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## Nation Building in Afghanistan: A Failed Nation and A Collapsed Country Why Did Afghans Failed to Build a Nation?

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**Nation Building in Afghanistan: A Failed Nation and A Collapsed Country**

**Why Did Afghans Failed to Build a Nation?**

**Senior Project Submitted to**

**The Division of Social Studies**

**of Bard College**

**by**

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**Annandale-on-Hudson, New York**

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## Table of Contents

<i>INTRODUCTION</i> .....	1
<i>Chapter One: Historical Developments</i> .....	4
The Modernist King.....	4
Governance and Power Dynamics .....	7
State Autonomy and Control:.....	9
Nation Building Progress.....	11
The Thirst of Power: Post Soviet Afghanistan.....	14
<i>Chapter Two: Rebuilding a Failed State</i> .....	18
Political and Administrative Reforms Post-2001.....	18
Judicial and Legal Reforms .....	29
National Unity Government 2014.....	31
<i>Chapter Three: Solutions and Future Directions</i> .....	37
Empowering Women Through Education.....	39
Economic Development.....	41
International Relations .....	43
Reference .....	46

## INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan, commonly referred to as the "Graveyard of Empires" has been a multifaceted battleground of various ethnicities, political instability, and past invasions, all of which have had a lasting influence on its current unstable condition. This thesis examines the challenging process of nation-building in Afghanistan, analyzing the contributions made by three significant global powers—Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Their aspirations to form a cohesive Afghan nation were hindered by the country's entrenched ethnic divisions and political instability. Today, Afghanistan is led by an illegitimate de facto power, lacking both sovereignty and international legitimacy. The complex context is essential for comprehending the reasons behind the repeated unsuccessful endeavors in nation-building and stabilization of the state. This fact was made evident by the recent U.S. withdrawal, which clearly demonstrated the lack of a cohesive nation with shared objectives and values among all ethnicities<sup>1</sup>. According to the constant hostilities that exist between Afghanistan's numerous ethnic groups, the narrative of Afghanistan as a single nation is a fantasy that cannot be supported. The deep ethnic divides are highlighted by the historical violence of leaders such as Amir Abdul Rahman Khan toward the Hazaras during the 1880s<sup>2</sup>, as well as by the ongoing persecution based on ethnicity. The approximately thirteen major ethnic groups that make up Afghanistan each have their own unique cultural identities and political allegiances, which makes the process of developing a united national identity in Afghanistan more difficult. It is the

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<sup>1</sup> Hameed Hakimi and Dr Gareth Price, "Afghanistan: One Year of Taliban Rule," August 15, 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/08/afghanistan-one-year-taliban-rule>.

<sup>2</sup> ' Askar Mūsawī, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, 1. publ (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998).

contention of this thesis that the failure of external powers to acknowledge and properly manage the ethnic variety that exists within Afghanistan was a fundamental contributor to their failure to construct a stable government. Following this, the succeeding chapters of this thesis will delve into the varied character of these failures, investigating how internal dynamics and external interventions have interacted over the course of the decades to impede efforts to form a nation.

The initial chapter provides an overview of the historical development of Afghanistan, following its progression through the various stages of governance and the numerous influences from the outside world. This chapter traces the path of the modern Afghan state, beginning with its fight for independence and ending with the invasion by the Soviet Union. The political landscape of Afghanistan has been characterized by a series of significant moments and decisions, which are discussed in this chapter. The chapter also highlights the ways in which these aspects have influenced the governance of the state as well as its interactions with external forces. It offers a critical examination of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the enormous impact that it had on the country's internal politics and society.

In the second chapter, the focus changes to the endeavors and difficulties encountered in the reconstruction of Afghanistan after 2001, subsequent to the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2021. This text examines the progression of the Afghan state's growth over a period of twenty years, focusing on important political choices, interventions from other countries, and changes made within the country. This chapter provides a thorough analysis of the international community's participation, with a specific focus on the United States and NATO, in the process of rebuilding the Afghan state, governance systems, and security forces. The text examines the political situation in Afghanistan during this time, marked by the introduction of a



new constitution, numerous presidential and parliamentary elections, and the ongoing insurgency headed by the Taliban. This analysis offers valuable insights into the intricate process of reconstructing a collapsed nation in the midst of ongoing hostilities and geopolitical considerations.

The third and last chapter of the study brings the investigation to a close by presenting the findings and making suggestions for potential remedies that are targeted at promoting unity among Afghanistan's various ethnic terrain. In this section, we build on the findings that were presented in the first two chapters and propose potential solutions to the ethnic and political divides that have been a characteristic of Afghan society for several decades. With the intention of establishing a framework for a governance structure that is more inclusive and efficient, the suggestions will make use of theories of transitional justice and rule of law.

## Chapter One: Historical Developments

### The Modernist King

For a decade, from 1919 until 1929 Afghanistan was ruled by King Amanullah Khan, a modernist leader who aimed to develop and progress Afghanistan as a sovereign state. During his reign, he introduced pioneering reforms in education and women's rights so that Afghanistan might become more advanced. Through the implementation of a co-educational system, Amanullah made a significant departure from the traditional gender-segregated educational practices that were uncommon in the country at the time. His travels in Europe and Turkey provided him with valuable experiences that played a role in shaping this decision. Not only did this initiative make it possible for both males and females to have easier access to school, but it also signified a substantial change toward gender equality in educational opportunities<sup>3</sup>. He founded a number of educational institutions, which led to a significant increase in the percentage of people who could read and write, as well as an expansion of educational opportunities across the country, including in some of the more distant areas. Through the facilitation of Afghan students' enrollment in foreign countries such as France, Germany, and Turkey for the purpose of pursuing further education, Amanullah extended the scope of his educational reforms beyond the borders of Afghanistan. According to Leon B. Poullada, the objective of this strategy was to establish a group of leaders who would acquire essential skills and creative ideas, which would, in turn, contribute to the development and expansion of

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 4. impression, Oxford Pakistan Paperbacks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>. At the same time that he was fighting for women's rights, Amanullah was also a strong supporter of the elimination of purdah, which was a common practice in Afghanistan that involved excluding women from public view. Through the act of challenging this custom, he endeavored to incorporate women into the socio-economic framework of the nation in a more comprehensive manner. The policies that he put into effect encouraged the participation of women in a variety of facets of public life, including education, employment, and politics, among others. This represented a substantial divergence from the norms that were prevalent in society at the time. Queen Soraya, the spouse of Amanullah Khan and the daughter of Mahmmod Tarzi, who is renowned as the father of journalism and a trailblazing politician, demonstrated the desired societal role for women in Afghanistan by actively engaging in public events and delivering speeches<sup>5</sup>. She provided a prime example of the new role that women were expected to play in Afghanistan.

In spite of this, conservative tribal and religious leaders came out against these progressive measures almost immediately. They saw them as threats to Afghan culture and as an attempt to impose Western standards on the country. Although both the empowerment of women and the introduction of co-educational schools were considered as direct threats to the traditional family structure and gender norms at the time, there was a significant amount of opposition to both of these initiatives. During the demonstrations that led to Amanullah's resignation, the resistance reached its peak, emphasizing the difficulties associated with implementing rapid social reforms

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<sup>4</sup> Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization ; 1880 - 1946* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 1969).

in a society that is characterized by a high degree of conservatism<sup>6</sup>. The situation escalated an ethnic division between Afghans and continued paved a way for further instabilities.

On the other hand, the educational reforms and advocacy for women's rights that King Amanullah Khan implemented in Afghanistan have had a long-lasting impact on the country's society, despite the fact that he was eventually ousted and faced significant opposition. It is true that the seeds of change that he planted have not fully disappeared, even though they have been disrupted; they have continued to exist and continue to have effect on subsequent generations. This serves as a powerful reminder of the complex relationship that existed between modernization and tradition throughout the stormy history of nation-building in Afghanistan from the beginning. Despite the sudden interruption, his vision has established a precedent for the potential educational and social advancements that can occur in Afghanistan.

In the years that followed, the progressive framework, concerns women's rights in particular, reappeared on occasion. This was especially true during the brief moments of liberalization that occurred in the middle of the 20th century, and it reappeared once more during the age that followed the year 2001 with support from all around the world. Aside from the ongoing hostilities and the repetition of conservative elements that are resistant to such upheavals, Amanullah's reforms have clearly been seen to have a lasting impact, as evidenced by the persistent efforts to achieve universal education. Furthermore, the ambitious and far-reaching nature of Amanullah's reforms has served as an important and instructive example for politicians and reformers both within and outside of Afghanistan<sup>7</sup>. This is because Amanullah's reforms

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<sup>6</sup> Richard S. Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan*, South Asian Political Systems (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> M. Waseem Raja, *Modernization, Regression and Resistance: Amir Amanullah Khan's Afghanistan* (Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011).

have been implemented in Afghanistan. When it comes to efforts to bring about reform, this shows how important it is to keep a reasonable pace and ensure that cultural alignment with the goals is maintained. Although quick modernization may elicit significant opposition, gradual changes, when well managed with consideration for cultural sensitivity, can lead to long-term progress. This is exemplified by the firsthand account of Amanullah. This lesson is highly significant for Afghanistan, where the existence of multiple ethnic groups and complicated tribal dynamics contributes to the intricacy of the socio-political environment. Moreover, the disintegration of Amanullah's government serves as a warning example of the vulnerabilities faced by reformist leaders who advocate for rapid change without substantial support from the general public or thorough assessment of traditional beliefs.

#### Governance and Power Dynamics

King Amanullah Khan swiftly took measures to achieve Afghanistan's entire independence after he assumed power in 1919. He did this by putting an end to British control of Afghanistan by creating the Treaty of Rawalpindi, which ensured the country's sovereignty<sup>8</sup>. His authority was not only bolstered by this initial step, but it also prepared the door for comprehensive measures that were aimed at consolidating control and establishing Afghanistan as a nation that is sovereign and does not focus explicitly on religion. The establishment of a constitutional monarchy considered a creative endeavor that defined rule of law based outside of the Sharia and religious practices. A new legislative body was intended to be established in order to foster a more democratic form of governance with the purpose of limiting the authority of the king<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Dupree, *Afghanistan*.

<sup>9</sup> Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929*.

In addition, Amanullah's reforms had an impact not only on the political system but also on the administrative and legal systems as well. As a notable departure from the traditional reliance on Sharia law, the leader enacted a novel civil code that was implemented. Also, the judicial system was reorganized so that it would fulfill the requirements of modern legal standards with the intention of fostering a shared sense of national identity and reducing the number of conflicts that arise between different tribes, these alterations were made with the intention of establishing a legal system that is consistent across the entire nation<sup>10</sup>. His comprehensive reform plan was put into action with the help of administrative reforms, which included the process of standardizing official procedures and developing a more organized bureaucracy. The implementation of these political and legal reforms, however, was met with tremendous opposition from a wide variety of segments within Afghan society. These oppositions were particularly strong from traditionalist tribal and religious groups, who viewed these changes as putting their self-governance and traditional customs in jeopardy. As a result of the rapid pace and Western impact of Amanullah's reforms, there was a significant amount of dissent and concerns regarding the collapse of traditional traditions. These considerations ultimately led to his abdication of his position in 1929, which was a forced abdication<sup>11</sup>. There was more to the resistance than simply rejecting certain measures; rather, it was a broader effort to protect traditional values and social frameworks, which a large number of Afghans regarded as being undermined by the king's efforts to modernize the country. For a nation that has historically been split, his efforts to construct a government that is more unified and up to date brought attention to the possibilities of political advancement. The concept of a constitutional monarchy and a

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<sup>10</sup> Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan*.

<sup>11</sup> Amin Saikal, 'Abd-ul-Ghafūr Ravān Farhādī, and Kirill Nourzhanov, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris, n.d.).

centralized judicial system continued to have an impact on Afghan political thought and later reforms, Although several of his enhancements were reversed or abandoned following his departure.

Amanullah's dream of a modern Afghanistan served as a compelling illustration of the role that government plays in the process of building a nation. In a community that is marked by traditionally held cultural beliefs and long-standing tribal relationships, it demonstrated both the possibilities and the restrictions of enacting significant political changes.

#### State Autonomy and Control:

For Amanullah Khan, securing Afghanistan's independence and effectively ending British authority was considered a success that not only bolstered his legitimacy within his own country, but it also provided him with the independence that was necessary to carry out extensive changes without any influence from outside sources<sup>12</sup>. Amanullah, who was aware of the critical role that a strong military plays in the maintenance of national independence, launched an ambitious effort with the intention of modernizing the Afghan military. For the purpose of enhancing the professionalism and efficiency of the armed forces, he established new military institutions, modernized military equipment, and introduced modern training procedures. According to Stephen Tanner, the purpose of these military reforms was to improve the capabilities of the military and to foster a sense of national cohesiveness<sup>13</sup>. This was accomplished by giving high priority to the recruitment and advancement of individuals based on their merit, which in turn reduced the influence of tribal relationships within the military. Beyond simply having a

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton university press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban*, Updated version (Philadelphia: Da Capo, 2009).

powerful military, Amanullah had a vision that encompassed much more. It was his intention to modernize and consolidate the military in order to facilitate the implementation of his more comprehensive modernization plan. To develop a centralized force that would be loyal to the state rather than tribe leaders, he intended to combine Western military principles and reduce the traditional dominance of tribal militias<sup>14</sup>. This action was undertaken to build a military that would demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the governing authority. This transfer not only functioned as a practical measure to ensure the effectiveness and loyalty of the military, but it also served as a purposeful tactic to strengthen his power and implement significant changes in other social and political domains. Despite this, the modest changes that were made unavoidably led to a significant amount of pushback from the conventional authority. The professionalization and centralization of the military was seen by tribal leaders as a direct threat to the power and independence that they already possessed. According to M. Nazif Shahrani, several of these factions experienced a significant amount of dissatisfaction as a result of the erosion of tribal self-governance, namely the decreased involvement of tribal militias in local administration and protection processes<sup>15</sup>. In addition, the further reforms that Amanullah implemented, particularly those that were concerned with social modernization, made their complaints even worse and further isolated traditional forces within Afghan society. The rebellion that occurred in 1929, which took advantage of the frustrations of various socioeconomic groups, culminated in Amanullah being forced to give up his post as a consequence of the tensions that were surrounding the situation<sup>16</sup>. Amanullah Khan's changes in the military arena had a lasting impact,

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<sup>14</sup> Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863)* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan: Adaptation to Closed Frontiers and War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Saikal, Farhādī, and Nourzhanov, *Modern Afghanistan*.



molding the makeup and operation of the Afghan armed forces for many years to come, despite the bad results and his later deportation. As a result of the individual's efforts to establish a centralized and competent military, fundamental concepts were established that continue to shape Afghanistan's military and political environment. These concepts emphasize the significant role that the military plays in maintaining national independence and putting governmental strategies into action<sup>17</sup>. The reforms that Amanullah implemented illustrated both the potential and the complexities of improving a nation's military within the context of broader societal shifts. The delicate balance that must be maintained between modernization and tradition in a culture that has historically been tribal was brought into sharper focus by this.

### Nation Building Progress

King Amanullah Khan's attempts in nation-building facilitated subsequent talks and initiatives aimed at constructing a contemporary nation in Afghanistan. His program included substantial reforms in the areas of education, women's rights, the military, and administration with the intention of consolidating control and strengthening Afghan identity. His program was designed to accomplish these goals. Their efforts, however, were met with tremendous challenges as a consequence of the strong tribal affiliations and traditional cultural norms that existed at the time. Vartan Gregorian argues that Amanullah's support for secular education and social liberty, particularly the freeing of women, was the root of challenges he faced later and sparked intense hostility from religious and tribal authorities<sup>18</sup>. The conservative and dark minded opposed groups viewed these reforms as being in direct contrast to the traditions that were prevalent in

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<sup>17</sup> Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge Middle East Library (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*.

Afghanistan. Additionally, his efforts to consolidate control and decrease the independence of regional warlords through reforms in military and administrative practices resulted in repeated rebellions. Although the reforms were first executed with the best of intentions, they were carried out too rapidly and without a solid base in society, which ultimately led to his abdication<sup>19</sup>. The complex challenge of bringing together modernization and traditional values has been a recurring theme throughout the entirety of Afghanistan's history. The dilemma that Amanullah Khan was facing is illustrative of the challenges that are experienced when attempting to implement rapid reforms without obtaining sufficient consensus from society or making adjustments to specific local circumstances<sup>20</sup>. The country struggled with its sense of self and the rate of transformation, which formed a foundation for subsequent conflicts. The historical setting provided a foundation for these wars. Later on, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a significant event that further increased the ongoing efforts to achieve development and stability in Afghanistan. It was the dynamics of the Cold War and the aim to support a pro-Soviet regime that led to the United States of America's intervention in the conflict. On the other hand, this engagement led to a terrible conflict that engaged a number of actors from other countries and exacerbated the divisions that already existed throughout society<sup>21</sup>. The Soviet Union's attempt to impose communist ideologies in Afghanistan sparked a nationalist and religious reaction that was strikingly similar to the opposition that Amanullah had experienced some decades before. Not only did this involvement make the Afghan resistance more intense, but it also brought to light the fundamental challenges that come with imposing foreign change on a country that has a long

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<sup>19</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*.

<sup>20</sup> Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*.

<sup>21</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

and complicated history of resisting outside influence<sup>22</sup>. Because of the invasion, there was a fight that lasted for a long time, which led to a substantial number of casualties and disruption. Afghanistan's efforts to develop a united national identity and a stable government were further hampered as a result of this<sup>23</sup>. The complicated and frequently volatile link that exists between internal reform and external pressures in Afghanistan's quest of nation-building and independence is demonstrated by the impact of Amanullah's attempts at reform and the subsequent invasion by the Soviet Union. There is a critical need for policies that fully understand and honor the diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious settings that exist in Afghanistan<sup>24</sup>. This is shown by the historical patterns of ambitious transformation that were followed by strong opposition and violence.

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<sup>22</sup> Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> M. Hassan Kakar and Muḥammad Ḥasan Kākaʾī, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response ; 1979 - 1982*, 1. paperback printing, Middle Eastern Studies Politics (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, 2. ed (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).

## The Thirst of Power: Post Soviet Afghanistan

Following the collapse of the Dr. Najibullah's government and withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabani, a Tajik tribal leader from northern province of Afghanistan and founder of Hizb-e-Jameyat Islami took the power through bloodshed and violence. His cabinet was structured with majority of Tajik ethnicity in higher ranks. Ahmad Shah Masoud one of the leading commanders of the North Alliance, was appointed as the minister of defense. On the other hand, Gulbudin Hekmatyar a Pashtun leader and warlord who founded the Hizb-e-Islami was fitted as the prime minister of the government. The struggle of the power between the president and prime minister was profoundly noticeable. Their history of conflict after Soviet Union's withdrawal until reaching to the agreement of forming a single government created a robust foundation on disagreement between the members of both political parties<sup>25</sup>. The situation was very fragile until the raise of Mullah Mohammad Omar from the western province, Kandahar. As a result, their government was overthrown by the Taliban and forced them to refuge in Panjshir Valley and form a resistance movement against the Taliban. The foundation of the Taliban group is divined from Islamic extremism that focuses on depriving women from their rights, forcing people to grow beards, banning music, mandatory attending prayers, and implementing rules and regulations of Deobandi sub-division of Islam; The Deobandi movement, originating from a seminary in Deoband, India, represents a traditional

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<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Shah Massoud, Massoud: U.S. forgot its "moral responsibility" in Afghanistan, 2001, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/trade.center/massoud.html>.

form of Sunni Islam with a significant emphasis on adherence to Islamic law and teachings. It's characterized by a purist approach to Islam, focusing on the fundamentals of the faith. This movement has been influential in South Asia, particularly in India, where it has remained predominantly peaceful and traditional for over 150 years.

The political views of Deobandi in India are primarily focused on religious education and maintaining a classical interpretation of Islam that includes embracing Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, and adhering to traditional practices and teachings. It is argued that this movement avoids political extremism and maintains a peaceful coexistence with other faiths and sects. However, the Deobandi movement has evolved differently in Pakistan and Afghanistan, often referred to as 'neo-Deobandi.' This variant has been influenced significantly by Wahhabism, an ultraconservative movement within Sunni Islam. Wahhabism, named after 18th-century Saudi theologian Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, is known for its strict interpretation of Islam and is the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The neo-Deobandi movement, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has incorporated elements of Wahhabism, leading to a more rigid and conservative interpretation of Islam that has been linked to extremist groups and known for their harsh policies and militant activities. The Taliban's version of Deobandi Islam diverges significantly from the original Deobandi teachings, especially in its rejection of Sufism, which is considered an essential part of the Deobandi faith in India<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Hassan Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

Furthermore, the political views of the neo-Deobandi movement have been shaped by the geopolitical dynamics of the region, especially the influence of Saudi funding and the historical context of the Cold War, where arms and support were funneled to mujahedeen guerrilla groups in Afghanistan. Aside from regional instability, the Taliban created a safe nest for Al-Qaida that was led by Osama Bin Laden and executed the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, attacks on New York, Washington D.C, and Pennsylvania. Indeed, confronting such complex extremist militant group required a professional and well-trained forces.

Mujahideen on the other hand was backed and sponsored by Pakistan, France, Iran, and partially United States<sup>27</sup>. Their aggression was mostly justified as a nationalist behavior to protect their homeland, but during the two years of their governance the whole struggle was over power. Although, during their resistance against Soviet Union, the Mujahideen was a unite force and equipped with the U.S. Stinger missiles<sup>28</sup>, but the aftermaths of the Soviet Union withdrawal proved it otherwise. The whole city was burned under rockets and bullets of each party for months and destroyed major infrastructures.

Nonetheless, to prevent blood shed and civil war in Afghanistan, Dr. Najibullah announced on March 18, 1992, that he will surrender the power and leave let an interim government with support of the United Nations to form the future of governance in Afghanistan<sup>29</sup>. The dilemma of choosing stability over power caused a brutal death of Dr. Najibullah and left Afghanistan in the

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<sup>27</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 2nd ed (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Ahmad Shah Massoud, Massoud: U.S. forgot its “moral responsibility” in Afghanistan.

<sup>29</sup> Edward A. Gargan, “Afghan President Agrees to Step Down,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/19/world/afghan-president-agrees-to-step-down.html>.

hands of a terrorist group that was commanded by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI)<sup>30</sup>.

Although Dr. Najibullah was killed inside the United Nations regional office in Afghanistan, the Taliban hanged his body to the exact same location where he delivered a historic anti-Pakistan speech.

From 1996 until 2001, the Taliban governed the nation by implementing Islamic religious laws and engaging in the illicit trade of opium and hashish with neighboring countries. The Taliban, along with various other terrorist organizations, ultimately contributed to the devastating September 11th, 2001 attacks.

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<sup>30</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

## Chapter Two: Rebuilding a Failed State

### Political and Administrative Reforms Post-2001

In 2001, the United States initiated a significant military operation against terrorism in Afghanistan, known as Operation Enduring Freedom. The operation utilized on October 7th, 2001, with undeniable support of British air strikes, which provided crucial air superiority and targeted strategic Taliban positions<sup>31</sup>. A key element of the operation's early success was the collaboration with local Afghan forces, notably the support from General Dostum, a prominent Uzbek ethnic leader in Afghanistan. General Dostum's intimate knowledge of the region and his leadership among local forces were invaluable in confronting the Taliban, particularly in the northern regions of Afghanistan. This collaboration between U.S. forces, British air power, and Afghan allies was a testament to the multifaceted nature of the operation. The initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom was marked by rapid advancements<sup>32</sup>. The coalition forces successfully pushed the Taliban out of their strongholds, driving them southward towards Kandahar province. Kandahar, known as the spiritual home of the Taliban, became the focal point of the conflict. However, the Taliban's retreat did not signal their defeat. Instead, they

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Fields and Ramsha Ahmed, "A Review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and Application to the Road Ahead in Afghanistan," *Institute for National Strategic Studies*, November 2011, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-8.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> "OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM," July 7, 2002, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg83471/html/CHRG-107shrg83471.htm>.



managed to cross over into the border regions of Pakistan. In these relatively inaccessible areas, they found refuge and began to regroup. The border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, characterized by rugged terrain and a porous border, provided an ideal haven for the retreating Taliban forces. Here, they established Madrasas and other institutions that served not only as educational centers but also as recruitment and training grounds for new fighters. These developments signaled a shift in the Taliban's strategy, moving from direct confrontation to a more guerilla-style warfare, leveraging the safe havens in Pakistan to rebuild their strength and launch insurgent attacks back into Afghanistan. This phase of the conflict underscored the complex nature of counterterrorism operations in the region. The initial military successes achieved by the U.S. and its allies were significant, yet they also marked the beginning of a protracted and evolving conflict, one that would demand continued international attention and a multifaceted approach to security and diplomacy in the region.

The Bonn Conference, convened on December 25th, 2001, played a crucial role in shaping Afghanistan's future following the fall of the Taliban regime. This significant gathering led to the establishment of an interim authority, headed by Hamid Karzai, a prominent Pashtun leader from Kandahar province. The conference's objectives were ambitious yet vital: laying down the groundwork for a new constitution and the organization of democratic elections<sup>33</sup>.

The success of the Bonn Conference can be attributed to a confluence of factors. Notably, the U.S.-supported Northern Alliance held a clear military advantage, which was a critical aspect. Additionally, there was effective coordination of U.S. interagency positions, ensuring a unified approach to the complex situation in Afghanistan. This was complemented by thorough bilateral

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<sup>33</sup> Mark Fields and Ramsha Ahmed, "A Review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and Application to the Road Ahead in Afghanistan."

preparations and consultations, which helped in laying a solid foundation for the discussions. Moreover, the skilled use of multilateral negotiations played a key role in bringing diverse viewpoints to the table and reaching a consensus. Importantly, the conference set limited, achievable objectives, focusing on immediate and practical goals to ensure the success of the transitional process. This strategic approach led to the creation of a framework aimed at establishing stability and governance in Afghanistan, signifying a pivotal transition from a state of conflict to one of political rebuilding. These factions included the Northern Alliance, proponents of ex-King Mohammed Zahir Shah (referred to as the Rome Group due to their relocation there), past Afghan leaders in Pakistan (termed the Peshawar Group), and a set of opposition members connected to Iran (known as the Cypress Group)<sup>34</sup>.

Below is the composition of Bonn Conference based on their ethnic and political background:

#### THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATION

(Ethnicity and political affiliation, where known, in brackets)

##### CHAIRMAN

Hamid Karzai [Pashtun, did not attend Bonn Conference]

##### VICE CHAIRS

Women's Affairs: Sima Samar [Hazara, Rome group]

Defense: Mohammad Qassem Fahim [Tajik, Northern Alliance]

Planning: Muhammad Mohaqqueq [Hazara, Northern Alliance]

Water and Electricity: Shaker Kargar [Uzbek, Northern Alliance]

Finance: Hedayat Amin Arsala [Pashtun, Rome group]

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<sup>34</sup> PBS Frontline, “Filling the Vacuum: The Bonn Conference,” accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/withus/cbonn.html>.

## MEMBERS

Foreign Affairs: Dr. Abdullah [Tajik, Northern Alliance]

Interior: Younus Qanooni [Tajik, Northern Alliance]

Commerce: Seyyed Mustafa Kazemi [Shiite, Northern Alliance]

Mines and Industries: Muhammad Alem Razm [Uzbek, Northern Alliance]

Small Industries: Aref Noorzai [Pashtun, Northern Alliance]

Information and Culture: Raheen Makhdoom [Rome group]

Communications: Abdul Rahim [Tajik, Northern Alliance]

Labor and Social Affairs: Mir Wais Sadeq [Northern Alliance]

Hajj (Pilgrimage): Mohammad Hanif Hanif Balkhi [Shiite, Independent]

Martyrs and Disabled: Abdullah Wardak [Northern Alliance]

Education: Abdul Rassoul Amin [Rome group]

Higher Education: Sharif Faez [Northern Alliance]

Public Health: Suhaila Seddiqi [Tajik, Independent]

Public Works: Abdul Khaliq Fazal [Rome group]

Rural Development: Abdul Malik Anwar [Northern Alliance]

Urban Development: Abdul Qadir [Pashtun, Northern Alliance]

Reconstruction: Muhammad Amin Farhang [Rome group]

Transport: Sultan Hamid Hamid

Return of Refugees: Enayatullah Nazeri [Northern Alliance]

Agriculture: Seyyed Hussein Anwari [Shiite, Northern Alliance]

Irrigation: Mangal Hussein [Pashtun]

Justice: Abdul Rahim Karimi [Uzbek, Northern Alliance]

Air Transport and Tourism: Abdul Rehman [Tajik, Rome group]

Border Affairs: Amanullah Zadran [Rome group]

Source: PBS Frontline Report: *Filling the Vacuum: The Bonn Conference*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/withus/cbonn.html>

Contrary to the implications of their titles and descriptions, these groups did not all share the same perspective or, in some cases, consist solely of members from one ethnic background<sup>35</sup>.

Considering historic political friction between Mujahideen (Northern Alliance) and Pashtun leaders, accepting Hamid Karzai as the head of the interim government was a hard agreement that was forced on Mujahideen by the United Nations Envoy to Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi. Regardless of these efforts, the vision of establishing a government with an equal distribution of power and inclusive of all parties was met with challenges. It was a golden opportunity presented by the Bonn Conference to create a balanced and inclusive governance system in Afghanistan through national elections and secured by 5,000 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that was led by the British government and focused on security of Kabul during the interim government<sup>36</sup>. In 2005, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took the command of ISAF operations and extended the operations across Afghanistan to provide security during the national elections. Even with the insecurities and lack of resources, Afghans casted their ballots and the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) announced Hamid Karzai as the president of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for next 5 years with 4.4 million votes out of

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Fields and Ramsha Ahmed, “A Review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and Application to the Road Ahead in Afghanistan.”

<sup>36</sup> James Dobbins et al., “Post-9/11 Nation-Building: Afghanistan and Iraq,” in *After the War* (RAND Corporation, n.d.), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.7249/mg716cc.12>.

8.1M casted votes<sup>37</sup>. Mohammad Yunos Qanoni (Tajik) and General Abdul Rashid Dostum (Uzbek), secured the second and third positions respectively in elections.

#### Security Sector Reform:

A significant agreement was reached between the Afghan government and the nations providing assistance in Bonn Conference in December 2002. They collectively decided that the newly established Afghan army should embody a principle of ethnic balance, ensuring fair representation of the diverse groups within the country. Additionally, it was agreed that enlistment in this army should be entirely voluntary, encouraging a sense of commitment and choice among its members. The consensus also set a specific limit on the size of this force, determining that it should not surpass a total of 70,000 individuals. This figure was inclusive of all ranks and roles, ranging from civilian employees to personnel within the Ministry of Defense, thereby maintaining a manageable and efficient military structure<sup>38</sup>. This decision marked a significant step in the efforts to rebuild a stable and inclusive defense force in Afghanistan.

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<sup>37</sup> IFES, “Election Guide: DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE AND ELECTION NEWS,” n.d., <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/1939/>.

<sup>38</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, “AFGHANISTAN SECURITY Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to Be Better Defined,”

By 2010, ANA was comprised of diverse ethnic composition: approximately 43% Pashtun, 32% Tajik, 12% Hazara, and 10% Uzbek, with smaller ethnic groups making up the remainder<sup>39</sup>. This distribution mirrored the ethnic demographics of Afghanistan's population. Despite this diversity, the sense of unity and camaraderie among the different ethnic groups within the ANA was a relatively new development. The United States has been instrumental in trying to foster a sense of motivation and nationalistic spirit within the ANA. This is evident in the composition of the ANA's combat units, which are predominantly 'normal' infantry and some commando-type units, comprising a mix of various ethnicities<sup>40</sup>. There was a major concern that ANA's operational effectiveness is under serious threat due to its internal ethnic diversity. Soldiers may find themselves in a moral and ethical dilemma if they are required to engage in operations against their ethnic or tribe. The bold argument here is that the operational effectiveness of the ANA is jeopardized by this internal ethnic diversity. If soldiers within each combat unit are reluctant or refuse to participate in operations against their own ethnic or linguistic groups, it could severely undermine the ANA's ability to function as a cohesive and effective military force. Such a situation could lead to a breakdown in military discipline and operational coherence, significantly weakening the ANA's capacity to maintain security and stability within Afghanistan. Although, international alliance was providing professional trainings and equipment to ANA, but literacy could be the only solution to overcome this. United States was focused on training Ministry of Defense, Germany was involved in training and extending the

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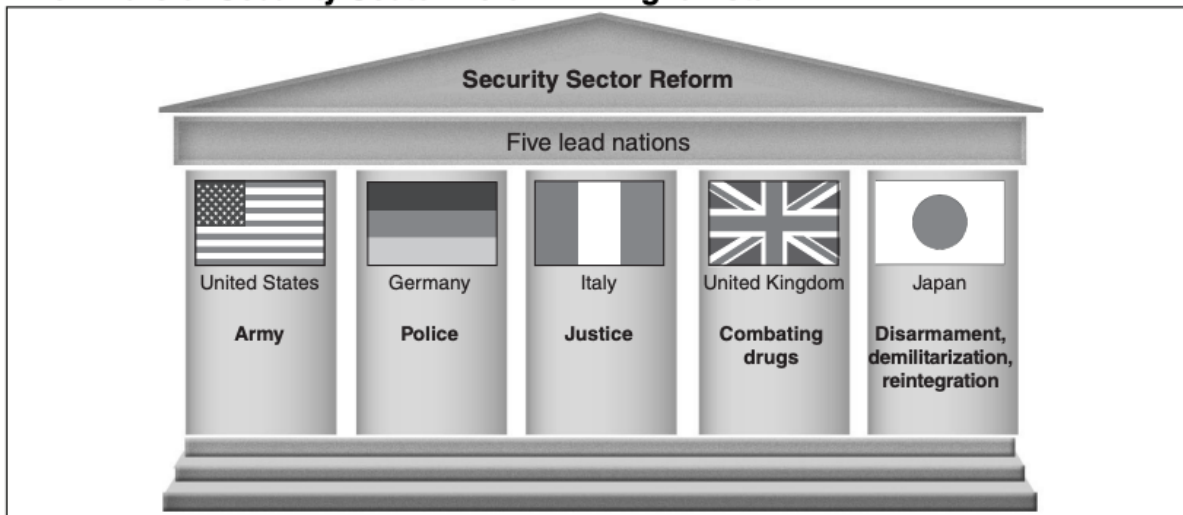
Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, June 2005, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1180198.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Gautam Das, "THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY IN 2014," Small Wars Journal, December 4, 2012, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-afghan-national-army-in-2014>.

<sup>40</sup> Gautam Das.

capacity of Afghan National Police (ANP), while Italy was supporting the Justice sector and United Kingdom supported the Ministry of Counter Narcotics.

### Five Pillars of Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data.

By August 2021, there were nearly 22,000 professional commandos and 300,000 overall ANDSF personnel<sup>41</sup>. The biggest spike in number of ANDSF personnel was in 2009 when the momentum of war with the Taliban was hot. The government formed Afghan Local Police (ALP) and it experienced a swift and significant growth. Initially, at the time of its authorization towards the close of 2010, the force was relatively small, comprising slightly more than a thousand men. However, this number rapidly increased, and by the conclusion of 2012, the ALP had swelled to an impressive strength of 17,000 personnel. This expansion trend continued in the following years. By January 2015, the ALP had further augmented its numbers, reaching approximately

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<sup>41</sup> Tom Bowman and Monika Evstatieva, “The Afghan Army Collapsed In Days. Here Are The Reasons Why,” August 20, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/20/1029451594/the-afghan-army-collapsed-in-days-here-are-the-reasons-why>.

28,000 men<sup>42</sup>. The growth trajectory of the ALP didn't stop there; by the year 2017, the force had seen even more expansion. This remarkable increase in personnel over a relatively short period highlights the significant scaling up of the ALP's capabilities and presence within the region. These forces played a crucial role in empowering the Taliban and supporting them in their operations. According to Global Public Policy's report, ALP was involved in drug trafficking, selling military equipment, and destabilizing the country<sup>43</sup>.

On the other hand, the professional warriors of Afghan National Army Special Army Command (ANASOC) continued their operations with support of U.S airstrikes to target the Taliban and their nests no matter which ethnicity and tribe they were related to. Nonetheless, Hamid Karzai refused to sign the strategic agreement with United States that was allowing American troops to remain stationed at nine bases, continue to mentor the inadequately equipped and inconsistently train Afghan police and army<sup>44</sup>. After two *Loya Jirga* more than 2,500 people gathered and agreed to sign the strategic agreement, however, Hamid Karzai resisted this approach, providing a weak and bias rationale that it would lead to violent conflicts and fratricidal warfare. He expressed his concerns by stating that such actions would inevitably result in bloodshed and the

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<sup>42</sup> KATE CLARK et al., "Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilization in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future" (Global Public Policy Institution, July 1, 2020), <https://gppi.net/2020/07/01/lessons-from-local-force-mobilization-in-afghanistan-and-prospects-for-the-future>.

<sup>43</sup> KATE CLARK et al.

<sup>44</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, "Hamid Karzai Refuses to Sign US-Afghan Security Pact," *The Guardian* (blog), November 24, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/hamid-karzai-refuses-to-sign-us-afghan-security-deal>.



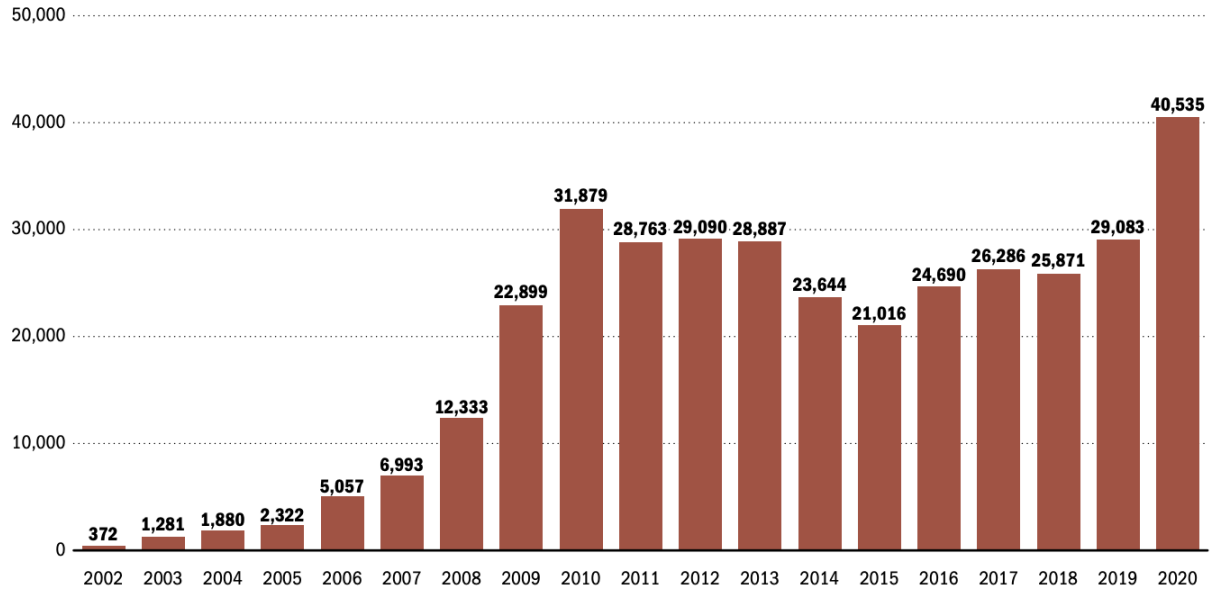
distressing spectacle of brother fighting against brother. This perspective marked a significant moment in the discourse surrounding the conflict. For the first time, the terrorist group, which had been actively engaged in combat against the legitimate army, was referred to as "brothers" by the president. Karzai's choice of words was not just a linguistic choice but a deliberate political and social statement, reflecting a deeper understanding of the complex familial and tribal relationships that underpin Afghan society<sup>45</sup>. It underscored the intricate and often personal nature of the conflict, acknowledging the ties that bind even those on opposing sides of the battle. This terminology signaled a shift in perspective, hinting at the possibility of reconciliation and a move away from the dehumanization often associated with wartime rhetoric. In fact, Karzai took the side of his tribesmen (the Durrani of Kandahar) that are mostly the leaders of the Taliban and betrayed both the army and the people of Afghanistan.

Below chart illustrates the number of attacks performed by the enemy from 2001 till 2020, surprisingly Karzai made such shameful statements admits the heavy combat of ANA with the Taliban.

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<sup>45</sup> BBC Yalda Hakim, Afghanistan: Hamid Karzai says the Taliban are his brothers, December 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-59505688>.

## ENEMY-INITIATED ATTACKS, 2002-2020



Note: The chart reflects data on enemy-initiated attacks sourced from the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency for the years 2002 to 2009, and from the U.S. military headquarters in Afghanistan for the years 2010 to 2020. Defense Intelligence Agency data are generally derived from a larger number of sources and therefore captures more incidents, but these additional sources were not available for the full 19 years.

Source: Resolute Support, response to SIGAR data call, April 1, 2021, and June 12, 2021; Resolute Support, response to DOD OIG vetting, October 2019; U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, response to SIGAR data call, April 2015.

## Judicial and Legal Reforms

The implementation of judicial and legal reforms has been crucial in Afghanistan's nation-building efforts, with the goal of rebuilding and fortifying the necessary institutional structure for a stable government. The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) has been instrumental in improving the judicial system by developing strong legal frameworks, providing extensive training for judicial personnel, and advocating for increased access to justice. The primary objective of these endeavors has been to incorporate global human rights norms into the legal framework of Afghanistan. This is essential for the establishment of a fair legal system that safeguards the rights of every individual and guarantees equitable justice across various segments of society<sup>46</sup>. IDLO played a crucial role in the development and enforcement of the new Criminal Procedure Code, which simplified court procedures and enhanced transparency and equity in legal proceedings. This code is an essential component of wider changes that aim to create a legal framework that promotes the rule of law, which is fundamental for any country seeking to improve its governance and institutional integrity<sup>47</sup>. In addition, the implementation of the new Criminal Code in 2018, which was formulated with guidance from international legal professionals, unified multiple pre-existing legislation into a cohesive structure. The new law implemented strict measures to address corruption, terrorism, and human rights violations, demonstrating a strong dedication to rigorous legal oversight and bringing Afghanistan's legal framework in line with global norms<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> IDLO, "ANNUAL REPORT 2017," 2017, <https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/IDLO-AnnualReport2017-Doubles-LowRes.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> IDLO, "IDLO ANNUAL REPORT 2018," November 8, 2019, <https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/idlo-annualreport2018-lr-web.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Government of Afghanistan, "New Criminal Code 2018," 2018.

Notwithstanding these progressions, the ability to obtain justice continues to be a significant obstacle in Afghanistan, especially in remote regions where legal services are few. In order to address this issue, IDLO has implemented substantial measures such as the decentralization of legal services, the improvement of local courts' capabilities, the training of paralegals, and the provision of assistance to informal justice systems that supplement the formal judicial structure. According to IDLO 2017 Annual Report these initiatives have greatly increased the availability of legal services and enhanced the understanding of legal matters among the people of Afghanistan, hence promoting a judicial system that is more inclusive<sup>49</sup>. The modernization of the legal sector, which encompasses the creation of new courtrooms and the implementation of digital technologies for case management, has played a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness and openness of judicial procedures. The importance of women's participation in the judicial sector has been increasingly recognized, acknowledging that gender inclusion is essential for ensuring full access to justice. There has been a focus on prioritizing initiatives aimed at enhancing the involvement of women in the court. These initiatives include specialized training programs for female judges and legal professionals to assure that women's rights are strongly advocated for and upheld within the legal system, fostering gender parity and ensuring that the judicial system is inclusive and responsive to the interests and rights of all individuals<sup>50</sup>. The comprehensive judicial reforms are crucial for Afghanistan as it aims to reconstruct and enhance its legal and institutional structures, which are vital for ensuring sustainable long-term growth and fostering a more stable and equitable society. The collaborative endeavors of

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<sup>49</sup> IDLO, "ANNUAL REPORT 2017."

<sup>50</sup> USAID, "USAID Report on Legal Sector Training and Modernization in Afghanistan," 2020.

domestic and global stakeholders to revamp the legal system highlight a firm dedication to constructing a legal framework that not only ensures fairness but also acts as a fundamental basis for peace and stability in Afghanistan. This enhances the process of constructing a nation by implementing a restructured legal system that efficiently caters to the requirements of its citizens, with a specific emphasis on empowering women within the legal sector to guarantee a fair and impartial approach to justice for all individuals in Afghanistan.

#### National Unity Government 2014

Following the conclusion of Hamid Karzai's two consecutive terms as president, Afghanistan found itself at a critical juncture. The nation, grappling with the complexities and challenges left by Karzai's administration, faced an uncertain future. Karzai's tenure, which was marked by various controversies and issues, had left a significant impact on the country's political and social landscape. Moreover, the establishment of the Taliban office in Doha, Qatar, added another layer of complexity to the already fragile situation. This development in Doha was perceived by many as a controversial move, raising questions about the future direction of Afghan politics and the role of international players in shaping it. For the Afghan people, who had endured years of conflict and instability, the situation was particularly daunting<sup>51</sup>. They were desperately seeking a path forward, one that would help them navigate out of the shadow of Karzai's legacy, which many considered to be problematic<sup>52</sup>. Karzai's presidency, though it had its moments of progress

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<sup>51</sup> David B Roberts, "Why Has the Taliban Opened an Office in Qatar?" (The Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security, 01/04/20212), <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/why-has-taliban-opened-office-qatar>.

<sup>52</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, "Hamid Karzai Refuses to Sign US-Afghan Security Pact."

and development, was often criticized for issues such as corruption, poor governance, and inability to effectively manage the security challenges posed by insurgent groups. As a result, his legacy was viewed with a mix of skepticism and disappointment by many Afghans. This sentiment was further complicated by the delicate balance of power in the region and the involvement of international stakeholders, including the United States and neighboring countries, in Afghan affairs. The opening of the Taliban office in Doha was intended as a step towards facilitating peace talks, but it also sparked a debate about the legitimacy and intentions of the Taliban, and whether such a move would lead to a sustainable peace or further instability. The Afghan populace, weary of war and longing for peace and stability, found themselves at a crossroads, searching for a political structure that could steer the nation towards a more stable and prosperous future.

In the warm embrace of June 2014, under a hopeful summer sky, the people of Afghanistan embarked on a significant democratic journey. Over 8 million citizens, driven by aspirations for a brighter and more stable future, participated in what was a historic electoral process for the nation. The elections, marked by high turnout and fervent participation, culminated in a fiercely contested race between Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. After an intense and rigorous electoral process that spanned two rounds of voting, Dr. Ghani emerged as the victor, leading his opponent by nearly one million votes<sup>53</sup>. However, this moment of democratic triumph was soon overshadowed by controversy and political strife.

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<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group Asia, “Afghanistan: The Future of the National Unity Government,” April 10, 2017, <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/285-afghanistan-the-future-of-the-national-unity-government%20%281%29.pdf>.

In the days preceding the official announcement by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), both Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ghani, in a premature and controversial move, declared themselves the legitimate presidents of Afghanistan. This unexpected turn of events ignited a wave of political unrest across the country, particularly in the capital, Kabul. Supporters of Dr. Abdullah, feeling aggrieved and disillusioned, took to the streets in large numbers. They set up tents, blocked key roads, and orchestrated demonstrations, effectively plunging the city into chaos and disorder. This political turmoil did not occur in isolation; it was deeply rooted in the legacy of former President Hamid Karzai, whose approach towards the Taliban, often referring to them as "brothers," had sown seeds of division and contention in the political landscape<sup>54</sup>.

This fraught situation underscored the deep-seated ethnic tensions that had been simmering beneath the surface of Afghan society. The election, which started as a democratic exercise, inadvertently morphed into a catalyst for ethnic discord, reminiscent of past conflicts that had once torn the country apart. It was no longer just a battle between two political leaders; it had escalated into a confrontation between two of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups, bringing to the fore longstanding grievances and rivalries. This ethnic dimension of the political crisis highlighted the fragility of the nation's social fabric and the challenges inherent in forging national unity.

As Kabul and other parts of the country grappled with this escalating crisis, the international community watched with growing concern. The situation raised critical questions about the effectiveness of the democratic processes put in place, the role of international actors in Afghanistan's political landscape, and the future of peace and stability in the region. Amidst this turmoil, the Afghan people, who had initially approached the elections with hope and

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<sup>54</sup> BBC Yalda Hakim, Afghanistan: Hamid Karzai says the Taliban are his brothers.

enthusiasm, now faced a reality check. The dream of a peaceful, democratic transition was giving way to the harsh reality of political instability, ethnic division, and the daunting task of navigating a path towards reconciliation and national unity<sup>55</sup>. In this complex and uncertain environment, the future of Afghanistan stood at a precarious crossroads, with its people yearning for leadership that could heal divisions and steer the nation towards a more harmonious and prosperous future.

After enduring months of intense political struggle, a significant development occurred when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry intervened by visiting Afghanistan. In a decisive move, Kerry exerted diplomatic pressure on both conflicting parties, leading to the formation of a national unity government. This compromise resulted in Dr. Abdullah Abdullah being appointed as the Chief Executive Officer and Dr. Ashraf Ghani assuming the role of President. However, the underlying tensions within Afghan society were far from resolved<sup>56</sup>.

The prolonged electoral dispute had deepened divisions among the Afghan people, who found themselves more disengaged from each other than ever before. In this climate of heightened disunity, ethnicity and tribal affiliations emerged as the primary bonds holding the society together. The concept of a unified national interest, once a cornerstone of political discourse, seemed to have been eclipsed by ethnic considerations. Governance and administrative decisions began to be viewed and managed predominantly through the lens of ethnic identity.

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<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group Asia, “Afghanistan: The Future of the National Unity Government.”

<sup>56</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), “Why the Afghan Government Collapsed,” November 15, 2022, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/evaluations/SIGAR-23-05-IP.pdf>.



This division was starkly evident in the alignment of ethnic groups with the two major political offices. Tajiks, for instance, found greater affiliation with the Office of the CEO, headed by Dr. Abdullah, who is of Tajik descent. Conversely, Pashtuns, the ethnic group of President Ghani, were more closely aligned with the Presidential Palace. This polarization between Tajiks and Pashtuns, two of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups, reflected a broader fragmentation of the national political landscape<sup>57</sup>.

Such ethnic-centric politics raised serious concerns about the future of Afghanistan's governance and its ability to foster a cohesive, inclusive, and effective administration. The challenges of bridging these deep-seated ethnic divides and steering the country towards a more inclusive and unified path of governance were daunting. The national unity government, while a step towards political compromise, highlighted the complex interplay of ethnicity, politics, and power in Afghanistan, posing significant challenges to the country's long-term stability and development. As a result of power-centered approaches of politicians and leaders of Afghanistan, it is profoundly remarkable to notice the division of Afghans to small groups, parties, ethnicities, and tribes. Consequently, the insatiable thirst for power has consistently emerged as the primary impediment in the journey towards fostering an inclusive nation and imbuing true significance into the concept of national interest in Afghanistan. This relentless pursuit of authority and control among various factions has not only hindered the establishment of a cohesive national identity but has also perpetually stalled the progress towards a unified, harmonious society. The complexities and challenges that stem from this power struggle have deeply affected the political, social, and economic landscape of Afghanistan, impeding the nation's ability to develop a shared vision and work collectively for the greater good. The repeated cycles of conflict and

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<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group Asia, "Afghanistan: The Future of the National Unity Government."

instability underscore the urgent need for a shift in focus, away from individual or group power dynamics, towards a more inclusive and participatory approach in nation-building. This shift could be essential for fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation's interests among all Afghan citizens, ultimately paving the way for lasting peace and prosperity.

### Chapter Three: Solutions and Future Directions

Inclusive governance has a fundamental role in promoting national unity and identity, particularly in nations such as Afghanistan, where past tribal and ethnic divisions have often hindered peace and progress. Inclusive governance entails the incorporation of various demographic groups into the political system, guaranteeing that all ethnicities and communities have an opportunity to participate in molding the destiny of their country. This strategy is crucial for Afghanistan, a nation characterized by a diverse array of ethnic groups such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, among others. Every group possesses distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical characteristics that, depending on their political management, can either enhance or undermine national unity. The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), implemented by the Afghan government in collaboration with the World Bank, exemplifies effective inclusive administration. The NSP has greatly improved community-level decision-making by enabling local communities to select, plan, and oversee their own development initiatives. This has fostered inclusivity among many ethnic groups. The project has not only facilitated vital local development but has also been instrumental in fostering a feeling of national identity and mutual respect among varied populations<sup>58</sup>. In addition to community-led efforts, implementing structural changes within the governance framework is equally essential for promoting national identity and cohesion. Constitutional amendments that seek to ensure equitable representation and protect the rights of minority groups are crucial. It is recommended by Graeme Smith in his

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<sup>58</sup> World Bank, “National Solidarity Programme Transformed Scores of Lives in Kandahar Province,” 2012.

book “The Dogs Are Eating Them Now: Our War in Afghanistan” that these reforms should ideally incorporate a federated structure of government<sup>59</sup>. Implementing a federated government system would enable increased regional autonomy, providing ethnic groups with the opportunity to maintain their cultural distinctiveness while yet participating in the overall national objectives. This approach has the ability to decrease ethnic conflicts by establishing official methods for involvement and representation, thereby incorporating various identities into a cohesive national structure. Additionally, integrating inclusive policies into the education system, such as the construction of a curriculum that reflects the different history and traditions of Afghanistan's ethnic groups, can further strengthen national unity. Education not only educates but also molds the perspectives of young minds, making it a potent instrument for building a common sense of identity and purpose. Continuous discourse and involvement among all elements of society must accompany the implementation of inclusive government and structural reforms. Afghanistan can only overcome its differences and develop a unified national identity that sees its diversity as a strength rather than a weakness by consistently working hard and being dedicated to these ideals.

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<sup>59</sup> Graeme Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now: Our War in Afghanistan* (New York: Counterpoint, 2015).

## Empowering Women Through Education

Today marks the 990<sup>th</sup> day of deprivation of Afghan girls from their right of education and banning from school above 6<sup>th</sup> grade, due to the Taliban's rise to power. This highlights the urgent need for women to have access to education. Enabling women via education is not only a fundamental entitlement of every individual but also a crucial foundation of a country's progress. Throughout history, the disparity in educational opportunities between males and females has been a major obstacle to development in numerous nations, including Afghanistan. The Taliban has played a particularly harmful role in this matter, as their black policies have directly led to the exclusion of women and girls from official education institutions. The consequences of this are significant, impacting not only individuals but also the overall structure of the nation. When women receive education, they have a greater chance of obtaining higher-paying jobs, earning more money, and attaining positions of leadership. These outcomes have a positive impact on the economy and society as a whole, leading to smaller family sizes, lower rates of infant mortality, and enhanced overall economic productivity. The results are crucial for ensuring Afghanistan's enduring peace and development.

Efforts to improve access to education in Afghanistan, particularly under the present Taliban administration, have encountered significant hurdles despite the crucial significance of educating women. Efforts to address gender inequities in education have frequently been included as part of wider foreign aid initiatives. Nevertheless, there is an urgent requirement for more targeted domestic policy. Concrete initiatives that could have a significant impact include implementing scholarships specifically for females, guaranteeing the security of schools against militant

assaults, and advocating for curriculum that include gender issues<sup>60</sup>. These projects have the potential to change public perceptions towards women's education and showcase the need of investing in women as equal contributors to progress. Another vital measure is to enhance legislation that enforces mandatory education for all females and imposes penalties for any form of discrimination against women pursuing education. Implementing such legal measures would establish a strong and comprehensive system to uphold and safeguard women's rights to education. Furthermore, the exertion of foreign pressure and assistance can have a crucial impact on shaping the Taliban's stance on women's education. It is imperative for the international community to persist in promoting and defending the rights of Afghan women and girls by diplomatic coercion, providing specific assistance, and endorsing indigenous non-governmental organizations dedicated to educational restructuring. In addition, it is worth considering innovative methods, such as leveraging technology and remote learning platforms, to overcome the obstacles created by the current system. This would guarantee that women and girls can maintain uninterrupted access to school and participate in society to play their important role as half of the nation.

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<sup>60</sup> Naila Kabeer, ed., *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*, Claiming Citizenship, v. 1 (London ; New York: Zed, 2005).

## Economic Development

Establishment of infrastructure is the first and foremost vital step for a country that is aiming to achieve long-term stability and independence following a prolonged period of turmoil, it also creates a stable economic atmosphere that promotes business and trade. Investing in infrastructure, such as roads, telecommunications, and energy supplies, has dual benefits. First, it generates employment opportunities and second, it decreases the country's reliance on foreign aid by improving market accessibility, enhancing trade routes, and facilitating communication. These improvements, in turn, attract investments from both domestic and international sources. Robust infrastructure is crucial for providing access to education and health services, as well as creating economic possibilities. This directly helps reduce poverty and promotes sustainable economic growth. Nevertheless, the prudent utilization of Afghanistan's plentiful mineral resources has the potential to greatly boost the economy. It is imperative to exercise cautious management in order to avoid worsening conflict or corruption. This underscores the importance of implementing rigorous regulatory frameworks and maintaining transparent operations in the mining industry. Furthermore, it is crucial to engage in the process of modernizing the Afghan economy and its workforce by investing in education and vocational training. It is noteworthy to mention that inclusion of all groups and ethnicities in this workforce helps achieving a long-term and sustainable nation. Vocational training specifically should focus on aligning educational outputs with the demands of the job market, so improving the chances of finding employment and equipping the workforce for emerging industries like technology and green energy. Investments in education decrease dependence on volatile economic activities such as the opium trade and attract international investment by establishing a highly qualified workforce and strong educational systems. In order to effectively construct a nation in Afghanistan, it is necessary to

implement a comprehensive economic strategy that combines infrastructure development, agricultural improvement, mineral resource management, and human capital development. Every element not only stimulates economic expansion but also adds to a wider national strategy focused on attaining independence, stability, and enduring progress. The role of international community should never be neglected in supporting these efforts through funding, technical aid, and capacity-building programs. Afghanistan has the potential and capacity to achieve a thriving and resilient economy by maintaining a strong dedication and implementing strategic plans that is focused on all Afghans.



## International Relations

The Taliban's return to power has placed Afghans on a constricted path, leaving them with little choice but to accept an illegitimate authority. Consequently, many have fled the country, leaving them without a formal address to represent their nation and state. In such critical situation, effective diplomacy is essential, not only to secure the necessary foreign aid and investment needed for reconstruction and development but also to manage the complex dynamics of a government that lacks broad international recognition. Afghanistan's strategic location makes it a key player in regional politics; however, the presence of an unrecognized regime complicates relationships with neighboring countries. These relationships are vital for ensuring stability and promoting economic collaboration, which in turn can bolster Afghanistan's own economic stability and growth. According to Seth G. Jones, fostering strong and beneficial relationships with neighboring countries is imperative to manage the regional uncertainties that arise from the current political situation<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, balancing relationships with major global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China becomes even more critical under these circumstances. These countries have significant geopolitical interests in Afghanistan, and their engagement can either stabilize or exacerbate the nation's delicate political balance. Navigating these complex international relationships carefully is crucial to avoid Afghanistan becoming a battleground for larger geopolitical conflicts, while still securing partnerships that can aid in nation-building<sup>62</sup>. The Afghan government—or what represents it under Taliban rule—must engage proactively with international organizations to ensure continued support for development projects and

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<sup>61</sup> Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York, NY: Norton, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*.

humanitarian assistance. Participation in international dialogues and promoting a policy of neutrality are more crucial than ever to uphold Afghanistan's sovereignty under the challenging conditions of an unrecognized regime. Tamim Asey, emphasizes the importance of such strategies, noting that engaging in international dialogues can help Afghanistan maintain a semblance of autonomy and play a constructive role in regional and global arenas despite the lack of official government status<sup>63</sup>. By promoting neutrality and engaging in diplomatic efforts, Afghanistan can navigate the complexities of international relations to enhance recovery and future prosperity. This approach is not only essential for securing necessary aid and investments but also for creating a favorable environment for sustainable development, contributing to the nation's stability and growth in a complex international landscape. Additionally, working with global and regional bodies such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can provide crucial platforms for Afghanistan to advance its interests and secure international support and recognition, which are vital for long-term stability and integration into the global community, despite the current governance challenges.

Afghanistan's journey towards nation-building and stability necessitates a holistic approach that integrates inclusive governance, empowerment through women's education, and adept international relations, particularly under the shadow of the Taliban's widely unrecognized governance. Inclusive governance is essential in a nation characterized by diverse ethnic groups such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, each with distinct cultural and historical

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<sup>63</sup> Tamim Asey, "Rebooting Neutrality in Afghan Foreign Policy – A Framework for Global and Regional Engagement on Afghanistan Post-US and NATO Withdrawal," April 29, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/rebooting-neutrality-in-afghan-foreign-policy/>.

identities. Engaging with international bodies while promoting bans on the Taliban's restrictive practices to form an inclusive government is also essential in maintaining autonomy and advancing global interests, thereby facilitating a peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive nation-building process.

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