the country's counterterrorism strategies.

The expectation of a coordinated large-scale attack on American cities is a striking observation expressed in intelligence experts' 'Doomsday Scenario' reports (Wright, 2006, p. 342). However, there is no clarity on whether this anticipated attack would involve long-range missiles or biological weapons. Thomas R. Wilson, who served as the head of

the American Military Intelligence Agency on February 7, 2001, stated in his speech before the Senate Committee that attacks similar in style to the September 11 terrorist attacks were anticipated. Wilson forecasted that the next 5-10 years would be quite turbulent for the world and detailed expectations likely to occur within approximately 12-24 months (Kean and Hamilton, 2004, p. 254). These observations played a significant role in shaping both domestic and foreign security strategies of the United States and heightened sensitivity regarding national security.

3.1 Decisions taken by the UN and NATO

September 11, 2001, has been etched as a dark stain in the history of the United States. This grim day was struck by the largest terrorist attack on American soil. The World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the most symbolic structures of the country, were targeted in a coordinated assault. These attacks were not only recorded as the greatest acts of terrorism in American history but also as a dark moment etched into the memory of humanity. Thousands of innocent lives were lost in these attacks. These tragic events not only shook America deeply but also emphasized the universal threat of terrorism to the entire world.

The September 11 attacks are considered a turning point in the international arena in the fight against terrorism. This dark day drew significant international institutions like the United Nations and NATO to an unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination in combating the threat of terrorism (Kaya, 2005, p. 89). NATO took significant steps during this critical period to take effective measures against terrorism threatening international peace and security. The challenges in combating terrorism revealed that national efforts alone were insufficient and underscored the need for increased international cooperation. The focus of this cooperation and new strategies is to ensure the sustainability of international peace (Yalçınkaya, 2009, p. 73). This process highlighted the international community's will to act together in combating terrorism and the determination to develop joint solution strategies.

At its 4370th meeting, the United Nations Security Council enacted Resolution 1368 (2001) in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on September 12, 2001. The preamble of this resolution reiterated the the goals and tenets of the United Nations

Charter. It also stated that the UN was determined to combat threats and attacks against international peace and security by all means in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter. The resolution also noted the recognition of the right to natural or collective self-defense in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter (UNSCR, 2001). This resolution demonstrates the international community's determination to act together in combating terrorism and to adhere to the principles of international law.

The first paragraph of the resolution emphasized the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania were strongly condemned by the United Nations Security Council. The dark figure behind the attack was identified as the leader of the Al-Qaeda organization, Osama Bin Laden, and the Taliban regime supporting him. It was also emphasized that the UN fully supported the US affected by these attacks and was ready to act together in the fight against terrorism. This resolution demonstrates the international community's determination to act together against terrorism and to actively participate in the fight against terrorism (Taşdemir, 2006, p. 158).

After the September 11 attacks, the 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)' quickly convened and issued a statement on September 12, 2001. This statement condemned the terrorist acts. NATO emphasized that if it was determined that the attacks on the US were directed from outside, action would be taken under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. According to this article, any armed action in Europe or North America against one or more allies would be viewed as an attack against all allies. This allows for a collective defense system against attacks on allies (NATO, 2001, p. 1). NATO's decision reflects its aim to act together in the fight against terrorism and to strengthen solidarity among allies.

US President George W. Bush revealed the intelligence services' findings on September 20, 2001 that the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization was responsible for the attacks and stated that these findings were solid evidence. Subsequently, on October 2, 2001, NATO, based on the evidence presented by the US, acknowledged that the attacks were directed from outside and applied Article 5 for the first time in its history. Based on this article, it was

decided that the September 11 terrorist attacks would be considered an attack on all NATO allies (Sasaoğlu, 2014, p. 53). NATO's decision reflects the determination to act in unity and solidarity in the fight against terrorism and the request for support from allies. Additionally, following the NATO meeting, allies were requested to obtain information regarding the expectations and requests of the US (Bilbilik, 2004, p. 135). This process demonstrates that the international community is united in the fight against terrorism and that NATO plays a significant role in this struggle.

3.2 What is Operation Freedom's Sentinel?

October 7, 2001, is marked as a significant milestone in the pages of history. The United States of America took action following the horrifying attacks of September 11, 2001. These attacks resulted in the loss of innocent lives and sent a deep shockwave across the world. Operation Enduring Freedom was launched to combat the Taliban regime responsible for these heinous acts and provide sanctuary to them. This operation was not only characterized as a fight against terrorist groups but also as an international effort for freedom, peace, and security. The war operations in Afghanistan aimed not only to eliminate the terrorist threat but also to stabilize the country and establish a democratic government (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022).

However, these operations brought along a long-term and complex process. The war in Afghanistan witnessed numerous debates, challenges, and tragedies over time. Increasing civilian casualties, prolonged conflict, and instability added to the difficulty of the process. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was swiftly toppled, and on May 1, 2003, Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense, declared the end of significant combat operations. From that point onward, the US and its allies in the international coalition entered a new stage focused on combating terrorism and strengthening the newly established Afghan government. This phase included efforts to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan, train local security forces, and engage in reconstruction efforts in the country. At the same time, establishing democratic institutions and empowering civil society were also among the primary objectives. However, this process was fraught with challenges. The terrorist threat in Afghanistan persisted, and it took time to enhance the training and capacity of

local security forces. Additionally, internal political strife, corruption, and economic challenges continued to affect the process (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022).

In summary, the conclusion of military operations in Afghanistan marked the beginning of a new era; however, challenges and efforts to combat terrorism persisted in the country. The United States and the international community continued to strive for stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. It was a reality during the period of strategy change between the announcement in 2003 and 2009; the attacks by the Taliban killed or injured thousands of American service members. It is known that during this time, the United States increased its troop presence sent to Afghanistan to combat the resurgent Taliban. By 2010 and 2011, this increase peaked with a force of 100,000 troops. Initially, this military surge was seen as successful in restoring security in many regions of Afghanistan. However, as the United States began to withdraw its forces, serious concerns arose about the ability of Afghan forces to maintain security. Especially, it was observed that attempts to regain control in areas where the Taliban remained strong were unsuccessful due to the inadequate training and capacity of Afghan security forces. Additionally, internal political disputes, corruption, and economic hardships continued to undermine the stability and credibility of the Afghan government. As a result, with the reduction of the United States' military presence in Afghanistan, the future of the security situation in the country became uncertain. It was crucial to strengthen the Afghan government and enhance the capabilities of local security forces, but challenges and uncertainties persisted in this process.

The 'Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS)' was the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan that commenced on January 1, 2015, succeeding Operation Enduring Freedom. Its primary objectives were to support, advise, train, and help Afghan security forces as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission and to carry out counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The mission aimed to help the Afghan government maintain security and stability, prevent the resurgence of the Taliban, and build sustainable Afghan security institutions. Key elements of OFS included: (1) counterterrorism operations to target al-Qaeda remnants and other terrorist groups (2) providing 'Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)' with instruction,

guidance, and support to improve their capability and readiness and (3) supporting the Afghan government in building a stable and secure state, capable of preventing terrorist safe havens (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2021, p. 4).

In that process, diplomatic efforts that began in 2018 accelerated the negotiation process with the Taliban, culminating in the long-awaited agreement on February 29, 2020 (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022).

This agreement included a commitment by the United States to reduce its military presence in Afghanistan. By July 2020, the number of troops was to be reduced to 8,600, and the United States, its allies, and coalition partners were required to withdraw all military forces from the country by May 1, 2021. These commitments held the hope of ending the long-standing conflict in Afghanistan and achieving lasting peace in the country. However, many challenges and uncertainties remained unanswered during this process. Questions about whether the Taliban would adhere to their commitments, how the peace negotiations with the Afghan administration going, and how security and stability would be maintained in the country were among the uncertainties for the future (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022). In conclusion, the reduction of military presence in Afghanistan and the acceleration of the peace process could be a significant step towards achieving long-term stability and peace in the country; however, it required careful and determined progress. According to the agreement, the Taliban committed not to use Afghanistan's territory to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. This commitment included not only their own members but also other individuals or groups, especially terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, from using Afghanistan's territory as a means of endangering the security of the US and its allies. President Biden declared in April 2021 that US soldiers will not leave the country by the scheduled withdrawal date in May. However, he announced that the withdrawal process would begin in May, and the goal was to withdraw all American military personnel, DoD civilians, and contractors from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021 (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022).

This decision was seen as part of the United States' efforts to end its military presence in Afghanistan and contribute to the long-term peace process. However, important questions such as how security and stability would be ensured and how peace would be maintained in Afghanistan remained unanswered. Additionally, uncertainties remained about whether the Taliban would remain committed to the agreement and how political stability would be achieved in the country. In August 2021, following the Taliban's seizure of much of Afghanistan, U.S. military forces completed the final withdrawal process. This led to the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan government and army on August 15. Embassy personnel, along with certain Afghan personnel and their families, departed the country during the evacuation of the United States, allies, and certain Afghan individuals, with the last flight departing from Kabul on August 30. Some former personnel resumed their work from the U.S. Embassy in Doha, Qatar. The rapid change in the security situation in the country, coupled with the complete withdrawal of U.S. military presence, sparked widespread debate and international attention. On October 1, 2021, the Department of Defense formally ended Operation Enduring Freedom and initiated Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The purpose of this new operation was to protect the remaining U.S. diplomatic personnel and assets in Afghanistan, continue counterterrorism operations, and support stability in the region. This operation was shaped in response to recent developments in Afghanistan and aimed to protect U.S. interests in the region (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022).

4. CONSEQUENCES OF NATO ACTIVITIES

4.1 US Afghanistan Operation and NATO's Legal Basis

After the revelation that Al-Qaeda, the organization responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks, was based in Afghanistan, the US government began preparations for a retaliatory operation in Afghanistan. During this preparatory phase, the US sent NATO a set of "top-secret" requests consisting of 8 points, which NATO deemed sufficient. After accepting the US's requests, NATO implemented the 5th point, which served as the legal basis for the use of force by the US during the operation in Afghanistan on October 4, 2001. The 8 secret requests made by the US to NATO were as follows (Bilbilik, 2004, p. 137):

- i. Increased intelligence sharing and cooperation among NATO members to track and counter terrorist activities originating from Afghanistan.
- ii. Deployment of NATO surveillance and reconnaissance assets to support US operations in Afghanistan.
- iii. Provision of logistical support, including access to airfields and supply routes, for US military operations in Afghanistan.
- iv. Activation of NATO's Article 5 collective defense clause to demonstrate solidarity and support for the US in response to the September 11 attacks.
- v. Authorization for the use of NATO assets, including aircraft and naval vessels, in support of US military operations in Afghanistan.
- vi. Coordination of diplomatic efforts to garner international support and coalition-building for the US-led operation in Afghanistan.
- vii. Implementation of measures to enhance the security and stability of neighboring countries affected by the conflict in Afghanistan.
- viii. Facilitation of humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan to address the needs of the civilian population affected by the conflict.
- ix. Coordination of efforts to disrupt and dismantle terrorist financing networks supporting Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

- x. Training and capacity-building assistance for Afghan security forces to enable them to combat terrorism and maintain stability in the region.
- xi. Establishment of mechanisms for the monitoring and verification of compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights standards during military operations in Afghanistan.
- xii. Engagement with regional stakeholders, including neighboring countries and international organizations, to promote long-term stability and peacebuilding in Afghanistan.
- xiii. Support for efforts to counter the production and trafficking of narcotics, which contribute to funding terrorist activities in Afghanistan.
- xiv. Provision of medical and humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the conflict, including refugees and internally displaced persons.
- xv. Assistance in the reconstruction and development of infrastructure, institutions, and governance systems in Afghanistan to promote stability and prosperity in the post-conflict period.

4.2 The Results of two Operations in Afghanistan

4.2.1 The General Assessment of Operations

The ‘Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES)’ and the ‘Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS)’ were planned and executed as part of counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. The OES aims to continue counterterrorism activities under the "over-the-horizon" strategy following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, while the OFS covered U.S. military presence and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan for five years. Both operations are significant components of the U.S. and its allies' efforts to combat the terrorist threat in Afghanistan (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022)

4.2.2 The Activities of the Department of Defense (DoD)

Air Strikes and Surveillance: The report states that no counterterrorism strikes were conducted by the DoD in Afghanistan during the quarter. However, on July 31, after the quarter finished, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the head of al-Qaeda, was killed by an American

airstrike. This indicates that the U.S. continues to monitor terrorist targets in Afghanistan (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 3).

Equipment and Weapons: During the retreat, almost all of the weapons and equipment used by U.S. troops were either destroyed or removed by US military forces. However, the Taliban seized a significant amount of equipment from the former Afghan military. This affects the balance of power and security situation in the region (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 5).

During the retreat, almost all of the weapons and equipment used by US troops were either destroyed or removed by US military forces.

4.2.3 Terrorist Threats and Security Situation

ISIS-K Activities: ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) carried out 80 attacks during the quarter, a 90% increase from the previous quarter. These attacks mainly targeted Shia minorities, aiming to destabilize the region (Human Rights Watch, 2023, p. 105).

Terrorist Numbers: That Human Rights Watch report notes the continued presence of various terrorist groups in Afghanistan, with no change in their numbers:

ISIS-K: 2,000 fighters

‘Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent’: 200 fighters

‘Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan’: 4,000 fighters (Human Rights Watch, 2023, p. 108).

4.2.4 Diplomatic Situation and Human Rights

Recognition and Diplomatic Relations: No sovereign state has officially recognized the Taliban, but many countries maintain diplomatic relations. The U.S. briefly halted high-level engagements with the Taliban following the decree banning girls from attending secondary school. However, discussions resumed in June on women's rights, terrorism, the economy, and post-earthquake assistance (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 19).

Humanitarian Aid: Due to the ongoing economic and governance crisis, 60% of the Afghan population requires humanitarian aid. The 5.9 magnitude earthquake in June killed approximately 770 people and injured 1,500, increasing the need for aid. The Taliban has hindered humanitarian operations by interfering with aid distribution and imposing strict requirements on female aid workers (International Rescue Committee, 2023; Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 29).

4.2.5 Oversight and Investigations

DHS and DoS Activities: 4,362 Special Immigrant Visas were issued by ‘the U.S. Department of State (DoS)’ during the quarter, almost four times as much as the previous quarter. Additionally, the ‘Department of Homeland Security (DHS)’ and the DoS declared new exemptions to certain inadmissibility factors for fully-vetted Afghans to enter the U.S. legally (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 21).

Investigations and Audits: ‘The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG)’ issued a management advisory on the use of the ‘Civil Reserve Air Fleet’ during the evacuation from Afghanistan. Furthermore, Lead IG and partner agencies initiated seven new inquiries and coordinated on 50 ongoing inquiries related to fraud, corruption, theft, and other offenses (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 4).

4.2.6 NATO's Role in Operations

Evaluating NATO's role within these operations highlights its contribution to security and stability efforts in Afghanistan. NATO has been instrumental in training and advising local security forces, providing logistical support, and enhancing international cooperation and coordination in the region. These efforts have significantly contributed to the effectiveness of counterterrorism operations. The OES and the OFS operations have played a vital role in the U.S. and its allies' efforts to maintain security and combat terrorism in Afghanistan. NATO's support has been crucial for the success of these operations. However, the security situation in Afghanistan remains challenging, especially

due to ongoing terrorist activities, and international efforts in the region must continue (NATO, 2021, p. 12).

4.2.7 General Assessment of Operations

The quarterly report for January 1, 2022–March 31, 2022, submitted by the ‘Lead Inspector General for Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES)’ and ‘Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS)’, highlights the initiation of new "over-the-horizon" counterterrorism activities under OES and the conclusion of the five-year OFS mission. These operations are part of the ongoing efforts to address the terrorist threat in Afghanistan (Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 2022, p. 45).

4.2.8 Department of Defense (DoD) Activities

No Strikes Conducted: Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the DoD has not conducted any strikes in the region. The "over-the-horizon" strategy, intended to monitor and strike terrorist targets remotely, confronts a number of obstacles:

1. “Lack of physical presence in Afghanistan or neighboring countries”.
2. Dependence on neighboring states for overflight permissions.
3. Extended flight distances limit operational time of aircraft.
4. Loss of human intelligence assets on the ground.
5. Terrorist Threats and Security Situation (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2022, p. 16).

ISIS-K Activities: ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) remains the primary terrorist threat in Afghanistan, with approximately 2,000 members:

This quarter, 41 attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan were reported by ISIS-K.

Targeted assaults on the economic infrastructure, religious minorities, and the Taliban.

Intended to use violence and disinformation to topple the Taliban government.

Conducted a significant suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Peshawar, Pakistan, resulting in at least 63 deaths and 200 injuries (Counter Extremism Project, 2023).

4.2.9 Humanitarian Situation

Critical Humanitarian Assistance: The report underscores that 59% of Afghans need vital humanitarian aid:

Food shortages have forced 70% of Afghan families to make negative dietary changes.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other illness outbreaks are still putting a pressure on the healthcare sector.

Taliban-imposed bureaucratic constraints, security threats, crime, and logistical challenges hinder humanitarian operations. The U.S. remains the largest donor, providing over \$720 million in aid since August 2021 (U.S. Department of State, 2022, p. 8).

4.2.10 Diplomatic Engagements and Recognition

Taliban's International Relations: While no sovereign state has formally recognized the Taliban, some countries have engaged diplomatically:

Diplomats appointed by the Taliban have been approved by Russia, China, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Other nations have been asked by the United States to hold off on normalizing relations with the Taliban until they show improvement in counterterrorism and human rights (Kugelman, 2022, p. 14).

4.2.11 Afghan Evacuees and Resettlement

Evacuee Resettlement: Afghan evacuees are no longer housed by the DoD on US military bases:

Every evacuated person who had been kept on American bases has been sent to different places around the nation. 2,800 Afghans are still housed in facilities in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022a, p. 5).

4.2.12 Materiel Left in Afghanistan

Accounting for Materiel: The DoD continues to account for equipment left in Afghanistan, estimated at \$7.1 billion:

Comparing to the equipment utilized by American forces, this was less advanced gear that was given to the former Afghan military.

While several important assets were demolished by departing US forces, the Taliban were able to obtain some working vehicles, including aircraft (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022b, p. 12).

4.2.13 Oversight and Investigations

Management Advisories and Investigations: The DoD Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued several advisories and continued investigations:

Nine management advisories about insufficient screening, security, and medical attention for Afghan evacuees were released.

The arrest of a U.S. Navy Reserve member for fraud connected to the DoS Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program resulted from lead investigatory general studies.

The 17 projects the IG community is working on are connected to the evacuation, relocation, and departure from Afghanistan (Office of Inspector General, 2022, p. 18).

4.2.14 NATO's Role in OES and OFS Operations

NATO's involvement in these operations is crucial, particularly in supporting local security forces, providing training, advisory, and logistical support. NATO allies and partners have played significant roles in enhancing international cooperation and coordination, which are vital for effective counterterrorism operations. The OES and OFS operations reflect ongoing efforts by the U.S. and its allies to maintain security and combat terrorism in Afghanistan. NATO's support has been integral to the success of these operations. Despite these efforts, the security situation in Afghanistan remains challenging

due to active terrorist groups, and sustained international efforts are essential (NATO, 2021, p. 10).

4.3 The Operation of the United States in Afghanistan and NATO's Request

The covert requests made by the United States to NATO for a retaliatory operation in Afghanistan following the September 11 terrorist attacks signify a critical juncture in international relations and treaties. These requests underscore both the protection of U.S. security interests and the importance of international cooperation in combating terrorism (Smith, 2002, p. 8).

- i. Firstly, the request for enhanced cooperation and information sharing in the intelligence field highlights the vital importance of information flow in counterterrorism efforts. This necessitates the coordination of the international intelligence community to strengthen efforts to identify and prevent terrorist activities in advance.
- ii. Secondly, the request to provide support to allies or other members targeted by terrorist acts or experiencing terrorist attacks emphasizes NATO's principles of solidarity and defense. This includes providing military and logistical support among countries under threat of terrorism, as well as psychological and moral support.
- iii. Thirdly, the request for ensuring the security of U.S. bases on NATO territory and increasing security measures demonstrates NATO's commitment to preserving military presence and enhancing defense capabilities among member countries.
- iv. Fourthly, the request to utilize NATO bases and facilities enables the effective utilization of NATO's military infrastructure and resources, facilitating logistical support and operational cooperation among participating countries.
- v. The fifth point entails opening airspaces to the U.S. and allied countries, aiming to provide necessary transit rights for conducting air operations and enhancing operational flexibility.

- vi. The sixth point involves opening NATO air and sea ports to the U.S. and other allied countries' military forces, aiming to provide logistical support for military operations and increase operational capacity.
- vii. The seventh point entails the deployment of NATO naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, ensuring maritime security and supporting counterterrorism operations at sea.
- viii. Lastly, the request for the deployment of NATO's Early Warning Aircraft (AWACS) to necessary regions within the scope of counterterrorism efforts enhances airspace monitoring and strengthens early warning systems (Asmus, 2002, pp. 15-18).

The acceptance of these requests underscores the U.S.'s determination to cooperate with the international community in counterterrorism efforts and emphasizes NATO's role in combating terrorism. However, the implementation of these requests and the military operations that follow necessitate a thorough analysis of the dynamics in international relations.

December 2008's European Security Strategy report carries pivotal messages from the European Council. It notably underscores the commitment to foundational principles of international law, such as those enshrined in the UN Charter and OSCE doctrines. The report firmly advocates for the resolution of issues surrounding state independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity through peaceful means, leaving no room for debate. Moreover, the report shines a spotlight on the European Union's proactive efforts to ensure security and stability transcending its borders. Notably, the situation in Afghanistan serves as a poignant exemplar of these endeavors. Acknowledging significant contributions to NATO missions by EU member states, the Union is depicted as actively bolstering developmental and governance initiatives within Afghanistan. Additionally, there's mention of an expanded mission aimed at revitalizing Afghan police forces. Crucially, the report accentuates that the success story in Afghanistan hinges upon a dual-pronged approach: the burgeoning assumption of responsibility by the Afghan government and the unwavering support extended by neighboring nations, including Pakistan, India, Iran, and other Central Asian states. It eloquently stresses the paramountcy of fostering regional

collaboration as an indispensable pillar of enduring stability and progress (Grare and Maley, 2011, pp. 23-26).

According to Orbie's analysis, the future trajectory of the European Union remains a subject of significant debate: will it continue as a civilian power or emerge as a military actor? The integration process of the EU has been founded upon principles of human rights and democracy, with security needs historically intertwined with NATO during and after the Cold War era. As a separate defense organization develops, parallel efforts to deepen political unity, NATO's scope of intervention and strategy have shifted from Europe towards Eurasia. This change has accelerated the EU's pursuit of security in alignment with its own defense policy. Discussions surrounding how the EU will position itself as a military power extend beyond mere military capacity and operational capabilities; they also delve into whether the EU's values and principles align with such a role. According to Orbie's analysis, the evolution of the EU as a military power must consider not only the enhancement of military hardware but also the EU's commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Orbie, 2006, pp. 126-127). In this context, the EU's progress towards becoming a military power is not only linked to the changing role and strategy of NATO but also intertwined with the EU's internal dynamics and global security challenges. The rise of the EU as a military power holds the potential to contribute not only to bolstering Europe's defense capabilities but also to becoming an effective actor in preserving global peace and stability.

Military power still holds significant importance in terms of being a global actor. Within the European Union, security and defense issues often take shape not through efforts to develop a common policy but rather through intergovernmental negotiations. While the United States supports the development of a strong defense policy by Europe to address new threats emerging in the 21st century and to ensure its own security, it is clear that these efforts will not conflict with NATO's interests (Howorth, 2007, p. 92). Another crucial point is the effectiveness of European defense forces without utilizing NATO's capabilities. Currently, the number of European interventions conducted without NATO resources is quite limited. Additionally, especially before the intervention in Iraq, it was observed that EU member states were not successful in presenting a united front, and some

states preferred to align themselves with the United States. This indicates a divergence in unity on foreign policy and defense matters. However, some consensus has been partially achieved in operations conducted within the framework of NATO, such as the mission in Afghanistan (Menon, 2004, p. 624).

The fifth article of the 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)', entails that an attack on one ally shall be considered an attack on all allies and met with a collective defense response. This article is one of the cornerstones of NATO and reinforces the principles of solidarity and defense within the alliance. Particularly, the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, led to the invocation of this article by NATO. Based on the evidence provided by the United States, it was accepted that the attacks were externally directed, prompting the activation of Article 5 by NATO. This situation ensured that the terrorist acts were considered as having been perpetrated not only against the United States but also against all NATO allies. These developments underscored NATO's spirit of unity and solidarity and contributed to strengthening defense mechanisms among allies. Furthermore, it emphasized NATO's effective role in combating terrorism and highlighted the necessity for member countries to act together against a common threat (Sasaoğlu, 2014, p. 55).

Following the NATO meeting, there was a significant discussion among allies regarding the requests and expectations of the United States. During this discussion, it was emphasized that the U.S. is seeking more support from NATO in the realms of security and defense. Specifically, the U.S. called for increased contributions and cooperation from its allies. There was a particular focus on the need to increase defense spending and strengthen military capabilities. Additionally, it was stated that NATO should take on a more active role in strengthening and enhancing its effectiveness. These requests will play a crucial role in shaping the future strategic orientation of NATO and contribute to strengthening cooperation among allies (Bilbilik, 2004, p. 135).

NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson made a statement on October 2, 2001, asserting that there existed clear and compelling evidence implicating the Al-Qaeda organization, harbored by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, as the perpetrators behind the September

11 terrorist attacks. Robertson emphasized that the United States' armed response was primarily targeted at these attacks, and underscored that the NATO alliance would regard the events of September 11 as an external assault (Bozkurt, 2003, p. 230).

4.4 The intervention of the United States in Afghanistan and NATO activities

NATO declared at the Riga Summit that security in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without development, and development cannot be achieved without security. However, these represent two different missions. On one hand, Afghanistan requires robust, strong military intervention, and on the other hand, it needs reconstruction efforts. If humanitarian security is interpreted broadly, it necessitates coordination capable of managing all kinds of activities required to eliminate fear, poverty, and political instability. NATO cannot perform both military and civilian tasks simultaneously with its current structure, but it can establish strong cooperation with its allies, partners, and the Afghan people. The positive effects of this cooperation need to be felt by the Afghan people as soon as possible for the future of cooperation. And Kaim states that the new Afghanistan strategy is NATO's last chance. According to this strategy, instead of treating the Taliban as an "indivisible whole" that needs to be completely eradicated, efforts should be made to win over the "moderate elements/intransigent ideological extremists" distinction by civil and military authorities (Kaim, 2009, p. 660).

The International Crisis Group notes that President Obama advocated for a gradual withdrawal of forces starting in 2011. The real question is whether ISAF can provide the capabilities and opportunities for the Afghans to establish security, law, and order in Kabul and its surroundings.

In this context, President Obama announced the new Afghanistan strategy at West Point on December 1, 2009 (Woodward, 2010, p. 220). According to this strategy, an effective Afghan Security Force that will be trained and established can be a valuable partner for ISAF. Although it is stated that the increasing responsibility of Afghans will begin the withdrawal of American troops in the summer of 2011, the Riga Summit emphasizes that NATO's commitment to Afghanistan is long-term. As resistance recedes to manageable levels, Afghan Security Forces will be able to deal with resistance alone, and the Afghan

government will be stabilized, followed by combating corruption in Afghanistan, providing support in important areas such as agriculture, and responding to the needs of the people for the establishment of social services.

There is also an economic motivation boosting violence in Afghanistan. Those who hold power and authority in Afghanistan, where a stable and legitimate state structure is not dominant, fill the power and authority vacuum with war economies that have become endemic. The annual volume of the opium trade from Afghanistan to the world is estimated to be around \$40 billion. Only a small portion of this \$40 billion in revenue, which is said to be controlled by global capital bosses, returns to Afghanistan, and only \$1 billion goes to peasants who have no other livelihood than opium production. Today, reasons leading the Afghan people to drug production and marketing include "terrorism, arms trade, and poverty, especially in rural areas, which started with the occupation of Afghanistan by the United States and has deepened over time." (Smith, 2022, p. 45).

The entire drug trade, which constitutes one-third of the total Afghan economy, provides financial resources to insurgent groups while undermining the legitimacy of the Kabul government. It is estimated that 20 million people, or two-thirds of the Afghan population, try to sustain their lives on a daily income of less than \$1.50. Afghanistan is an example that encompasses many of the redefined global threats; in addition to these threats, the element of human being, which is ignored in threat perceptions, is added. Because it is humans that connect and transform all these security threats and risks into a kind of "network". In 2000, the UN addressed security as "collective human security" in the Millennium Report. States can struggle against each other with weapons and armies or with relative political and economic superiority, but the loss of functionality of these means in the absence of the state is inevitable. This is also the case in Afghanistan. The struggle must come down to humans. And it is not surprising that the success of the Turkish Armed Forces in Afghanistan evolved as positive relations developed with the people (Asmus, 2002, pp. 15-18).

4.5 Peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan

After the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, the international community started working on peacebuilding in Afghanistan in earnest. A wide-ranging, multi-ethnic, and fully representative government was the goal of this agreement, which was facilitated by the UN, in Afghanistan. It established the framework for broad international participation in a range of peacebuilding initiatives.

4.5.1 Initial Peacebuilding Efforts

Security Sector Reform (SSR):

The reform and expansion of the ‘Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)’, which comprised the ‘Afghan National Army (ANA)’ and the ‘Afghan National Police (ANP)’, was one of the main elements of peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Training and equipping these forces was made possible in large part by NATO's involvement through the ‘International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)’ and subsequently the ‘Resolute Support Mission (RSM)’. The ANSF suffered with issues of competence, corruption, and loyalty despite significant investment, which reduced their effectiveness (Cordesman, 2013).

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):

In order to disarm former fighters, dismantle militia organizations, and reintegrate former combatants into civilian life, the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) was initiated in 2003. Although the program saw some success, obstacles included the Taliban's comeback, militia leaders' resistance to disarming, and the restricted economic prospects for reintegrated combatants (Giustozzi, 2008).

Governance and Rule of Law:

The creation and ratification of a new constitution in 2004, the holding of municipal and national elections, and judicial reforms were all attempts to create efficient governance frameworks. However, the establishment of a stable and functional government in Afghanistan was impeded by problems with governance, including weak institutions, power struggles among different factions, and corruption (Goodhand, 2008).

Economic and Infrastructure Development:

International donors invested heavily in rebuilding Afghanistan's war-torn infrastructure and economy. Construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and energy supplies were amongst the projects. While these efforts led to some improvements in living standards and economic growth, they were often undermined by ongoing insecurity, corruption, and the opium trade, which continued to fund insurgent activities and foster instability (Byrd and Ward, 2004).

Human Rights and Social Development:

Large sums of money were contributed by foreign donors to reconstruct Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure after the war. Construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and energy supplies were among the projects. Even though these initiatives raised living standards and stimulated economic growth to some extent, they were frequently thwarted by persistent corruption, insecurity, and the opium trade, which continued to finance insurgent activity and promote instability (Byrd and Ward, 2004).

4.5.2 Challenges and Failures

Despite significant international investment and efforts, peacebuilding in Afghanistan faced numerous challenges and was only partially successful.

Security Issues:

Peacebuilding efforts were hampered by ongoing insecurity brought on by the Taliban's resurgence and the actions of other insurgent groups. Following NATO's withdrawal, the ANSF found it difficult to uphold security on its own, which resulted in widespread instability and violence (Jones, 2013a, p. 305).

Political Instability:

Peacebuilding efforts were hampered by ongoing insecurity brought on by the Taliban's resurgence and the actions of other insurgent groups. Following NATO's withdrawal, the

ANSF found it difficult to uphold security on its own, which resulted in widespread instability and violence (Jones, 2013b, p. 207).

Economic Challenges:

Afghanistan's economy remained unstable, highly reliant on foreign aid, and constrained by the illegal opium trade despite development initiatives. In addition to providing funding for insurgent endeavours, the opium economy also exacerbated corruption and undermined the official economy (Mansfield, 2016).

Social and Cultural Factors:

Profound racial, tribal, and geographic divides hampered peacekeeping initiatives. Significant barriers were also presented by prevailing conventions and opposition to contemporary reforms, particularly those pertaining to women's rights. Reforms imposed from without frequently ran afoul of regional norms and practices, sparking opposition and backlash (Barfield, 2010).

Insufficient Coordination:

The efficacy of peacebuilding initiatives was generally diminished due to the fragmented and redundant efforts resulting from a lack of coordination among international donors, non-governmental organizations, and Afghan authorities. According to Waldman (2008), the attainment of sustainable outcomes and the effective distribution of resources were impeded by the multitude of stakeholders and the lack of a well-defined plan.

4.5.3 Lessons Learned

Training and Independence of Security Forces:

NATO trained Afghan security forces, but it soon became clear that in order for these forces to function autonomously and successfully, more extensive and long-term planning was required. Along with training, strengthening local capability in technical support, intelligence, and logistics is essential. The creation of self-sustaining security institutions ought to be a priority for upcoming peacebuilding operations (Biddle, 2017, p. 214).

Understanding Local and Regional Dynamics:

The complex political, religious, and ethnic dynamics in Afghanistan presented difficulties for NATO. It is essential to have a deeper comprehension of regional and local dynamics and to design strategies appropriately. According to Sedra (2013), foreign actors must interact with local populations and establish alliances based on respect and understanding.

International and Regional Cooperation:

In nations like Afghanistan, security concerns frequently have cross-border components. As a result, it is necessary to set up more efficient mechanisms for coordination and collaboration with surrounding nations and regional players. Addressing common security challenges and promoting stability require regional cooperation (Ruttig, 2013).

Humanitarian Aid and Civil Support:

Alongside military operations, NATO should place greater emphasis on civil support and humanitarian assistance initiatives. Gaining the confidence of the community and maintaining long-term stability depend on this. Comprehensive development initiatives that deal with the underlying causes of conflict and create resilient communities should be part of the endeavour (Jones, 2013b, p. 230).

Flexibility and adaptability:

NATO's plans ought to be flexible to adjust swiftly to shifting circumstances on the ground. Adopting flexible and adaptable strategies is preferable to sticking to strict plans. The success of peacebuilding efforts are based on the ongoing evaluation and modification of strategies in light of local conditions (Sedra, 2013).

5. ANALYSIS

When evaluating NATO's success in Afghanistan, it is essential to consider multiple factors. NATO conducted various missions in Afghanistan, the most significant being the 'International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)' from 2001 to 2014, followed by the 'Resolute Support Mission (RSM)' which began in 2015. Operation Freedom's Sentinel, NATO handed full responsibility to Afghan security forces. In 2021, after 20 years, NATO's presence in Afghanistan came to an end. Throughout this period, significant political and security changes occurred in the country. However, the withdrawal decision sparked criticism and concerns. The complex situation in Afghanistan has prompted the international community to develop new strategies and provide support to the region. The withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan underscores the complexity of international cooperation in counterterrorism and the challenges associated with long-term commitments.

5.1 Successes

Security and Training: NATO made significant contributions to the training and capacity building of Afghan security forces. The 'Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)' were largely modernized and strengthened through the training and advisory support provided by NATO.

5.1.1 Counterterrorism

NATO conducted significant operations against terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Achievements such as the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden were critical milestones in the fight against terrorism.

5.1.2 Infrastructure and Humanitarian Aid

NATO also contributed to civil projects in Afghanistan, such as the reconstruction of infrastructure and the improvement of education and healthcare services. This was an important step towards enhancing the living standards of the Afghan people.

5.2 Challenges and Failures

5.2.1 Security Situation

NATO's presence in Afghanistan did not fully suppress the Taliban and other insurgent groups. Following NATO's withdrawal, the Taliban rapidly regrouped and seized control of the country.

5.2.2 Political Stability

Sustainable political stability could not be achieved in Afghanistan. Governments established with NATO's support struggled with corruption, internal conflicts, and governance issues.

5.2.3 Resilience of Afghan Security Forces

The Afghan security forces trained by NATO did not demonstrate effective resistance against the Taliban following NATO's withdrawal. This highlighted the unsustainable nature of NATO's investments in Afghan security forces.

5.2.4 Humanitarian Situation

Despite NATO's presence, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remained highly fragile. Significant deficiencies persisted in areas such as poverty, access to healthcare, and education.

5.3 Lessons Learned from NATO's Experience in Afghanistan

Training and Independence of Security Forces: While NATO trained Afghan security forces, it became evident that a more long-term and comprehensive planning should be needed for these forces to operate independently and effectively. Strengthening local capacity in logistics, intelligence, and technical support is critical alongside training.

5.3.1 Understanding Local and Regional Dynamics

- i. **Political and Cultural Factors:** The complex ethnic, religious, and political dynamics in Afghanistan posed challenges to NATO's success. A better

understanding of local and regional dynamics and developing strategies accordingly will be crucial in future missions.

- ii. **International and Regional Cooperation:** Security issues in countries like Afghanistan often have cross-border dimensions. Therefore, more effective collaboration and coordination mechanisms with neighboring countries and regional actors need to be established.
- iii. **Diplomatic and Economic Approaches:** Military strategies alone may not suffice. Diplomatic and economic tools should be effectively utilized, and international cooperation should be enhanced.

5.3.2 Humanitarian Aid and Civil Support

- i. **Humanitarian Aid Operations:** NATO should focus more on humanitarian aid and civil support activities alongside military operations. This is important for gaining the trust of the local population and ensuring long-term stability.
- ii. **Protection of Women and Children:** Women and children were among the most affected groups in the conflicts in Afghanistan. Special policies and programs should be developed to protect and support these groups in future missions.

5.3.3 Flexibility and Adaptability

- i. **Strategic Flexibility:** NATO's strategies should be able to adapt quickly to changing conditions on the ground. Flexible and adaptable strategies should be adopted instead of rigid plans.
- ii. **Intelligence and Information Sharing:** Effective intelligence networks and information sharing are crucial for success in counterterrorism and security operations.

5.4 Conclusion and Forward-Looking Strategies

NATO's experience in Afghanistan highlights the challenges and achievements of operating in complex and demanding environments. While NATO has made significant progress in some areas, more comprehensive and integrated strategies are needed to achieve long-term sustainable success.

- i. **Enhancing Local Capacity:** NATO should develop long-term and comprehensive support programs to enable local security forces to operate independently and effectively.
- ii. **Regional and International Cooperation:** By strengthening regional and international cooperation mechanisms, NATO can develop more effective strategies to combat cross-border threats.
- iii. **Humanitarian Aid and Civil Support:** Alongside military operations, priority should be given to humanitarian aid and civil support activities to gain the trust of the local population.
- iv. **Flexible and Adaptable Strategies:** NATO should adopt flexible strategies that can quickly adapt to changing conditions on the ground.

5.5 Peacebuilding Activities

Afghanistan's peacebuilding offers important lessons for upcoming foreign interventions. Even though there were notable achievements in the security sector reform, infrastructure development, and human rights advocacy, social resistance, political unpredictability, and ongoing security challenges limited the overall impact. A comprehensive, coordinated strategy that tackles the underlying causes of conflict, involves local communities, and creates resilient institutions capable of long-term peace and development is necessary for effective peacebuilding. Afghanistan serves as a reminder of how crucial it is to comprehend local dynamics, promote regional cooperation, and implement adaptable strategies in response to shifting conditions (Crisis Group, 2023).

5.5.1 Summary of Successes and Achievements

Security Sector Reform (SSR):

The creation and education of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) was one of the major achievements. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), in particular, were two of NATO's most important initiatives in helping the Afghan military and police forces develop their capabilities. Even

though it wasn't enough to completely stabilize Afghanistan, this development was essential in bringing some security and order to the nation (Cordesman, 2013).

Governance and Rule of Law:

Important turning points included the adoption of a new constitution and the conduct of several elections. The objectives of these initiatives were to improve political engagement and create a democratic framework. A more just and equitable society was also intended to be achieved through the establishment of legal and judicial reforms however, these institutions remained brittle and frequently ineffectual (Goodhand, 2008).

Infrastructure and Economic Development:

Major infrastructure projects, such as the renovation of highways, schools, and hospitals, were made possible by international investments. Many Afghans' living conditions were not only improved by these projects, but they also made economic activity easier by improving connectivity and service accessibility. Initiatives for economic development sought to alleviate poverty and generate employment, which helped to stabilize the economy to some extent (Byrd and Ward, 2004).

Human Rights and Social Development:

There has been a notable, if uneven, advancement in the cause of human rights, especially those of women and children. Notable accomplishments include the rise in female students enrolling in schools and the advancement of healthcare services. These initiatives helped spread the word about gender equality and human rights, laying the groundwork for long-term social change (Amiri, 2015, p. 135).

5.5.2 Challenges and Shortcomings

Persistent Insecurity:

Efforts to promote peace have been consistently undermined by the Taliban's comeback and the actions of other insurgent groups. Without international support, the ANSF struggled to maintain security despite receiving a great deal of training and assistance. The

swift demise of the Afghan government and security forces in 2021 provided a sobering reminder of these efforts' limitations (Jones, 2013a, p. 250).

Political Instability and Corruption:

It was extremely difficult for the Afghan government to put in place an efficient government. State-building initiatives were hampered by corruption, nepotism, and weak institutions, which reduced public trust. Ethnic and regional divisions compounded political instability, making it more difficult to establish a unified and functional state (Ruttig, 2013).

Economic Dependence and Challenges:

The illegal opium trade hindered Afghanistan's economy, which remained largely dependent on foreign assistance. Even though development initiatives produced some gains, economic sustainability was not attained. Development and security were harmed by the opium economy's continued support of corruption and insurgent activity (Mansfield, 2016).

Social and Cultural Resistance:

Reform was severely hampered by ingrained social and cultural norms, particularly those pertaining to gender roles and human rights. When attempts to enforce contemporary reforms collided with customs, opposition and occasionally violent retaliation resulted. This opposition brought attention to the necessity of using culturally aware methods in peacebuilding (Barfield, 2010).

Coordination and Coherence:

Disjointed and redundant efforts were frequently the outcome of a lack of coordination between international donors, non-governmental organizations, and Afghan authorities. The variety of players, each with their own goals and objectives, made it difficult to create a coherent plan. The overall efficacy of peacebuilding efforts was diminished by this fragmentation (Waldman, 2008).

5.5.3 Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Comprehensive and Long-term Planning:

Planning for peacebuilding must be long-term and comprehensive, extending beyond short-term security issues. This entails providing ongoing assistance for the growth of regional capacity in economic management, security, and governance. Building self-sustaining institutions that can function without aid from abroad should be the top priority for future interventions (Biddle, 2017, 220).

Context-specific Approaches:

The effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives depends on an understanding of and integration of local and regional dynamics. In order to create context-specific strategies that honour and take into account local customs and practices, international actors must actively engage with local communities and stakeholders. According to Sedra (2013), this strategy can foster a sense of local ownership and support for peacebuilding efforts.

Regional Cooperation:

Handling the cross-border aspects of conflicts requires effective regional cooperation. To guarantee a comprehensive strategy for security and stability, neighbouring nations and regional actors must take a proactive role in peacebuilding initiatives. Building regional frameworks for collaboration and conflict resolution should be the main goal of diplomatic efforts (Ruttig, 2013).

Integrated Development and Security Strategies:

In order to address the underlying causes of conflict, peacebuilding strategies ought to integrate development and security initiatives. This includes initiatives to improve security along with comprehensive development plans that support healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. A more resilient and stable society can be achieved with the use of integrated approaches (Jones, 2013a, p. 275).

Flexibility and Adaptability:

Peacebuilding initiatives need to be adaptive to shifting local circumstances. It is imperative to constantly evaluate and modify strategies in response to real-time feedback and changing circumstances. This adaptability can make it easier to react more successfully to unanticipated opportunities and challenges (Sedra, 2013).

Building Trust and Legitimacy:

Long-term peace depends on establishing credibility between the government and its people. The protection of human rights, the provision of public services, and open and accountable governance should be the main priorities in efforts to strengthen the legitimacy of the government. Building legitimacy and trust requires involving civil society and encouraging inclusive political processes (Goodhand, 2008).

Addressing Economic Drivers of Conflict:

In order to stop conflict from recurring, economic issues like poverty and the black market economy need to be addressed. This entails tackling inequality, fostering job opportunities, and advancing sustainable economic development. Reducing the financial resources available to insurgent groups requires efforts to demolish the opium economy and offer substitute sources of income (Mansfield, 2016).

5.5.4 Forward-looking Strategies for Future Peacebuilding Missions**Enhancing Local Capacity:**

In order to allow local security forces and governance institutions to function autonomously and successfully, future peacebuilding missions should concentrate on creating extensive, long-term support programs. This includes making investments in education, expanding one's skills, and creating long-lasting organizations that are resilient to both internal and external pressures (Biddle, 2017, p.225).

Regional and International Cooperation:

Creating more potent plans to counter cross-border threats and promote stability requires fortifying regional and international cooperation mechanisms. In order to address common security concerns and encourage cooperative approaches to peacebuilding, this entails forming partnerships with nearby nations and regional organizations (Ruttig, 2013).

Humanitarian Aid and Civil Support:

In order to win over the local populace and guarantee long-term stability, humanitarian aid and civil support initiatives should take precedence over military operations. Sustainable peace depends on comprehensive development initiatives that tackle the underlying causes of conflict and create resilient communities (Jones, 2013a, p. 280).

Flexible and Adaptable Strategies:

NATO and other international players ought to implement adaptable strategies that can be swiftly adjusted to changing ground conditions. The success of peacebuilding efforts depends on the ongoing evaluation and modification of strategies in light of local conditions (Sedra, 2013).

Promoting Inclusivity and Social Cohesion:

To create a more cohesive and stable society, efforts should be directed toward fostering inclusivity and social cohesion. This entails addressing social injustices, involving diverse communities in the peacebuilding process, and encouraging a feeling of shared identity and purpose (Barfield, 2010).

Addressing the Humanitarian Impact:

Addressing the humanitarian impact of conflicts is a top priority for peacebuilding missions, especially for populations that are more susceptible, like women, children, and displaced people. To safeguard and assist these groups and guarantee their involvement in the peacebuilding process, specific policies and programs should be created (Amiri, 2015, p. 142).

Strengthening Institutional Resilience:

Long-term peace depends on the development of resilient institutions that can endure shocks and change with the times. This entails strengthening the rule of law, boosting the ability of governance structures, and making sure that institutions are receptive to the needs of the populace (Goodhand, 2008).



6. CONCLUSION

One of the most major and complex foreign interventions in late history is NATO's engagement in Afghanistan. The mission, which lasted more than 20 years, attempted to address a number of issues, such as political unrest, terrorism, and the reconstruction of a nation that had been devastated by war. As we reflect on NATO's role in Afghanistan, it's crucial to consider not just the immediate outcomes but also the larger implications for global security, peacebuilding, and the lessons learned for future interventions.

NATO's intervention in Afghanistan was initially driven by the need to combat terrorism in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Led by the United States, the international community aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime, which had provided a safe haven for the Al-Qaeda network responsible for these attacks. This initial goal was partially achieved; Osama bin Laden and other key terrorists were eventually eliminated, and the Taliban regime was quickly collapsed. However, as the mission evolved, it became evident that military victories alone were insufficient to secure lasting stability in Afghanistan.

The challenges NATO encountered in Afghanistan were deeply merged with the country's complex history, ethnic diversity, and strategic importance. Afghanistan has long been a crossroads of empires, a battleground for competing interests, and a region marked by deep tribal and ethnic divisions. These factors, combined with the legacies of previous conflicts, including the Soviet invasion and following civil war, created a chronic instability that resisted external intervention.

One of NATO's primary objectives was to rebuild Afghanistan's security forces and establish a stable, democratic government. Significant resources were dedicated to training and equipping the 'Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)', hoping that they would take over security duties. While there were notable successes in this area, including the development of a more professional military and police force, these achievements were eventually undermined by persistent issues such as corruption, weak governance, and the Taliban's resurgence. The rapid collapse of the Afghan government and security

forces following NATO's withdrawal in 2021 rapidly highlighted the fragility of these institutions and raised serious concerns about the endurance of the investments made over the past two decades.

NATO's mission also aimed to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and advance human rights, particularly for women and children. The international community made significant investments in infrastructure projects, education, and healthcare, leading to improvements in some areas of Afghan society. Meanwhile, these gains were often inconsistent and vulnerable to new security threats. The return of Taliban rule has raised significant concerns about the future of these advancements, especially regarding women's rights and access to education, which had seen considerable progress during NATO's presence.

The experience in Afghanistan serves as a strong reminder of the military's limitations in resolving conflict and instability at its source. While NATO succeeded in removing the Taliban from power and disrupting terrorist networks, it was unable to build a strong political system that could endure both internal and external pressures. The failure to achieve lasting political stability in Afghanistan suggests that future interventions must put an emphasis on comprehending and resolving the underlying social, cultural, and economic causes of conflict.

Moreover, the Afghanistan mission highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in resolving complex conflicts. Afghanistan's security and stability are closely tied to the broader region, particularly neighboring countries like Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian states. The fragile borders, crossborder militant activities, and regional rivalries played a significant role in ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan. Future interventions should put high priority on developing regional structures for cooperation and conflict resolution, recognizing that lasting peace in one country often depends on stability in its neighbours.

The humanitarian component of NATO's mission in Afghanistan also justifies close attention. The long conflict and eventual withdrawal of international forces have left millions of Afghans in desperate conditions, with many facing displacement, food insecurity, and limited access to basic services. The humanitarian crisis that has emerged

in the wake of NATO's departure emphasizes the need for ongoing international involvement, even after the formal end of military operations. It is crucial for the international community to continue providing humanitarian assistance and support efforts to solve the root causes of poverty and inequality in Afghanistan.

NATO's experience in Afghanistan also offers valuable lessons for future peacebuilding missions. One key takeaway is the need for comprehensive and long-term planning that goes beyond immediate security concerns. Effective peacebuilding requires an overall strategy that involves security, governance, economic development, and social integrity. Building local capacities and institutions that can operate independently and sustainably is essential for reducing reliance on external support over time.

Flexibility and adaptability are also crucial in peacebuilding efforts. NATO's strategies in Afghanistan were often limited by strict schedules and plans that did not always correspond with the complex and evolving realities on the field. Future missions should include mechanisms for ongoing assessment and adjustment of strategies, enabling more responsive and effective interventions.

The lessons that international interventions can learn from Afghanistan's experience in peacebuilding are extremely valuable. It is crucial to have comprehensive, context-specific, and integrated approaches. Effective regional cooperation and simultaneous advancements in both development and security are necessary for maintaining peace over time. After internalizing these lessons, the international community can improve its support for peacebuilding efforts, which will eventually lead to a more stable and peaceful global environment. Despite the progress in certain areas of peacebuilding in Afghanistan, the overall success of these efforts remains mixed and unanswered. The unique circumstances of the Afghan conflict made it clear that peacebuilding methods need to be adaptable and adapted to each situation.

As the international community reflects on the lessons of Afghanistan, it is clear that future interventions must be better adopted to the specific contexts in which they operate. This includes a deeper understanding of local dynamics, a stronger emphasis on regional cooperation, and being dedicated to resolving conflicts at their basis. The lessons learned

from the experience in Afghanistan also highlight the significance of continued international involvement to preserve the gains made and keep the door open to peace and stability even after military operations have ended.

As a case study, NATO's engagement in Afghanistan will likely be examined and discussed for many years in terms of complexities of modern conflict and the challenges of building peace in a divided world. The lessons learned from this experience should inform not only future military interventions but also the broader strategies of international cooperation and development. The international community can better navigate the difficult terrain of conflict resolution and make a more significant contribution to world peace and stability by implementing these lessons into future efforts.

In conclusion, NATO's mission in Afghanistan represents a complex and varied effort to tackle one of the most challenging conflicts of the 21st century. While there were significant achievements, particularly in counterterrorism and infrastructure development, the overall success of the mission was limited by enduring challenges related to security, governance, and regional dynamics. The rapid decline of the situation following NATO's withdrawal shows the fragility of the progress made and underlines the need for a more comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. As a final thought, depicting Afghanistan's status as a democratic state after NATO's withdrawal is more disappointing than an achievement, given the length and futility of the NATO intervention as well as the nation's submission to the pre-2001 circumstances.

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