

**Master Thesis – Failed state-building in Afghanistan: Analyzing  
its causes and consequences.**

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## **Abstract**

This project delves into the issue of state-building in Afghanistan and the US' role. The project analyses why nation-building failed from the angle of economics and politics.

There is usage of dependency theory and political modernity that is utilized to understand and reflect on the empirical data.

The project concludes that the nation-building project led by the US has failed due to lack of effective political development as well as deep reliance on aid from the US and its allies.

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## **1. Introduction**

The ideas of statehood, nation-building and development are extremely important to the public discourse in this era. While Western countries have found industrial and political development as the pillars of their current day societies, some parts of the world struggle with embracing or adapting to these ideas. There is certainly a significant section of people who disbelieve in these ideas and coin them as eurocentric. However, it is in the interest of most people and nations to see a stable, secure government that can create law and order in the land (Fukuyama, 2004).

States can take a wide range of shapes and there is not a monopoly on the ideal state. This project seeks to look at the US led state-building project from two angles, the economic aspect as well as the political aspect. These two factors play a significant role in the building of a nation and are largely intertwined

The US invasion of Afghanistan followed the tragic september 9/11 attacks and although the initial rhetoric from the US was that it was going there to combat the terrorist threat of al-Qaeda, the chaos caused by the conflict meant the US had to invest and help establish a government to replace Taliban (Nester, 2012). With all its efforts to distance itself from a state-building project, the US was forced into it as many felt they had a responsibility to fix some of the mess created by the conflict (Dobbins, 2008). The state-building would be affected by internal factors as well as external factors, however, this project will only delve into the US' role.

### **1.1. Research Question**

- Why has the state-building process led by the US in Afghanistan failed?
  - What are the economic factors as well as the political factors that led to this outcome?

## **2. Methodology**

In this section there will be a presentation of several methodological reflections and processes that will shape the foundation of this paper. Research design will be part of this discussion and there will also be a rundown of terminology, definitions and methodological choices in the research process.

## **2.1. Limitations**

From a methodological point of view it is important to reflect on the challenges associated with writing a report that delves into such a complex matter. One of those methodological challenges and reflections is the scientific limitations connected with it. The aim of this project is to be as holistic as possible, however, there are some methodological limitations that must be noted.

### **2.1.1. General Limitations**

It is arguable that the nature of the subject brings with it some limitations. Time is a factor, there has to be some kind of prioritization in terms of the data and literature reviewed and applied. Furthermore, some data won't be accessible as it is written in the native languages in Afghanistan, if translations are not available. The choices made in reference to the theory and data will equally also have some implications on the conclusions made with regards to the research question.

### **2.1.2. Empirical limitations**

Methodological approaches are not objective truths and in every social science field you will often find different pathways that pose different solutions. The focus of this paper has been to assess the American-aided state-building process in Afghanistan that followed the invasion. Admittedly, much of the conclusions and reflections in this paper will be centered around America's role and the outcomes associated with it. This is what we could classify as the *external* explanation as to why the state-building process failed. However, there is also a more locally focussed aspect, which would be centered around the role of the Afghan government, the people, Taliban and other important local actors in this process. This could be classified as a *local* or *internal* explanation as to why the Afghan state-building project did not succeed. An even more holistic approach would take both of these aspects into account – however, due to the lack of time and space, as well as the barriers of language and culture, my project is focused only on the external aspect, i.e. the American role in this process. It is fair to say that the US and its allies played an extremely important role in shaping the trajectory of Afghanistan, both politically and financially, and although local factors certainly also played a role, it is not ludicrous to argue that the US and its allies had a very large hand to play in how things developed (Rubin, 2006).

### **2.1.3. Eurocentrism**

The Eurocentric nature of the field of nation-building theory and modernization will be discussed more in depth later in this paper, although I wish to discuss the theoretical implications it might have. Definitions of modernization and state-building or nation-building are both contested. However, these fields have also been critiqued for being heavily eurocentric. What is the desired path toward nation-building? Should democracy be enforced? Is industrialization a good thing? These are all questions or assumptions that could be associated with large parts of the literature surrounding state-building and modernization theory. Some of these presumptions are ultimately something that this paper will have to adopt – my aim will be to justify it to the best of my capability, however, the objections that I mentioned must also be noted and reflected upon. There are alternative theories that try to assess the issues of modernization and development through a more indigenous or local lens (Ziai, 2013). Part of critiquing the nation-building process led by the US will be to critique the eurocentric approach of it.

### **2.2. Research design**

In this chapter the aim is to provide an explanation of the research design that was utilized in the project. Research designs are key components of every paper within the fields of sociology, social sciences and political science. In order to make the process transparent, reliable and replicable to some extent, documenting how and why through careful choice of research design is required (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). There will be a presentation of the research design and discussion on the process of data-collection and choice of theory.

### **2.3. Choice of theory**

Theories are often byproducts of wider ideological paradigms that shape the approach as well as the conclusions. The theoretical framework utilized in this paper can be divided into two parts, one is concerned with the political sphere while the other is focused on the economic sphere.

Political development is often seen in light of economic advancements. There is not a single blueprint as to which of the two spheres is more primary than the latter or which one should come first. However, it is fair to argue that political stability and economic advancements are often interdependent. If there is no political stability then it is unlikely that sustained

economic growth will be achieved. Likewise, economic growth is often a variable that governments are judged on by their people and it can be a catalyst to growth of political stability and trust (Cox et.al., 2012).

The choice of theory could be explained through several factors. For one, there was already some familiarity that I had enquired during my studies with the field of state-building and similarly the theoretical schools in the political modernization field. These existing familiarities certainly played a role in shaping my decisions. However, there was a necessity for further reflection and deeper reading, both on the history of Afghanistan, to understand the context, but also a deeper reading of the theories on modernization and state-building.

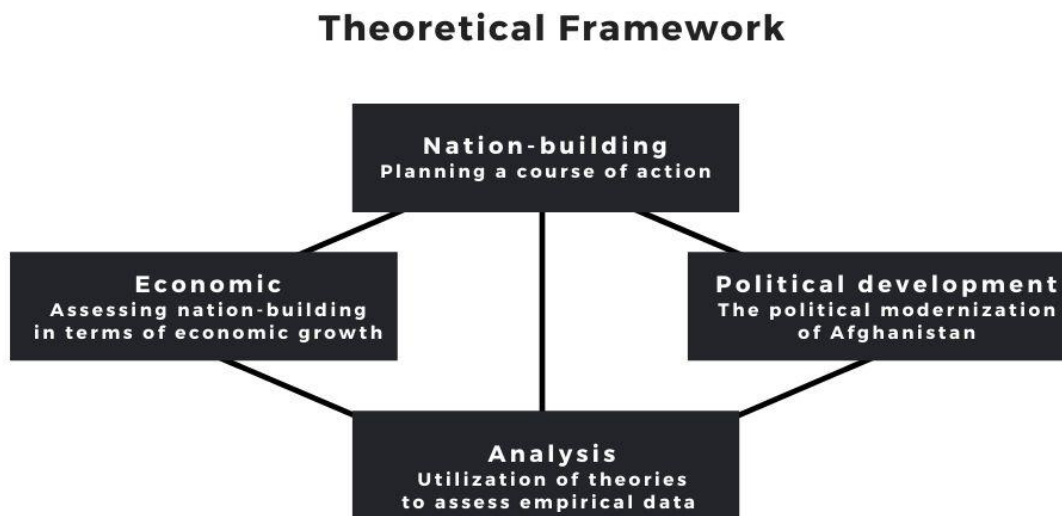
One of the things I discovered during my reading and research was that the Afghanistan case was very politicized. The invasion and the subsequent presence of the US was politically engineered, but there was also a humanitarian crisis caused by the war and it was evident that economic growth would also be influential in shaping the trajectory of the country. This led to the decision to utilize two theories within this field of modernization and state-building, one concerned with political modernity and another delving into economic modernization. Dependency theory was chosen as a theory to explain the economic sphere, not only due to its contemporary relevance, but also partially due to the fact that this state-building project was one being engineered by a developed nation, hence, some of the conclusions of the dependency theory was already recognisable and it appeared to be very much applicable and relevant.

The choice of theory with regards to the political sphere proved more challenging, as there were numerous theories with overlapping ideas and some degree of ambiguity. With the aim of choosing a theory with relevance, but also possessing a degree of concreteness I decided on the political development theory as defined by Lucian Pye (1966). The theory has some presumptions that would force the researcher to either adopt them or take a more critical approach. This paper will adopt some of the assumptions associated with the theory, such as the labeling of the crisis and its definitions on what political development and modernity constitute – however, there will also be some critical reflection on the theory and its applicability on the empirical data.

Another important note to make is that political modernization theory often refers to an internal process that a nation-state has to undergo. In the case of this paper however, we are only focussed on the role of the US and its allies in trying to modernize the political sphere in

Afghanistan and hence the theory will be utilized in that fasio. This approach is subject to critique, however, it is deemed justifiable due to the scope of influence the US had in the formation and development of the political institutions in Afghanistan following its invasion.

**Figure 1: Graphic illustration of the theoretical framework adopted in the paper**



#### 2.4. Qualitative method

This paper will be heavily focussed on utilizing a qualitative approach to answering the research question that was presented. There are several reasons as to why this approach was chosen. The nature of the question essentially deals with something, which is qualitative and detail-oriented. The research question posed was the following: “Why did the state-building in Afghanistan fail?” – often, when a research question is preceded with a why, it is to explain a reality that contains a lot of complexities. In our case, we are researching a decade long conflict and its aftermath. Qualitative research method is used to explain complexities and to understand the nuances of a given topic (Olsen & Pedersen, 2018).



Qualitative research methods will be utilized in this paper in a number of ways. Primarily in the use of theories that are qualitative in nature such as the dependency theory and modernization theory. These theories delve into statehood and the development of nations by giving their interpretations as to how and why nations develop as well as what development entails. There are certainly some aspects to these theories that seek to *generalize*, but this is distinctly different from the kinds of generalizations that we see in quantitative research methods. In the qualitative research method we utilize *analytical generalizations* – drawing general conclusions about a given case using deductive theories that are qualitative in nature (Yin, 2013). In quantitative research methods the aim is to make *statistical generalizations*, those are often simple in nature and measurable by metrics that are defined clearly. Qualitative research however will often be detailed, hence, making analytical generalizations that summarize the findings, but still preserve the nuanced picture are helpful.

In the section of this paper wherein the findings will be analyzed and discussed there will be a qualitative analysis and reflection on the theory presented and how it correlates with the case chosen in the paper. This qualitative process is what will allow us to address the research question more directly.

In any case where one particular methodology is preferred over another, there might be a reasonable justification, however, there will also be limitations and shortcomings. As explained, the qualitative methodology allows us to understand complexities and provides a deep understanding of a given topic. However, one of the criticisms often directed toward this methodology is that it doesn't provide concise findings and hence finding the solutions will be too convoluted. In this paper, the aim is to try to limit this problem by providing analytical generalizations using deductive theory, however, it must be noted that this criticism is valid.

#### **2.4.1. Content analysis**

Large parts of this paper will be delving into historical events and it will be essential to the analysis of this case that documents that reflect importance are read, contextualized and analyzed. There are documents such as speeches, official statements and alike that will give us an idea of the historical context, but will also provide analytical value. Document analysis is a hermeneutic qualitative method that is based on inference, interpretation and content analysis. In general, document analysis will have some degree of subjectivity, but it is a powerful and

perhaps even necessary qualitative tool that will assist the researcher with their findings (Flick et al., 2004). In this paper, we will look at statements that were released by relevant figures and institutions, Taliban officials, American government spokesmen, statements from al-Qaeda figures and speeches from those relevant figures. Reading and hermeneutically interpreting these documents will give us historical context and allow us to understand the timeline of events, but it will also allow us to bring reflections to our discussion that can either conform with or critique the theory. As mentioned, a critique of this particular method is that there is a degree of subjectivity involved – this is not necessarily a negative thing in researching terms, but it should be limited to a healthy amount in order not to render the paper too distant from any parameters of objectivity.

### **2.5. Quantitative method**

The qualitative method will serve as the primary foundation for this project, however, there will be usage of quantitative data and methods to some extent. The two aspects of focus, the political and economic spheres, will each require empirical data that supports it. The economic development of Afghanistan will be measured through the use of economic metrics such as GDP, GINI-coefficient and GDP growth-rate in the years relevant to the research question. This will serve as a guidance, both methodologically as it will illustrate the nature of Afghanistan's problems, at least in terms of economy. It will also allow us to track the changes in the Afghan economy over the period where the US were present – this will serve as a helping tool when reflecting on the theory and its application to reality. It should also be noted that although the quantitative data will be used in its own way, it will also be applied to support the qualitative reflections in the discussion.

### **2.6. Research subject**

In qualitative research methods there are many opportunities and pathways one could take in terms of concretizing the research subject. It is possible for a researcher to decide on several research subjects or one. If one's point of departure is an overall topic, for instance, *failed nation-building*, one could perhaps make use of a single or multiple cases (Yin, 2013). In the case of this project, the point of departure was Afghanistan. It began with an interest taken to the conflict, its trajectory and the aftermath. Simultaneously due to previous studies, the topic of

failed states or fragile states and nation-building had peaked my interest. Afghanistan had been one of the few countries, alongside the likes of Libya and Somalia that often were the reference points, so it made sense to delve deep into it. The aftermath of the US withdrawal and the collapse of the Afghan government had also played a role – the relevance of it and the fact that it was still a fairly recent event made this course of action rational. There was going to be a need for research due to the recency of the US withdrawal and symbolic end to the decade long conflict, but also a lot relevancy given to the topic of nation-building.

Another factor that would serve as justification for choosing this singular research topic is with regards to the uniqueness of the conflict in Afghanistan. In the case of post-conflict development we are dealing with a very specific case – perhaps if we were looking at other cases where the US has tried nation-building after a state of war or conflict, we could use a comparative method to analyse and compare the similarity as well as the differences. The Afghanistan case however is very different in that for one, we are dealing with an invasion of a country that perhaps had its conflicts, but nevertheless saw some stability with the Taliban government, some countries even recognising the state – furthermore it is in the context and wake of a new imminent threat to the West; terrorism and al-Qaeda. The US hence feels more responsible in fixing the mess that they were part of creating and the US involvement was very active. Some people might perhaps draw a parallel between Afghanistan and Iraq and there are certainly lots of crossover. However, an important distinction is that Afghanistan was seen as hotbed of terrorism, which served as a justification for the invasion whereas Iraq became a hotbed of terrorism following the invasion. Ultimately there are also many differences as well as similarities, but it is a valid argument that Afghanistan as a unique case can be investigated.

## **2.7. Definitions and terminology**

### **2.7.1. Nation and state-building**

The concept of nation or state-building could be defined and interpreted in several ways. Especially due to the fact that it is mostly seen as an ongoing process that requires active effort. In this project the concept of nation-building will refer to the US lead effort to re-building the governmental institutions of Afghanistan. In some parts of the project it might be used in a theoretical context, relating to the theories adopted, and in such cases the term will be applied loosely to refer to the general process of seeking political and economic stability. It might also be

utilized in reference to a specific theoretical argument, for instance in relation to political legitimacy or economic growth, in the case it is used the term will be contextually applied.

There is a widely adopted definition given by the OECD – in its discussion paper *Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations*, statebuilding is defined as follows:

‘Purposeful action to build capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process to negotiate the mutual demands between the state and societal groups’ (2008, pg. 14).

### **2.7.2. Modernization and development**

These two terms are grouped as they both offer similar challenges in terms of how contested they are. Modernization theory is a vast field with several sub-categories, each sub-category has its unique aspects to it. This project adopts a theoretical approach to modernization, which means that the specifics of the modernization theory applied will be mentioned in the theory section. However, the term modernization will also be used in some parts as a general reference to Afghanistan’s quest to live up to the standards of the modernized countries, predominantly in the Western part of the world.

The word ‘modern’ has existed in the English language since 1585 and was used to refer to that which is present or in the now. In 1748 the word ‘modernize’ became common and had a similar meaning, which is to make something applicable or suitable for present day standards and needs. Later on in the 1700s the term modernization became widely applied and the usage of this word was found in reference to the concept of nation-states and the progress and advancement of folks to what was deemed the standards of the present day modern-society at that time.

The term development will also be utilized in this paper at different parts. This word provides an equal amount of challenge when it comes to its definition. It has also been subject to criticisms due to its eurocentric connotations. Some definitions of development seek to encompass several spheres of society including economy, politics, human rights and sociology (Todaro & Smith, 2006). Other scholars defined development as the elimination of poverty and balance of equality within the society (Seers, 1969). In this paper, development is used in a generalized manner, referring to improvement in economic growth, political stability and

representation and the increased living standards of Afghans. As mentioned previously, developmental studies have received backlash at times, some arguing that it centralizes and glorifies the Western approach to development – this paper seeks to be as nuanced as possible in the usage of the term and reflecting on these objections.

## **2.8. Choice of data**

Empirical data is crucial in the research process as it will not only influence how the research question is answered, but perhaps even, what kind of research question that is posed. Some of the data that shaped the process leading to the formulation of the research question was pre-existing knowledge that was read either in relation to studies or outside of it.

Once the research question was articulated, it was evident that this project would need some historical background as well as some contemporary data. The historical documents would be speeches, official documents, existing literature depicting the conflict and the US' role in nation-building in Afghanistan. These kinds of documents would be qualitative in nature and would give an adequate insight into the historical context. Although there is certainly a large pool of information to choose from, the focus had to be specified to a) most important events and b) prioritizing literature focussed on the US intervention, its role in the timeline of events and its efforts related to nation-building and exerting political or economic influence.

Another aspect with regards to the choice of data would be more contemporary documents and statistics relevant to discussion of the research question. Some of this data will be quantitative in nature, i.e. statistics depicting the economic state of the country while other parts of empirical data will be qualitative. This distinction is important as some of the data utilized will have a more important role in the beginning of the process, while the rest will be more geared toward the discussion of the research question and conclusion.

The reliability of the data used has been prioritized and there has been an effort to ensure that the data is sourced from renowned, authentic sources. When it comes to quantitative data, official sources such as the OECD and the World Bank have been utilized. In terms of the qualitative data, similarly, only reliable books, documents from official government websites and news articles from renowned papers have been utilized.

### 3. Theory

In this section I seek to present the theoretical framework that I will be building my paper on. The theory will be utilized to understand the empirical data and these two aspects will serve as the foundation for the discussion and ultimately answering the research question.

#### 3.1. Modernization theory

The definition and etymology of the term modernization has been discussed previously in this paper in the section *Definitions and Terminologies*. This section seeks to delve deeper into the theoretical field of modernization and singling out a couple of theories that will be utilized.

Within the field of modernization studies there are several sub-categories and sciences that each form their own conclusions, of course, some things will produce crossover, however, in this paper we will be focusing on political modernization theories as well as some aspects of economic modernization theories. Furthermore there is stage-specificity within modernization theory – these theories stipulate and muse on which kinds of stations the present-day nation state has to either find itself in or found itself in previously and where it should gear toward in order to become ‘modern’. In this field there will be a usage of the dependency theory which argues that there are two stages in the present-day world order. Each theory will be explained and presented before they are tested with the empirical findings in the discussion.

It must be noted that the concept and terminology surrounding modernization itself has been subject to criticisms and that applying the theories that will be presented does lead us to adopting some presumptions in our methodology – however, the theories that are based around critiquing this field will not be discussed extensively (He, 2012).

**Table 1: Field specific and stage specific modernization theories**

Modernization theory	Field specific theory	Stage specific theory
Political modernization theory	Focused around nation-building and modernization of political institutions in order to adapt and live up to the standards of those nation-states that are deemed modern.	

Economic modernization theory	Metrics of industrialization, economic growth and advancement. Developed countries are often used as the standard.	Dependency theory: A theory focused on explaining the status quo of today's world order where countries are categorized into developed and underdevelopment and there is an interdependence.
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### 3.2. Dependency theory

Dependency theory is a structural theory that was developed as a sort of critique to modernization schools. This school of thought rose to prominence during the 1960s and sought to explain why there was underdevelopment in third world countries and came to the conclusion that these countries reside in a stage of dependence on developed countries, which halts or boosts their progress, depending on the trajectory of the developed countries..

The question is, what exactly does dependence entail? One of the figureheads of this Theotonio Dos Santos states that dependence is 'a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected' (Dos Santos 1970, p. 231).

Dependency theory has several strands and theory is not structured or articulated in one way, rather there are variations. However, in general terms, dependency school distinguishes between two categories of nations. Core countries are developed countries who exploit those countries that reside in the periphery. The core countries are often industrialized and modernized, but rely on the periphery countries to import low-value commodities in the primary sector. The countries that are underdeveloped, according to dependency theory, are dependent, financially on the developed nations as they export their commodities to these countries and their economic growth – so in reality, the core country has a level of control over the periphery country (He, 2012, pg. 194).

There is a focus on the concept of 'underdevelopment' and as the term itself suggests, there is an assumption that is glaring – the obvious question to ask would be, what does it mean to be underdevelopment. The field of development ethics is vast itself and modernization theory has often been critiqued for its lack of nuance. Development and modernization are both two terms that imply some kind of desired end-goal, to be developed or modernized is often

associated with positive outcomes. In dependency theory the idea that is posed is that the underdevelopment of the third world countries is directly tied with the development of the modern countries, hence arguing that this problem is a structural problem (He, 2012, pg. 195).

Dependency theory argues that the capitalist expansion as we have seen it is the true cause of this imbalance between the developed and underdeveloped nations. The lack of modernization is hence not a product of policies within those third world nations but an external, structural cause. The damning conclusion of the theory is that so long as the current structure of international relations is maintained, the relative gap between the two categories of nations will remain.

Other external causes have also been mentioned within dependency school, such as the aftermath of colonization, exploitation and dependence on aid from developed nations. According to Professor Baoyun Yin, there are three types of dependency theories. The first type of dependency theory is what one could dub as the *structuralists*. These scholars argue that the relation between the core and periphery countries is unequal and that periphery nations should undergo a gradual substitution of imported goods by seeking to produce those products locally. The second type of dependency theory are called *radical dependency theorists* – they argue that underdevelopment is a result of capitalism, rather capitalism directly advocates for it. The third category of dependency theory are *dependency development theorists* who believe that development is possible for the periphery nations through dependence.

**Table 2: Schematic diagram of dependency theory. Source: Zhang & He (2015)**

Core Countries	Controlling, Exploiting	Periphery Countries
(Former Metropolis)	Unequal International Relations	(Former Colonies)
Developed Countries	Dependent, Been Exploited	Underdeveloped Countries



### **3.3. Political Modernization**

As mentioned previously, within the field modernization there are several sub-categories. There are certainly some crossover of points between the different fields, but each has its uniqueness. Political modernization refers specifically to the development of the political sphere and its institutions. The development of the political sphere is not simple in its nature and there are certainly many nuances, even when comparing nations in the Western part of the world. In this section the aim is to provide an overview of the political modernization field as well as a presentation of the *political development theory*, which will serve as a basis for this part of our theoretical approach.

#### **3.3.1. Overview of the political modernity approach**

Political modernization theories are vast and abstract in nature – for one, politics itself is a contested construct. Although there are some definitions that are adopted more than others, the mere fact that there is a dispute as to what politics constitutes, shows the ambiguity of this sphere. Equally, as we may define some of the general characteristics of the outcome of this political modernization, the pathways could be many and depend on a lot of different factors.

According to He, there have been two shifts in the development of political modernity in history. The first shift was the switch from traditional politics, to what could be called modern politics – referring to the democratic, centralized, often secular and urbanized political system. The second is postmodern politics which is more decentralized, self-governing. There is often an association made between political modernity and democracy. It is important to note that democracy is not a universal form of governance and part of the criticism made of political modernity theory is that it portrays the Western pathway as a universal one. However, it could be argued that democracy itself could take many different shapes and although it might not be desired in every society, the important thing to note about the first shift, is that societies who adopt political modernity often drift away from feudal, autocratic governments to systems that allow for more public and civic involvement. One can't argue that this change is universally desired either, but we can argue that this change reduces alienation of societal groups and increases political trust.

It must also be noted that it's a widely accepted notion that political modernity is dependent on external factors. For instance, wars or economic crises often have a negative

impact on political modernity. This also relates to the fact that today’s international political climate and the hegemony of the West means that lesser developed countries, such as Afghanistan, that are ravaged by war, are also heavily influenced by foreign powers when it comes to their political development. The process of political modernization is a lengthy one and the demands put on developing countries in the 21st century do not match the timeline of Western countries who took the path (He, 2012).

**Table 3: Characteristics of political modernity**

<b>General Characteristics of political modernity</b>	Stages	Pathways
	Premodern: Autocratic, feudal, church-ruled	Civil reform, revolution
	Modern: Secular, civic societies	International intervention, conflict induced reformation

**3.4. Political development theory**

There are many theoretical frameworks within the political modernization field that one could utilize, some being more abstract than others. One framework that is recognised and renowned is the *political development theory* as formulated in the book *Crises and Sequences in Political Development* written by Leonard Binder et. al. (1971) and Lucian Pye’s *Aspects of Political Development* (1966). According to Pye and others, the process of political modernization could be categorized into a series of crises, specifically six. This theory also poses some ideas to how these crises should be dealt with. The six crises are defined as, a) identity crisis, b) legitimacy crisis, c) penetration crisis, d) participation crisis, e) integration crisis, f) distribution crisis.

In order for a country to achieve harmony and cohesion, Pye argues that the country must achieve and adopt a common *identity* that connects the people together and to their nation. Identity is often rooted, for most nation-states, in their heritage, whether that would be ethnic or tribal. In some more modern states the identity has been attached to a set of ideas, for instance the ‘American Dream’, ‘British Values’ and so forth.

The second crisis that Pye believed every society must encounter toward its political modernization is dubbed *the legitimacy crisis*. This is concerning the legitimacy of the authority in the nation, what kind of power the different branches of government should reside over, the relationship between central and local authorities and so forth. These matters are often formalities that are ironed out when the constitution of the country is formulated, however, there are demographic complexities that cause problems for some. For instance, in very tribal countries, representation will often be divided geographically as tribes and ethnic groups are concentrated in areas deemed local to those ethnic or tribal groups. This can cause challenges when the distribution of power, resources and finances are settled between the central and local governments. Legitimacy of the state can also pose ideological challenges, for instance, if there is division amongst people with regards to how secular or religiously governed the country should be.

The crisis of *penetration* is often related to the issue of legitimacy. It revolves around how the newly established government manages to ensure its grip, all the way down at the local level. One thing is to establish a government and write a constitution, the next challenge is how enforceable these governmental ambitions are. A common issue in developing nations is exactly this – for instance, Somalia is a country where the policies of the government are hardly enforceable outside of the capital, despite the government and parliament functioning relatively well for a number of years.

According to Pye, *the participation* crisis occurs when a nation is faced with the challenge of including interest groups into the political process. There are many facets to this, with time, new interest groups and civil movements might occur and the problem for younger states is that it is often attempting to balance the issue of trying to implement vast, ambitious changes that might cause instability, but also avoiding alienation of interest groups.

The *integration* crisis is to be understood as the point of meeting between the stages of penetration and participation. It essentially refers to the effectivity and cohesion between the enforceability of the government's policies, objectives and the cohesion between the system, it's different interest groups as well as the cohesion between these different groups. It can also refer to the integration and cohesion of the government's different institutions. In younger states there is often a tussle between different sectors within the government such as the police and the army, these kinds of problems display a low level of integration.

Every nation-state deals with the challenge of *distribution*. Even in developed countries there is a constant, ongoing discussion revolving around the allocation of budgets and distribution of goods. Many scholars have attributed the tendency of newer states leaning toward socialist ideas as a reflection of this crisis. In order for a country to sustain its development, it should address this concern and ensure that it is not undermined. Some would even argue that the main cause behind the collapse of fragile states is the misuse of funds and lack of equality.

When it comes to the chronology concerning these crises then there is not unanimous agreement. Pye acknowledges that each country will have its uniqueness to it, hence, the sequence of development is not going to be identical. The aim in this paper will be to address these crises, identify whether they appear, how and when they appear (1996)..

### **3.5. Summarization of theory**

In summary the theoretical apparatus of this paper is split into two categories. The dependency theory will be utilized to interpret and understand the economic aspect of the US-lead nation-building in Afghanistan, while the political sphere will be discussed using the political modernization theory, as formulated by Lucian Pye. This theory will be used by drawing, applying the six stages of political modernization that Pye argued every nation-state has to endure, to the case of Afghanistan. This, in order to investigate whether its hypotheses are applicable to the case of Afghanistan and to which extent. Dependency theory is more fluidly applied by analyzing the economic development of Afghanistan with a focus on its reliance on aid from the US and its allies. Dependency theory argues that developing nations will be reliant on developed nations and its trajectory will largely depend on the course of action taken by the developed countries that it is dependent upon. There will also be some critical reflection on the theory as well as its applicability to Afghanistan, possible objections and a discussion of some of the presumptions the theories carry.

These two theories will be used to analyze the state-building process and the US' role from the two angles, politics and economics. Although the two theories delve into their respective fields, there is no doubt that there is some correlation. For many, the political sphere is the catalyst to economic prosperity and likewise, without a healthy economy it is unlikely that the political system will be stable and evolve. The relation between the two spheres will be taken into account and this project does not assume one is more important than the other – rather it

seeks to explore what best explains the lack of progress in both these categories of nation-building.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### **4.1. Historical background**

The complexity of conflicts and their nuances can only be understood through a holistic method, where the chronology of relevant events is taken into account. To understand Afghanistan in 2022, we must understand it in light of the fact that it has been a conflict-plagued country for the past three decades almost consecutively. It is not practical to go through the entire modern history of Afghanistan for two reasons: for one, the spatial limitations make it difficult. Secondly, in order to facilitate a linear process between the background part and the analytical discussions, there should only be a rundown of relevant and crucial points. The starting point of this historical summary will be the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the late 1970s.

The Cold War is the name of a lengthy period in modern history post- WWII that saw the US battle with the Soviet Union for control over the world. The reason it was dubbed as the ‘Cold War’ is because seldomly did the US and Soviet Union clash, rather, most of the war was fought politically or through proxies that were funded and supported by each side. This also unfolded in Afghanistan, which up until the uprisings in the late 1970s was under the grip of the Soviet Union who supported the communist regime in Afghanistan.

The US were naturally worried about the presence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and therefore deemed it necessary to support the opposition, known as the Mujahideen. *Mujahideen* is an Arabic term that translates to, *those who strive* or *those who struggle*. These groups consisted of a mixture of local Afghan groups, most had an Islamist sentiment, however, there were also some groups with Marxist and communist ideologies. These Mujahideen groups were also supported by other foreign nations, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan – there were also an influx of foreign fighters who came to fight alongside the Mujahideen groups. Most of these foreign fighters were joining the conflict for religious reasons, particularly from the Arab Peninsula there was a large mobilization of *Muhajireen*, religious migrants who came to Afghanistan to support the local Mujahideen, due to what they believed were a religious duty to support fellow Muslims. Although at the time of this specific conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban

were not founded, it is believed that the true origins of the organization are to be found here (Malkasian, 2012).

#### 4.1.1. Aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal

In the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal, American support for the Mujahideen also started to fade away. The obvious victory of the Mujahideen forces and their allies led to an unanticipated conflict of civil war that ravaged the country following the war against the Soviet Union. Warlords ruled most parts of Afghanistan and the country emerged into a tribal conflict coupled by the anarchy of the reign of brutal militias who extorted the local population, murdered and committed sexual abuse of young boys.

These warlords, such as the likes of Ahmed Shah Massoud and Ismael Khan were vying for power in Afghanistan's different provinces. This is where the emergence of the Talibs is found – their name, *Talibs* or *Taliban*, which translates to *the students* signifies their humble beginnings and it would not be the prediction of most, that these people would end up ruling 90% of the country. The Taliban were religious figures and leaders who knew each other through their study of theology, fought together during the war with the Soviet Union and they were gathered by their uniformity in objectives and aims for the country; to riddle it of the corruption and anarchy of the warlords and to establish a religious rule in Afghanistan where the primary source for governance and legislation is Islamic law, also referred to as *Sharia* (Malkasian, 2012).

“The sharia would be our guiding law and would be implemented by us. We would prosecute vice and foster virtue, and would stop those who were bleeding the land” (Abdul Salam Zaeef, 2018, pg. 33).

The official formation of the Taliban culminated in a meeting held in October 1994, in the city of Kandahar – often called the capital of Taliban (Maisaia, 2005). In this meeting, the Mullahs decided on a set of objectives that would determine their intentions. The objectives were ‘institute Islamic law, remove the warlords, form a single powerful and just government in accordance with the Koran, open the main road in Kandahar, implement social reforms and eliminate corruption, and restore the country's independence and’ (Malkasian, 2019, pg. 60). In

many ways this signified how Taliban set itself aside from many other militant Islamist groups – their struggle seemed to be very locally oriented and focussed on the struggles within the Afghan borders.

The face of Taliban was for decades the one eyed ideologue, Mullah Mohammed Omar. It all started in 1994 when he saw scattered, dispersed bodies in the streets left by the militias and upon that scenery he felt a sense of responsibility to act to change the status quo. Mullah Omar and a handful of fighters aligned with Islamic scholar Mawlawi Pasanai to form a military allegiance. Mullah Omar was chosen by the *Shura Council*, a committee which oversees certain executive decisions. As the leader, or *Emir*, Mullah Omar the central figure in the group and he had the history of being a fighter during the Soviet Union as well as the reputation of being a religious and pious man. Mullah Omar referred to his Shura Council for appointments and decisions at the lower level of authority, whereas Omar would make the final executive decisions.

The rise of the Taliban in the post-Soviet chaos that ensued in Afghanistan was hence inspired by the ravage caused by militia groups led by warlords. With extensive networks to Pakistani religious leaders and circles. As word came out of the movement led by Mullah Omar, more *Talibs*, students, and religious figures in Afghanistan and Pakistan sought to join the caravan. During the mid-1995s, Taliban, with the support of Pakistan, would start to make advancements in the province of Kandahar, capturing several key cities and villages, even capturing the strategic border city of Spin Buldak. Taliban under the leadership of Mullah Omar would capture neighboring provinces and march toward Kabul where the forces of Ahmed Massoud were stationed. Unable to breakthrough initially, the Taliban focussed it's efforts elsewhere and managed to capture strategic cities and provinces and in 1998 they captured Mazar-e-Sharif, eliminating all opponents bar Massoud. Through their networks to religious schools in Pakistan, their good relations with local tribal leaders and with financial support from Pakistan, Taliban were able to find momentum and capture most of the city. However, the Taliban government, with it's official announcement in 1996, would only last until 2001, where a US invasion toppled what was known as, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Malkasian, 2012).

#### 4.1.2. 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan

September 2001 marked one of the most historic events in recent modern history. The terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the US Pentagon triggered a chaos across the Western world, as the looming danger of al-Qaeda was felt. The 9/11 attacks caused the deaths of almost 3000 people and injured another 25000 – the US and NATO felt that a swift response to this aggression was required.

al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan was known to the US and its allies as the two figureheads of the organization, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri both had spent lengthy periods of time in the country both during and after the Soviet war. The organisation had already committed terrorist attacks against US personnel since 1992, so their danger and threat to the US was not a secret. However, nothing of the scale of the 9/11 attacks was neither anticipated, nor was it believed that the organization were able to commit such a large-scale attack.

It is believed that the origins of what is referred to as *al-Qaeda*, which translates to, *the base*, actually lies with another figurehead of the Mujahideen movement in Afghanistan, Abdullah Azzam. In the late 1980s he formed an organization which had a lot of mystique around it, mainly consisting of Arab foreign fighters who had remained in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. After the death of Azzam in 1989, it was Osama bin Laden, a close aide of Azzam, who became the new figure head of this globalist jihadist movement that sought to 'reconquer the Muslim lands'. Bin Laden spent several years in Sudan where he sought to find a new safehaven – it is believed that from Sudan he orchestrated several attacks, but after increased pressure on the Sudanese authorities from the International community, bin Laden felt that it was no longer safe to roam in the country. Bin Laden went back to Afghanistan as he felt that it was the only remaining safe spot for his ideology to roam freely. Following his arrival in Kabul in mid-1996, Osama bin Laden issued his final warning to the US troops stationed in Saudi Arabia that they must leave a sacred land for Muslims.

Upon bin Laden's arrival in Afghanistan he sought to strengthen his ties with Taliban and in exchange for his expertise in management and building infrastructure, bin Laden was able to operate his training camps and *the base*, al-Qaeda, had found a base in the heart of Afghanistan. Similar to the Taliban, al-Qaeda's Shura Council elected Osama bin Laden as the Emir and the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri was appointed as the deputy Emir (Malkasian, 2012, pg. 71).



“Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. . . . Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger” (George W. Bush, 2001).

Although the attack had been orchestrated by al-Qaeda and not Taliban there was an agreement among the George Bush administration that this attack would warrant a very serious response, in other words, the invasion of Afghanistan and the toppling of the Taliban regime. George Bush offered an ultimatum to the Taliban to hand over all of the al-Qaeda organization present in Afghanistan otherwise the US would invade Afghanistan.

The Taliban and Mullah Omar underestimated the likelihood of the US actually following through with an invasion and for that reason they did not take the demands of Bush as seriously as they should have. There was also a reluctance to hand over bin Laden due to his popularity in Afghanistan and succumbing to such a request would be seen as a disgrace and a sign of weakness – this, despite the fact that according to some sources, bin Laden disregarded Mullah Omar’s clear instruction that he must consult with him regarding any major international terrorist attack.

The Taliban’s religious scholars issued a declaration of *Jihad* against the Americans in the case of an invasion, that declaration would serve as the primary source of theological justification used to mobilise Afghans to take up arms against the US. On October the 7th, the US invaded, a heavy air-campaign ensued that targeted Taliban headquarters and bases. The US employed advanced precision-weapons to strike the Taliban, which forced them to employ a more guerrilla warfare strategy. Within a few weeks, the US managed with the help of its allies to force the Taliban to retreat from the capital and other major provinces, the heavy campaign was too much for the Taliban forces to withstand and they became encircled in Kandahar where a strong Pashtun base allowed them to stay put. The US quickly realised that they would need a Pashtun ally in order to defeat the Taliban in those Pashtun areas.

The US saw the defeat of the Taliban as a necessary byproduct of the war against al-Qaeda, more famously dubbed as the War on Terror. With Taliban's leadership underestimating the seriousness of the Americans in their pursuit of al-Qaeda and the likelihood of an invasion, not only were they caught off guard, they were also extremely ill-prepared in their imminent war with the Americans. This, coupled with the simple reality that the US had the most advanced modern weaponry in the World meant that toppling the Taliban government only took a few months (Malkasian, 2012).

#### **4.1.3. A lengthy war; post-toppling of the Taliban government**

Although the US and its allies managed to defeat the Taliban in the most general sense by removing them from power, what followed the toppling of the Taliban governance was the most strenuous and bloody part of the war for the US and its allies.

In the early periods following the toppling of the Taliban regime and the subsequent appointment of Hamid Karzai, there was a relatively stable period of time. The seemingly endless reign of war and chaos, meant that people were relatively exhausted from the destruction on conflict. This, in addition to the fact that the Americans and their NATO allies had made lots of promises about rebuilding the country, establishing peace and investing in its economy, which gave the local people a lot of hope. This period was perhaps the most difficult for the Taliban in terms of local support. As Taliban fighters started to return to their homes, a Taliban commander proclaimed: "In the early days, when there was a drought and poverty, and the foreigners were promising a lot, that was when we did not have support of the people" (Rosner, 2015).

It was also in this period that challenges surrounding the US and its presence in the country began to arise. The Bush administration began to muse on what strategy they should employ in this seemingly post-war period. For one, they did not want the chaos of the 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal to repeat itself and so it was largely accepted that the US would have to remain and continue to have a political presence. George Bush vowed that he would build a democratic government that would serve as a catalyst for the future where Afghans could decide their own affairs, but for now, there was a needed US presence on the ground.

Part of the reason that US also felt the need to prolong their presence in the country despite forcing both Taliban and al-Qaeda to flee it – is that it was felt that avenging those thousands of innocent civilians who died in the 9/11 attacks was not going to be complete, except

with the capture or death of the masterminds behind the terrorist attack, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. The 9/11 attacks also created a very tense atmosphere on American soil – there was a looming fear that al-Qaeda was capable of repeating or even perhaps carrying out an attack that was deadlier. The public's pressure applied on the Bush administration meant that the dominant sentiment was to be aggressive in this war.

In terms of the military presence, the US believed it was necessary to stay in Afghanistan as one of their primary aims and objective behind the invasion of Afghanistan was to expel and defeat al-Qaeda. If the US left abruptly, it was feared that instability would rise and there would be a power vacuum that would harness a situation in Afghanistan that would create a safe haven for al-Qaeda.

George Bush reiterated that there was a need for 'rebuilding' Afghanistan politically and economically, as he proclaimed: "When you rout out a government like the Taliban you have a responsibility to replace it and to help a new government grow" (Degen, 2014). Bush even went as far as to call it a 'Marshall plan', signaling that the US wanted to have a similar presence in Afghanistan to the presence it had after WWII in Europe. At the same time, the US wanted to be careful with its agenda in Afghanistan as it also wanted to avoid portraying an image of itself in Afghanistan as a neo-Colonising force. For this reason, Bush and Rumsfeld were particularly cautious with using the term 'nation-building' – as it insinuates that there will be a strong American influence in the shape of the nation. Although this was an impossible balance to achieve, because it was inevitable that the US would influence the shape of Afghanistan.

An issue that became synonymous and almost pillar of the US intervention in Afghanistan was women's rights. Although not the cause for the invasion, the US quickly adopted the issue of women's rights and female oppression under Taliban as a crucial motivating factor behind dethroning the Taliban. The Western media also played a big role in shedding light on the treatment of women under the Taliban government, which served as further justification for the intervention (Malkasian, 2012). As George Bush stated:

"The last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government" (Bush, 2002).

Although the treatment of women under Taliban suffered its consequences there seemed to be an absence of nuance in the discourse and the idealistic approach to these societal and political matters seemed glaring. Afghanistan was a conservative society and irrespective of Taliban rule or not, the role of women the US were trying to install would've likely not been received well by the larger and wider society. The challenge to the US' idealism was that it disregarded or underestimated the influence of Afghanistan's societal norms on the Taliban and its interpretation of Islam. The US maintained, the women of Afghanistan, however, preferred a 'moderate' interpretation of Islamic laws, distinct from that of the Taliban.

Prominent American figures even tried to pose a correlation between the terrorism of al-Qaeda and the Taliban's treatment of women. Perhaps there was a feeling among the Bush administration that invading and toppling a government in a foreign country, just on the basis of individuals in that country who committed terrorist acts, was not enough as a sole justification. The US was now arguing that toppling the Taliban was not only a good thing due to its protection of al-Qaeda figures, but the byproduct of that would also be the liberation of women, a moral just cause. As first Lady Laura Bush said in a radio statement "There is an immoral link between the way women were treated by the oppressive Taliban in Afghanistan and the hateful actions of the al-Qa'eda terrorists" (Clinton, 2001).

With the focus largely being on establishing a democracy in a country that had not seen for centuries, it seemed like the US was trying to fast-track a process that simply could not be fast-tracked, as the internal problems that Afghanistan faced were simply not going to be fixed with the installment of a semi-democratic government.

Although trying to seemingly distance themselves from being the main driving force behind the statebuilding process in Afghanistan, the US still saw the necessity of working with influential figures and powerful warlords in Afghanistan to establish a new government. This culminated in what was dubbed the *Bonn Agreement* – in Bonn, Germany, 25 influential Afghan figures came to settle the affairs of the Afghan people. The US opted to invite warlords and include them in the process, as the fear was that had they been excluded they would disrupt and undermine the process. The Bonn Agreement declared that Hamid Karzai would now become the interim president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan but beyond that there was not much else. The formulation of a constitution and setting up of a legislative body and legal system all had to be done.

Hamid Karzai was a favored and respected figure in Washington – not only due to his calming demeanor, but also his natural inclination toward peace-making and conflict-prevention. After the Bonn Agreement the next monumental event in the Afghan state-building was the Emergency Loya Jirga, which translates to ‘Emergency Large Council’. The purpose of this council gathering which was held in Kabul, was to confirm who would rule Afghanistan for the next two years. Although Karzai was in contact with the Taliban during this period, they were not invited to this council meeting. Part of the reason behind that was the US felt the Taliban were defeated and did not see a reason to let them back into the corridors of power. Others stated that Taliban’s presence would’ve agitated other influential figures, particularly the Northern Alliance, whom the Taliban had a lengthy bloody history with.

The hardest settle to score during this council meeting was who was going to become the President of the provisional government. It was between Hamid Karzai and former king Zahir Shah. Another point of contention would be the minister positions – the conclusion of the Bonn Agreement was that Tajiks would have been given ministry posts, but the Pashtuns who dominate most of the country’s territory wanted influence. The constitution of the country would also be decided during this council meeting and it resembled the Afghan constitution of 1964 – Sharia, Islamic Law would be the primary source of legislation, alongside Afghan societal customs and codes.

The culmination of these measures that were taken by the US and actors inside Afghanistan was the election that was held on October 9th, 2004. Hamid Karzai lived up to the expectations and displayed that he had become somewhat of a popular figure. Karzai won fifty-five percent of the votes in an election that had an estimated turnout of 8 million Afghans showing up to cast their vote. The elections also served as an important symbolic victory for the Americans in their pursuit of displaying that their efforts toward empowering women were showing progress. Seats were reserved for women in every province and a Ministry of Women’s Affairs was also established to guard over and help secure better rights for women.

With the political process largely put in place, or at the very least the building blocks, the next objective of the Bush administration was to build a robust Afghan army. Following the toppling of the Taliban regime, it was the militias of Northern Alliance and warlords that had been serving as a de-facto army. It was decided that these militias would all be submerged and become the Afghan Armed Forces (AMF), however, the US also knew that there was a need for

a lot of reforms and development in order to create an army with cohesion and that could sustainably secure the country (Malkasian, 2012).

There was a lot of reluctance in deciding on the right measures that needed to be taken when it came to building this army. For one, some parts of the Bush administration felt that the power of the militias was too impactful to try and interfere with. In addition to the fact that they felt their cooperation with the US and its allies had to be rewarded. In the end, December 2002, the US and other donor countries decided that an Afghan army with around 70.000 troops would be formed. The Bush administration felt that this was an appropriate size to secure the country, as Taliban remnants was deemed too weak and that the Afghan government would eventually be able to fund an army of this size by itself without relying on outside funds. There was a widespread feeling among the Bush administration that there was not going to be a serious military campaign ensuing and that the Afghan army's task would be largely to keep the stability – Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld stated the following in a press conference in 2003: “We clearly have moved from major combat activity to a period of stability and stabilization and reconstruction activities. . . . The bulk of the country today is permissive; it's secure” (Tomsen, 2011, pg. 631).

According to many analysts this was one of the mistakes that the US made in their earlier assessments of the situation after the invasion and toppling of Taliban. There was too much optimism surrounding the capabilities of the new Afghan army and how much would be needed to avoid a resurgence of the Taliban. The US had underestimated the seriousness of the reality on the ground – one thing was to topple the Taliban and get rid of al-Qaeda remnants, another thing was to establish a safe and secure Afghanistan that wouldn't become a safe haven or breeding place for extremism. The other factor that the US underestimated was the social issues prevalent in Afghanistan. As mentioned before, women's issues were at the top of the agenda list, although one could question the strategy employed and how effective it was, there were other social issues that were also plaguing the country. Child abuse being one of those issues that carried its way into the Afghan army, corruption equally. These things would eventually create a lot of distrust among the people for the authorities – further elaboration on this will follow.

The Afghan police also needed to be built and they were neglected even more than the army. The police force was meant to be equipped to deal with the day-to-day problems that would arise in the cities of Afghanistan. The toppling of the Taliban left a huge power vacuum

that needed to be filled – not to mention the unity and centrality in the command structure that allowed Taliban to be effective during their reign was missing. The Afghan army and police were both underdeveloped and not funded adequately. Furthermore, the timeline for training and supplying the army and police was simply not cutting it, there was lack of equipment and salaries were extremely low which led to distrust, desertion and corruption. Lastly, there was no cohesion between the security forces, the only person who was able to command all security units was Karzai. Although he was a popular figure, many believed, however, that Karzai simply didn't have the character in him to solidify his power and seize full control of the security forces. For one, the security forces were filled with people who he didn't necessarily get along with, particularly the Northern forces, but it was also not his style of running office, he preferred peace and brokering safety through talks and councils.

Afghanistan had been ravaged by war for decades and for that reason there was a lot of destruction of infrastructure. Roads were rarely paved, buildings had been turned into ruins and there was a lack of civic administration. The US was wary about installing grand projects as it was feared that this would be perceived as nation-building, which is something that the Bush administration adamantly wanted to avoid. However, the scale of destruction meant the US were forced to carry out some national projects. Those included the likes of the Mazar-e Sharif to Kabul highway, the Gardez-to-Khost road and the Jalalabad-to- Asadabad road. Most of these projects were administered by the USAID, however, there were also some small-scale projects that involved NGO's and aid organizations. The economy of Afghanistan needed to be built back after it had been severely weakened by conflict and the increased international presence could be felt positively particularly in the capital of Kabul (Malkasian, 2012).

#### **4.1.4. The ghost of Taliban and the resurgence**

The Taliban were forced into the mountainous regions that border Pakistan – an extremely difficult piece of terrain to fight a war in, but nevertheless, most of the Taliban's warriors were not strangers to this land and had already fought for lengthy periods of their life against foreign forces and in civil wars. Its major figures including its leader Mullah Omar had gone into hiding.

In the early periods following the US invasion the Taliban were broken and the US had decided that it would take a hardline stance against the group. This meant that they were excluded from the negotiations and the emergency council. It is reported that some Taliban

figures were in contact with Karzai and had relayed from Mullah Omar that the group would be willing to talk and that it should be part of the new upcoming government. But as mentioned, the Bush administration was adamant that Taliban must be in the past and not the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban seemed to have been split on this issue – although some parts of the group wanted to seek peace, others felt that the group must seek revenge and not succumb to this symbolic defeat. Honor culture in the group was a very important thing and for many of the group's leading figures, seeking participation in the system set up by an opposition that ousted the group from power with the help of a foreign superpower would simply be too shameful. The group decided that it needed to rejuvenate, gather its remnants and seek to carry out a military campaign that ultimately should lead to the group retaking the country.

Occupied with the Iraq war that had taken a lot of resources and funds from the US, Afghanistan became a less of a priority post-2006. The US were fighting a much stronger, wider range of opponents in Iraq and while maintaining a serious presence in Afghanistan, the threat of Taliban's resurgence was not prioritized. The planned recruitment and training of 70.000 troops was yet to be completed and by 2005 only 26.000 troops had been trained. The police forces were left to patrol and secure large parts of territory and they were even funded less and provided fewer equipment. In some parts of the country it was believed that the Taliban fighters were equipped with similar or better weaponry.

Meanwhile, the Taliban had been preparing since 2003 under the orders of Mullah Omar to prepare an offensive to regain control of the country. Part of this campaign consisted of recruiting Afghans who were trained in *Madrassa*, Islamic schools, in Pakistan. These fighters were trained militarily but also schooled in the ideology of the Taliban. Another aspect to Taliban's recruitment was appealing to locals in Afghanistan who were disgruntled with the lack of security and stability. Facing an under-equipped Afghan army and police force, the Taliban managed to launch a series of attacks employing a mixture of local penetration and guerilla warfare. Between 2007 and 2010 Taliban ruled significant parts of the country and with their harsh crackdown on petty crimes as well as facilitating the sale of poppies, they managed to enjoy some local support and had re-established itself as a prominent actor in Afghanistan. With the re-established control on the ground after gaining territory, Taliban managed to recruit more locals and establish a grassroot support. It is estimated that their troops tripled in 2009 from



2006. There is a lot to suggest that the lack of stability during the government reign of these territories and corruption made the local people more inclined toward the Taliban.

The Taliban at the provincial level was until 2009 arming its fighters just as well as the police forces. The salaries were also similar and it must be noted that while policemen in the Afghan army were occupying these positions, primarily to support their family – for a lot of Taliban fighters it was a religious and moral cause. This meant that disgruntlement due to lack of pay or equipment would be scarce, because they ultimately believed this was a cause greater than life (Malkasian, 2012).

#### **4.1.5. The surge and Taliban's resistance**

With the increased presence of the Taliban the US and its allies, lead by President Obama decided that more troops had to be deployed and an offensive to push back the Taliban. Obama recognised that the Afghan army was not equipped to deal with the force of the Taliban. Hamid Karzai, the sitting president had butted heads with President Bush previously over the US military presence. Karzai preferred diplomacy and was more focused on political endeavors and he was worried that the continued dependence on US support would show its vulnerability over time.

The surge managed to give territorial gains to the government and forced the Taliban to retreat. Although, the number of attacks did not decrease significantly in 2011 after the surge. The Taliban had managed to infiltrate the society and gain popular support – this meant that it was no longer an isolated organization that the US was fighting, rather it was a group with deep support among the locals in large parts of the country. There were a common narrative among US and allies soldiers that during patrols, they were not certain that they were talking to a mere farmer or an undercover Taliban member.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government had been weakened even further. Lack of funds led Obama to increase funding. The deep rooted issues the Afghan authorities faced were not going to be solved with a few billion dollars however. While the Taliban enjoyed more local support as they managed to establish some security in the areas they controlled, the Afghan government were riddled with corruption and struggled to establish safety. While the Taliban had a clear command structure and fighters willing to listen and obey, the Afghan government consisted of different sections, at time tussling with each other and plagued with distrust and corrupt

commanders. Abuse of civilians, child-abuse also plagued the Afghan army and while the US and its allies were aware of it, they could not do much as the perpetrators had to be tried in an Afghan court. These issues were not going to be fixed with aid, they were long-term problems that would need time and effort. It aided Taliban tremendously that these issue persisted despite the continued US presence.

In 2015 and 2016 the Taliban launched another string of offensive campaign that lead them to take key parts such as the Kunduz province. It was also during this time that the US began to be open to peace-talks with the Taliban. Some saw this as an acceptance of the fate that Taliban was simply not going to be defeated and equally an abandonment of the project to build an Afghan government that would not only rival Taliban but rival it. The Taliban were hesitant to enter talks but eventually agreed in 2018, with the condition that the US retreat immediately out of Afghanistan. The peace talks were important, symbolically, for the US. It would allow them to exit with some sort of pride. It was largely becoming a common sentiment in this US that this war was pointless to continue. Al-Qaeda had been largely defeated and although the imminent threat of ISIS emerged in Afghanistan they didn't pose a threat outside of Afghanistan. In fact, the US would see the Taliban as an ally against ISIS – as Taliban's structure and command could be used more effectively than the government.

Even during the height of the peace-talks in 2020 the feeling within the Taliban was that as soon as the US forces withdrew, they would be able to take control of Kabul. There was an acceptance that there was no Afghan government without the US – the fact that the Taliban was communicating with the US over this peace treaty and not directly the Afghan government insulted the sitting president Ashraf Ghani. Perhaps there was also an acceptance from the US' point of view that the best thing for all parties involved, would be to swiftly sign a deal, even if it was merely symbolic.

On 15th of August 2021 the Taliban encircled Kabul and power was handed over without any resistance from the Afghan forces. The Taliban had already swept through most of the country, including Kandahar where they were founded. Senior Afghan officials fled the country and the US declared it was going to withdraw its soldiers, workers and Afghans who had worked for them. Other countries with presence announced the same. Two decades of war later, the Taliban was back in power (Malkasian, 2012).

#### **4.2. The political fragility of the US project**

We presented the theory of political modernization earlier in this paper. This part will seek to analyze the US nation-building project using the theory and its framework. The US engineered nation-building of Afghanistan will be analyzed from a political standpoint by going through the six stages of political modernization as formulated by Lucian Pye.

The stage of identity refers to how well a nation-state manages to cultivate a common identity amongst its people. In some countries that process is more easily facilitated due to ethnic homogeneity – in Afghanistan that proved to be more difficult. Most of the country, around 35-40%, belongs to the Pashtun tribe but beyond that there are Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazara, Balochis and Aimaks. The influence of the Pashtuns was never going to be something that the US could ignore. It was clear that the strategy from the get go was to include them in the process and give them influence. It could be argued however that other ethnic groups were alienated more and it hampered the cohesion between the Afghan people across these ethnic denominations. The sense of pride and honor is a strongly culturally integrated part of Afghan society so it was never a case of trying to instill that – but it was more about inclusivity and the sense that this Afghan government was not just a pawn being used by a super power but rather a state for the Afghans. This was not aided by the issues revolving around corruption, misuse of funds, US killing of civilians and crimes committed by Afghan soldier that were overlooked. In a very tribal society like Afghanistan it is challenging to break down those traditional hierarchies and that's part of the reason why the US recognised the importance of incorporating tribal influence into the political system, because the alternative was simply not an option. However, another important part of the Afghan society is religion and in many cases, it perhaps exerts more influence than tribes. This is a factor that played heavily into the Taliban's strategy. They swept through the country in the 1990s to get rid of warlords using Islamic slogans and by appealing to the Muslim identity of Afghanistan. Many argue the Afghan government simply could not copy the same mantras due to their alliance with the US. The US recognized the importance of Islam in Afghanistan and tried to incorporate it in their plans. The challenge was the lack of religiosity among the Afghan forces, at least in the sight of the Afghans. For instance, the stigma of corruption stained the Afghan forces for decades. Locals can't equate adherent religious people, who steal money or misuse funds. Taliban faced criticisms for their harshness in interpreting religion, their treatment of women and their violence, but what the US perhaps failed to

recognise or at decided to ignore, is that in many cases cultural dogmas affect how religion is interpreted in Afghanistan. Taliban might have some unique ways of interpreting religious texts, but a lot of their understanding will have come from traditions. Their religious legitimacy was still more recognised among the locals than the government.

Legitimacy is closely related to penetration and perhaps this is where the US lead nation-building in Afghanistan failed the most. The formation of the Afghani constitution was a formality and proved a smoother process than expected. The US managed to include large parts of the Afghan society and despite their dislike for some warlords, they realized their influence was too strong for them to not invite them and include them in the process. Penetration proved more challenging however. For one, there was an almost constant tussle between different branches of the government, including the army and the police forces. The grip of the Afghan government was unstable. Mismanagement of US and allies' funds played a big role as money that was meant to secure and stabilize the cities and towns were not distributed adequately. Another major issue was the lack of funding from the US and its allies. The Afghan army did not develop in the speed that was initially set out and the police force were worse off, lacking equipment, facing issues of distrust and corruption. This also affects the governance at the local level. A factor which led to the dissatisfaction among the Afghan people with the government was the lack of control it had beyond the bigger cities. There are several key explanations to this. As mentioned previously Afghanistan is a tribal nation and like many other tribal countries like Somalia and Libya who also have been deemed fragile states, there are already codes existing in these societies that govern the people. When the state collapses, people refer to the tribal authorities and because these are deeply ingrained within the society it is not easy to swiftly replace them with an all-powerful state. In the earlier stages of the US' presence in the country there was certainly more optimism, skepticism toward the US was also prevalent, but the increased economic investments and the prospect of a new government that would be more inclusive and have better relations with the international community gave a lot of Afghans hope. However, the disconnect between the government, its officials and the local Afghans only increased as time went on. It seemed to become a government where the elites collect their cheques in the capital of Kabul, which did enjoy a lot of development and served as the exemplary image for the work the US was doing in Afghanistan, but outside of Kabul and other major cities the government lacked penetration and its authority lacked legitimacy.

Ensuring the participation of different interest groups seemed to be one of the priorities of the US. From the beginning of the invasion of Afghanistan the US set the rights of Women in Afghanistan as one of the key points on its agenda. Whether this was a genuine interest in their rights being improved or more so a means to justify the invasion further has been questioned by many. To manufacture a change in a deeply conservative society like Afghanistan is a lengthy process and perhaps it could be argued that it was rushed and the issue was not presented entirely accurately by simply blaming Taliban for women's rights issues in Afghanistan while it could be a cultural matter. The nature of such a complex conflict is such that it is difficult to predict what will happen. For the US there was not merely the task of trying to build Afghanistan as a nation both politically and economically, they also had to preserve their image in the war. This meant that for a long while, the US were not interested in having talks with the Taliban, although it is arguable that for long periods of this war, they not only have a lot of influence but also a lot of local support. Excluding an interest group with such influence, irrespective of whether they are considered your enemies, will certainly cause problems when trying to build and establish a nation. As mentioned earlier, the matter of integration could be seen as a fuse between penetration and participation. The effectiveness of the rule and the effectiveness of its inclusivity is a difficult matter to balance and the US struggled with this process.

Lastly but not least, the distribution of goods was a major problem for the US in its state-building project in Afghanistan. Large parts of the country did not see infrastructure being built and developed and although they were were many schools and educational centers that saw investments, it did not translate into a rise in the general wealth of most of the country. Corruption was widespread throughout the whole duration of the US presence in the country and was never eradicated, despite efforts from Obama in particular. At the beginning phase of the invasion there was a lot of optimism from the average Afghans in terms of the infrastructural and industrial changes that the US had promised and in light of how poor the country had become under Taliban rule, it gave momentum for the US to garner support in the country, but it was never achieved and ultimately the government of Afghanistan became one for the elites and not for the people.

### **4.3. Afghanistan's dependence on the US**

State-building and economics are undoubtedly intertwined. In order to have a strong, stable government it needs the economy to a) sustain itself and b) sustain the support of the people. Afghanistan was reliant on foreign assistance both in terms of building and funding its military but also when it came to the government and development. Between 2001 and 2013 Afghanistan received \$US 52 billion in developmental aid from various donors, the US accounting for \$US 25 billion of that number. Over half of the aid received was spent on military and security, which meant less money for infrastructure and development. Although developmental aid meant growth in the GDP, 10% growth to be exact between 2002 and 2013, it meant that there was a heavy reliance on this aid – on average the developmental aid consisted of 40% of the gross national income between 2002 and 2013.

When the Taliban took over the country in 2021 much of the assets and aid flow was frozen, including the reserve assets belonging to Afghanistan that amounted to \$9.4 billion, it led to a collapse in the economy and an economic crisis as well as a humanitarian crisis ensued. It was obvious that the dependence of the Afghan state on aid money to function was never surpassed. The dependency theory argues that developing states will rely upon developed states and the growth in those nations will be dependent on how much the developing states allow (Bizhan, 2018).

Perhaps it could be argued that Afghanistan is a great example of this dependence. As mentioned earlier, state-building has various factors to it that must be in harmony for there to be progress and development. The military and security forces must be intact and strong, but this was never achieved due to the dependence of Afghanistan upon aid from donors, which was slow to arrive. Then there is the political system and the sustainability of the government and its civic tasks, which were equally affected as it relied on aid to function. Aid helps in the immediate as it prevents humanitarian crises or a collapse of rule of law, but it can also be a means of crippling a state-building nation.

## **5. Conclusion**

To summarize there are several points we ought to go through. The research question that was posed in this paper was the following: Why has the state-building process led by the US in Afghanistan failed? – and there are several reasons that should be mentioned. Firstly, looking at

the political development, the state-building process in Afghanistan led by the US failed as the government never managed to set its grip tightly on the country. Although a constitution was worked out swiftly, the government only had stable authority in the major cities like Kabul. Furthermore the cohesion between various parts of the government was weak. Police and army were in a tussle and mismanagement and lack of funds meant that large parts of the country did not see strong security forces as there was not enough training from the US and its allies and the progression of the army's formation was moving too slowly.

In addition, the government struggled with penetration and participation in the government. Corruption was rampant within the government and it quickly became one for the elites while the locals suffered. This created a disconnect between the authorities and the people. Religion played a huge role in Afghan society and although there were attempts to incorporate it, the government never managed to achieve religious credibility, at least to the level of the Taliban. Lastly the distribution of goods was mismanaged and not only did it create distrust, it created a large gap between the elites and the working class Afghans. With all of those plagues and scourgers it became hard for the nation-building project to take shape from a political standpoint.

The dependency of the Afghan government on aid from the US also crippled the nation-building. Governmental institutions never ceased to rely on outside aid and this halted their ability to expand and develop. Furthermore, the fragility of the state-building project became even more evident as the US troops withdrew, the collapse of the Afghan government was very swift. This reliance not only caused a disconnect between the government and its people, but also halted real growth economically that would sustain itself once the US and its allies withdrew – rather, this dependence is still present today.

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