



GRADUATE SCHOOL
ISTANBUL MEDENIYET UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Factors Affecting the NATO Mission in Afghanistan

Master's Thesis

Sebghatullah Sina

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I declare that this thesis I have prepared is entirely my own work, conducted in accordance with academic and ethical rules, and that I have provided citations for every quotation.

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ÖZET

Afganistan'daki NATO Misyonunu Etkileyen Faktörler

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NATO'nun Afganistan'daki misyonu, yirmi birinci yüzyılın en karmaşık ve tartışmalı uluslararası askeri müdahalelerinden biridir. Bu misyon, terörle mücadele, güvenliğin sağlanması ve Afganistan'ın siyasi ve güvenlik yapılarının yeniden inşası amacıyla başlatılmıştır. Ancak, birçok alanda belirlenen hedeflere ulaşmakta başarısız olmuştur. Bu araştırma, çeşitli faktörleri inceleyerek bu misyonun başarısızlık nedenlerini detaylı bir şekilde analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma üç ayrı bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölüm, Afganistan'ın sosyal ve kültürel yapısının, bu ülkedeki NATO misyonunun başarısızlığı üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. İkinci bölüm, Afganistan'ın komşu ülkelerinin, özellikle Pakistan ve İran'ın, Afganistan'ın siyasi ve güvenlik gelişim. Afganistan'ın sosyal ve kültürel yapısı, kabilevi özellikleri, etnik farklılıkları, gelenekselci yapısı ve dinin merkezi rolüyle birlikte, NATO'nun bu ülkedeki misyonunun başarısızlığını doğrudan etkilemiştir. NATO, bu karmaşık yapılarla etkili bir şekilde etkileşim kurmayı başaramamış ve bu sosyal ve kültürel zorluklarla başa çıkmak için uygun stratejiler geliştirememiştir. Bu durum, Afgan toplumunun ihtiyaçlarını ve dinamiklerini anlamada yetersiz kalan bir yaklaşımın sonucunda ortaya çıkmış ve misyonun etkisiz hale gelmesine neden olmuştur. sonuçlanmasına neden olmuştur. Afganistan, geniş

etnik çeşitliliğe sahip bir ülkedir ve bu ülkede Peştunlar, Tacikler, Hazaralar ve Özbekler gibi farklı etnik gruplar, sosyal ve siyasi gelişmelerde önemli roller oynamaktadır. Bu etnik çeşitlilik, doğrudan ülke içindeki karar alma süreçlerini ve politikaları etkilemekte olup, aynı zamanda bu gruplar arasındaki tarihi gerilimler ve çatışmalar, istikrarlı bir siyasi yapı oluşturma çabalarını da etkileyebilmektedir. NATO, Afganistan'da yeniden yapılanma ve güvenliğin sağlanması sürecine dahil olan bir dış güç olarak, bu alandaki her türlü müdahalenin etnik ve sosyal hassasiyetleri dikkate alması gerektiği gerçeğiyle karşı karşıya kaldı. Afganistan'ın siyasi yapısı, tarih boyunca savaşlar, krizler ve dış müdahalelerin etkisi altında şekillenmiştir. NATO'nun kendi özelliklerine sahip bir demokratik sistem kurma çabaları, devlet kurumlarının zayıflığı, yaygın yolsuzluk ve modern yönetim sistemlerini idare etme konusundaki deneyim eksikliği gibi büyük engellerle karşılaştı.

Bu durum, NATO'nun demokratikleşme hedeflerini gerçekleştirme konusunda zorluklarla karşılaşmasına neden oldu. Büyük mali ve insan kaynağı harcamalarına rağmen, demokratik bir devlet kurma çabaları ciddi zorluklarla karşılaştı. NATO, birçok durumda Afganistan'daki iç sorunların üstesinden gelememiş ve bu başarısızlıklar, Afganistan'daki askeri ve sivil görevlerin yürütülme biçimine yönelik eleştirilerin ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. 2001 yılında Taliban rejiminin devrilmesinin ardından, ABD ve NATO Afganistan'da merkezi ve demokratik bir siyasi sistem kurmaya çalıştılar. Bu merkezi sistem, onların bakış açısına göre ülkede istikrar ve düzen sağlayabilecek ve ekonomik ile sosyal ilerleme için bir temel oluşturabilecek bir yönetim modeli olarak görülüyordu. Ancak bu yaklaşım, tarihsel olarak yerel ve etnik güçlere dayanan Afganistan'ın siyasi kültürüyle çelişiyordu. Afganistan, tarih boyunca genellikle yerel veya etnik gruplar tarafından yönetilen, merkezîyetçi olmayan siyasi yapılar görmüştür. Bu yapılar, yerel ve etnik liderlerin kader belirleme ve kaynak yönetme konusunda önemli bir rol oynadığı sistemlerdi. Özellikle Afganistan'ın

kırsal ve uzak bölgelerinde, bu tür bir yönetim modeli sadece yaygın olmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda halk tarafından da kabul edilmiştir. Buna karşın, NATO ve ABD'nin uygulamaya çalıştığı merkezi sistem, gücün tek bir merkezi hükümette toplanmasını öngörüyordu ve bu durum, birçok yerel ve etnik grup tarafından genellikle reddediliyordu. Bu çelişkiler, NATO ve ABD'nin karşılaştığı büyük zorluklara yol açtı. Özellikle, Afganistan'daki birçok etnik grup, merkezi hükümetin başkenti Kabil'in, kendi ihtiyaçlarını ve önceliklerini göz önünde bulunduramadığını hissediyordu. Sonuç olarak, birçok bölgede merkezi hükümetin etkisi zayıf kaldı. Yolsuzluk, siyasi süreçlerdeki şeffaflık eksiklikleri ve kaynakların adaletsiz dağıtımı bu güvensizliği daha da derinleştirerek, birçok Afgan halkının merkezi hükümete güvenmek yerine yerel ve etnik liderlerine başvurmasına neden oldu. Ayrıca, Afganistan'ın komşu ülkelerinin, özellikle Pakistan ve İran'ın, çıkar çatışmaları bu ülkede istikrarsızlık yaratılmasında ve NATO'nun başarısızlığında önemli bir rol oynamıştır.

Her bir ülke, kendi stratejik ve güvenlik çıkarları doğrultusunda, istikrarlı ve birleşik bir Afganistan'ı desteklemek yerine, NATO'nun misyonuyla çatışma halinde olan grupları ve güçleri desteklemiştir. Bu durum, yalnızca NATO'nun çabalarını engellemekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda Afganistan'da devam eden çatışmaları daha da karmaşık hale getirmiştir. Afganistan'ın komşu ülkelerinin politikaları da NATO'nun misyonu üzerinde etkili olan faktörlerden biriydi. Bu bölümde ele alınan ana meselelerden biri, Pakistan'ın Taliban'ı, Taliban rejiminin devrilmesinin ardından nasıl desteklediğidir. Pakistan, özellikle 2001 sonrasındaki ilk yıllarda, açıkça ve gizliden Taliban'ı destekledi ve bu grubu, Afganistan'daki NATO ve ABD güçlerinin varlığını engellemek ve kendi bölgesel etkisini güçlendirmek için bir araç olarak gördü. Pakistan'ın Taliban'a verdiği destek, yalnızca Afganistan'daki iç isyanları güçlendirmekle kalmadı, aynı zamanda güvenlik ve siyasi durumu daha da karmaşık hale getirdi. Bu destekler, Taliban liderlerine barınak sağlamak, lojistik ve mali destek sunmak ve

isyancıların sınırları geçmesini kolaylaştırmak gibi unsurları içeriyordu. Bu müdahaleler doğrudan şiddetin artmasına ve Afganistan'daki güvensizliğin devam etmesine yol açtı, ayrıca NATO'nun misyonunun başarılı bir şekilde ilerlemesini engelledi. Pakistan'ın Afganistan'daki dış politikasının bir diğer önemli boyutu, ülkenin Afganistan'da uyguladığı "stratejik derinlik" politikasıdır. Bu politika, özellikle 2001 sonrası gelişmeler ve NATO'nun Afganistan'daki varlığıyla daha da önemli hale geldi. Pakistan, Afganistan'daki İslamcı grupları ve Taliban'ı destekleyerek stratejik derinlik sağlamayı hedefledi ve Hindistan ile gerilim durumunda, Afganistan'ı bir arka üs olarak kullanmayı amaçladı. Bu strateji, Pakistan'ın iç güvenliği için ağır maliyetler doğurmuş ve bölgedeki gerilimleri artırmış olmasına rağmen, Pakistan'ın Afganistan'daki politikaları dolaylı olarak savaşı ve istikrarsızlığı derinleştiren bir etki yaratmıştır. İran, NATO'nun Afganistan'daki varlığı süresince, ülkedeki istikrarsızlığı artıran politikalar izledi.

Taliban'ın düşüşünün ardından, İran başlangıçta bu gruptan geçmişteki düşmanlıklar nedeniyle uzak durduysa da, ilerleyen süreçte güvenlik tehditleri ve bölgedeki Amerika ve NATO ile rekabetle karşı karşıya kaldığında, Taliban'ın bazı kanatlarıyla ilişkilerini geliştirdi. Bu destekler, özellikle NATO'ya karşı olan gruplara mali ve askeri yardımlar sağlamakla kendini gösterdi. Öte yandan, İran her zaman, Afganistan'daki kültürel, dini ve ekonomik bağlantılarını kullanarak nüfuzunu genişletmeye çalıştı. Bu nüfuz, özellikle Şii Hazaralar ve diğer dini gruplar arasında yoğunlaşmıştı ve dolaylı olarak Afganistan'ın politikalarının şekillenmesinde etkili oldu. Bu durum, NATO'nun Afgan hükümetiyle olan etkileşimlerini karmaşık hale getirdi. İran'ın Afganistan'daki Amerikan karşıtı politikası, İran'ın Afganistan ile ilişkileri ve NATO ve ABD güçlerinin ülkedeki varlığı konusundaki önemli ve karmaşık bir boyuttur. 11 Eylül 2001 saldırılarının ardından ve Taliban rejiminin Amerikan güçleri tarafından devrilmesinin ardından, İran dolaylı olarak ve çeşitli araçları kullanarak Afganistan

politikalarındaki rolünü daha belirgin hale getirdi. Bu politikalar, büyük ölçüde İran'ın Amerikan karşıtı yaklaşımı ve bölgedeki jeopolitik çıkarlarının etkisi altındaydı. Orta Asya ülkeleri, Özbekistan, Tacikistan ve Kazakistan gibi, Afganistan'daki NATO askeri operasyonlarını lojistik yollar aracılığıyla desteklediler. Bu yollar, "Kuzey Yolu" olarak biliniyor ve Pakistan'ın güvenlik tehditlerinin ardından daha da önemli hale geldi. Ayrıca, bu ülkeler uyuşturucu kaçakçılığıyla mücadelede de işbirliği yaptı. Ancak, iç siyasi endişeler ve Rusya'nın baskıları nedeniyle, NATO ile işbirlikleri sınırlı kaldı. Bu ülkeler, güvenlik ve askeri konularda ilişkilerini genişletmek yerine, transit ve uyuşturucu kaçakçılığı ile mücadele gibi sınırlı işbirliklerine odaklanmayı tercih ettiler. NATO misyonu; hükümetteki yaygın yolsuzluk, askeri eylemlere aşırı odaklanma, kuvvetlerin yönetimi ve koordinasyonundaki yetersizlikler ile stratejik hatalar nedeniyle başarısız oldu.

Özellikle, Afganistan'ın tarih ve kültürünü göz ardı etmek, bağlı bir ordu yaratma girişimleri, ağır sivil kayıplar ve Afganistan'dan ani ve sorumsuz bir şekilde çekilmek, bu misyonun başarısızlığa uğramasında önemli faktörler arasında yer aldı. Tüm bu unsurlar, NATO'nun hedeflerine ulaşmasını engellemiş ve Afganistan'da daha derin bir kriz ortamı yaratmıştır. NATO, Afghanistan'a girdiğinde, askeri ve sivil görevleri çerçevesinde terörizmle mücadele, istikrar ve güvenlik sağlama, ve demokratik ve istikrarlı bir devlet kurma gibi hedefler izliyordu. Ana hedeflerden biri, El Kaide gibi terörist ağlarını yok etmek ve Taliban'ın iktidara geri dönüşünü engellemekti. NATO ayrıca, Afganistan'ın askeri ve hükümet altyapılarını güçlendirerek, bu ülkeyi bölgedeki başarılı bir örnek haline getirmeyi amaçladı. Ancak, bu yüksek hedeflere rağmen, NATO birçok zorlukla karşı karşıya kaldı. NATO üyeleri arasındaki koordinasyon eksikliği: Üye ülkeler arasındaki politikadaki farklılıklar, askeri katılım düzeyi ve kaynakların dağılımı, misyonun etkinliğini azalttı. Bazı ülkeler doğrudan çatışmalara girmemek istiyordu, bazıları ise daha çok belirli bölgelere

odaklandı. Afganistan'daki hükümet yolsuzluğu: Afganistan'daki hükümet kurumlarında, özellikle ordu, polis ve devlet dairelerinde yaygın yolsuzluk, etkili reformların uygulanmasını engelledi. Bu durum, Afgan halkının hükümete olan güvenini de zayıflattı. NATO'nun Afganistan'daki misyonu, terörizmle mücadele, istikrar sağlama ve demokratik bir hükümetin kurulmasına yardımcı olma gibi yüksek hedeflerle başladı, ancak bir dizi içsel, bölgesel faktör ve stratejik hatalar nedeniyle bu hedeflere tam olarak ulaşamadı. NATO'nun en büyük hatalarından biri, dış yardımlara bağımlı bir ordu kurmaktı. Afgan ordusu, finansman, askeri teçhizat ve teknik destek konusunda dış yardımlara yoğun bir şekilde ihtiyaç duyuyordu. Bu yüzden, NATO'nun 2021'deki çekilmesinin ardından, ordu Taliban'a karşı direnç gösteremedi ve hızla çöktü. Bu durum, sadece NATO'nun milyarlarca dolarlık yatırımını boşa çıkarmakla kalmadı, aynı zamanda Afgan hükümetine olan halkın güvenini de yok etti. Bunun yanı sıra, NATO, stratejilerini tasarlarken ve uygularlarken Afganistan'ın tarihini ve kültürünü göz ardı etti.

Afganistan, dış güçlere karşı uzun bir direniş geçmişine sahip ve kabile temelli bir toplumsal yapıya sahip bir ülkedir; bu, NATO'nun uygulamaya çalıştığı Batılı yönetim ve askeri modellerle büyük bir çatışma içindeydi. Bu kültürel ve sosyal özelliklerin göz ardı edilmesi, NATO'nun Afganistan'daki devlet ve toplum inşası programlarının büyük bir dirençle karşılaşmasına neden oldu. Ayrıca, devlet kurumlarındaki yaygın yolsuzluk da büyük bir sorun teşkil etti ve bu durum, Afgan hükümetinin zayıflamasına ve halkın hükümete olan güveninin azalmasına yol açtı. Ayrıca, NATO, Taliban'la mücadele için etkili bir strateji geliştirmekte hata yaptı. NATO'nun geniş kapsamlı askeri operasyonları bazen sivil ölümlerine yol açarak, halkın Taliban'a olan desteğini güçlendirdi. NATO'nun politikaları, halkın Taliban'a desteğini azaltmak yerine artırdı. 2021'de NATO güçlerinin aceleyle ve plansız bir şekilde geri çekilmesi, bu misyonun en büyük stratejik hatalarından biriydi. Bu ani çekilme, Afganistan

hükümetinin çöküşüne ve Taliban'ın hızla iktidara geri dönmesine neden oldu ve NATO'nun 20 yıllık kazanımlarını, özellikle kadın hakları ve altyapı konularındaki ilerlemeleri hızla ortadan kaldırdı. Bu deneyim, benzer görevlerin gelecekte daha dikkatli bir şekilde tasarlanması ve uygulanması gerektiğini, böylece bu tür hataların tekrarından kaçınılması gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etnik Çatışmalar, ABD Politikası, Terörizmle Mücadele, Taliban İsyanı, NATO Stratejisi.

ABSTRACT

Factors Affecting the NATO Mission in Afghanistan

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NATO's mission in Afghanistan is one of the most complex and controversial international military interventions of the 21st century. This mission was launched with the goal of combating terrorism, ensuring security, and rebuilding Afghanistan's political and security structures, but in many cases, it failed to achieve its established objectives. The present research seeks to examine the reasons for the failure of this mission by analyzing various factors. This research is divided into three separate chapters. The first chapter examines the impact of Afghanistan's social and cultural structure on the failure of NATO's mission in the country. The second chapter focuses on the role of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, particularly the interventions of Pakistan and Iran as two key actors in the political and security developments in Afghanistan. The third chapter discusses the strategic mistakes and challenges NATO faced in managing and executing its mission in Afghanistan. The social and cultural structure of Afghanistan, with its tribal characteristics, ethnic differences, traditionalism and the central role of religion, directly affected the failure of the NATO mission in this country. NATO could not properly interact with these complexities and provide appropriate strategies to deal with these social and cultural challenges. These factors caused NATO's efforts to establish stability and an effective central government to fail. Also, the conflicting interests of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, especially Pakistan and Iran, played an important role in creating

instability and failure of NATO in this country. Each of these countries, for their own strategic and security reasons, instead of supporting a stable and united Afghanistan, supported groups and forces that were in conflict with NATO's mission. These rivalries and conflicts of regional interests not only contributed to the failure of NATO, but also fueled the instability of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the NATO mission in Afghanistan is due to widespread corruption in the government, excessive focus on military actions, and the inability to manage and coordinate forces, as well as NATO's strategic mistakes in particular, ignoring the history and culture of Afghanistan, the creation of an affiliated army, heavy civilian casualties, and the sudden and irresponsible departure from Afghanistan were some of the important factors that led to the failure of this mission.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflicts, U.S. Policy, Fighting Terrorism, Taliban Insurgency, NATO Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

After the military invasion of Afghanistan, the United States of America and NATO allies announced three major goals they would pursue in the Afghanistan. The first goal was the complete defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and fighting terrorism. The second was helping to establish stability and the third was supporting the process of democracy in this country. However, after two decades of extensive political and military presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, this country did not achieve stability and democracy, and finally, after two decades, in August 2021, following the withdrawal of the United States and NATO from Afghanistan, this country became the territory of terrorism. One of the reasons for USA failure to realize democracy in Afghanistan was that most of the USA and NATO's investments in this country were in the military field. USA and NATO allies spent billions of dollars on the military budget in Afghanistan¹. Their strategy was to fight against terrorism and equip and support the Afghan army in order to ensure stability and fight against armed rebels. On the other hand, one of the reasons for the weaken of the democratic system in Afghanistan was the political contact of the US with the Taliban. From the political point of view, the United States started indirect negotiations with the Taliban from the beginning of 2010 onwards², and this group, with the agreement of the US, established a political office in Doha, Qatar to continue negotiations with the United States. The negotiation and interaction of the US with the Taliban on the one hand and the reduction of attacks by the US and NATO forces against the Taliban in Afghanistan on the other hand gradually weakened the republic system and nascent democracy in Afghanistan. Finally, as a result, the agreement that U.S. signed with the Taliban on February 29, 2020 accelerated the return of the Taliban regime and the collapse of the previous government of Afghanistan. Culturally, the United States did not have an effective strategy to institutionalize democracy in Afghanistan. For example, foreign institutions and donors generally emphasized women's rights and

¹ Jalil, Sadat Why Did the Biggest US Democracy Project Fail in Afghanistan After 20 Years of War and Millions of Dollars Spent? Bard College, (2023). pp. 18-20.

²Sheikh, M. K; Greenwood, M, T, J, Taliban talks: Past present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Danish Institute for International Studies, (2013). pp. 14.

participation, but there were no specific goals and policies to address important issues such as women's awareness and education throughout Afghanistan, women's access to social support, and the fight against violence and misogynistic tradition. In terms of education, the participation of girls was only limited to Kabul and big cities, but in the rural society of Afghanistan, which constitutes the largest population of the country, girls did not have enough security and facilities for education³. On the other hand, Afghanistan, as a post-war country where 99% of its population is Muslim, does not reflect western models, for example, the USA campaign for gender equality and other modern phenomena that did not compromise with the history and traditions of Afghanistan was a failed approach.

The West's emphasis on imposing its democracy and security models on Afghanistan, a country with special ethnic and religious complexities, actually caused U.S. and NATO to fail in the path of establishing stability and democracy in this country⁴. The United States as a superpower has an extraordinary capacity and ability to defeat regimes militarily and conquer and occupy countries, but not in establishing stability and prosperity. For example, if you check the budget of the Pentagon with the budget of the US State Department in the last twenty years, a simple Pentagon contract is as much as the entire budget of the US State Department and other US development institutions. Therefore, when the United States decides to overthrow a regime, the easiest part of the job is to crush that regime on the battlefield, but when it wants to create political stability, development and democracy in the context of its military presence, it is completely powerless. If we consider this issue in the experience of Afghanistan, after the September 11 attacks, the United States was able to easily defeat the Taliban and conquer Afghanistan. But the main question was how to create political stability after this military victory. We see that USA failed in this task. Mr. Christopher Miller who was the Acting Secretary of the US Defense Ministry for a short time, between 2020 and 2021, In his memories, he says that the Pentagon and the generals are mostly looking for wars with big

³ Sadat, Why Did the Biggest US Democracy Project Fail in Afghanistan After 20 Years of War and Millions of Dollars Spent? pp. 18-20.

budgets, wars where more resources are spent, conventional wars with advanced and expensive weapons⁵. These large budgets give the big arms companies in USA a kind of incentive to enter the USA political structures and use their influence on political institutions, especially inside the American Congress, and gain political support. There are large security companies whose shareholders are members of the USA Congress. Mr. Miller continues that the reason for the failure in Afghanistan was that the Pentagon had such an approach.

While the war in Afghanistan was a small war in every respect, the USA military was not at all skilled in fighting an insurgent group like the Taliban. Of course, it should be said that this is the opinion of the Secretary of Defense of the United States. Therefore, after September 2001, democratization and state building in Afghanistan were overshadowed by U.S. military priorities and became secondary goals. The main goal of the short-term military and tactical goals of USA was to target the members of the Al-Qaeda network and their operational partners, without a sustainable and institutional perspective and without regard to the characteristics of the country that had come under its military control⁶. Therefore, in general, it can be said that the negative effects of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan not only affected the failure of democracy, but also the process of state building, economy and stability in this country. If we look at NATO's presence and military intervention in Afghanistan, we can clearly see that NATO played a key role in the suppression of Al-Qaeda organization and the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. NATO and the domestic anti-terrorism coalition Succeeded in removing the domain of Taliban rule from the geography of Afghanistan in a few weeks. However, the actions of US, NATO and the Afghan governments⁷ after the victory made the grounds for the

⁵ Abdullah Khenjani, "How the Experience of Nation Building Failed in Afghanistan", ASSO, Accessed: 17.01.2024, <https://www.aasoo.org/fa/articles/4271>.

⁶ Khenjani, "How the Experience of Nation Building Failed in Afghanistan", Accessed: 17.01.2024, <https://www.aasoo.org/fa/articles/4271>.

⁷ Some Pashtun leaders and military officers in the previous government of Afghanistan sympathized with the Taliban. For example, Hamid Karzai, the former president of the Republic of Afghanistan, who led Afghanistan for nearly a decade and a half, has always indirectly supported the Taliban for political and ethnic reasons. Karzai was also close to the Taliban in terms of descent and cultural ties; he is from Kandahar province of Afghanistan, which is known as the main base of the Taliban. He released many Taliban prisoners who committed suicide and killing people under the name of peace process as well as Karzai repeatedly criticized the performance of the US Air Force and prevented the night operations of these forces in the Taliban areas on the pretext that civilians were being killed.

emergence and strengthening of the Taliban group as a big umbrella for other terrorist groups to be provided. The Taliban's narrative became stronger with the presence of international forces in Afghanistan to recruit. In order to take revenge for their defeat, the Taliban promoted, propagated and promoted the narrative of Jihad against the infidels⁸, who they believe occupied Afghanistan with their military presence. This narrative has been familiar to many Afghan citizens for many years. For its realization, thousands of people have been killed; millions have been injured and displaced. The Taliban and other terrorist groups knew very well that they could use this narrative to rebuild their powerful presence in various levels of the tribal society in the south and east of Afghanistan.

The southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan are remarkable in that their people tend towards radical and fundamentalist groups due to war, poverty and illiteracy. Tribal culture in southern Afghanistan is very strong and influential and plays an important role in the social, political and economic life of the people of this region. Tribe and religion play an essential role in the lives of people in these regions. In general, tribal culture in southern Afghanistan is very important and plays an important role in forming the social and political identity of people and communities in this region. Therefore, it can be briefly said that part of the complexity of the Afghanistan's crisis is rooted in cultural regression and religious extremism in the southern part of this country. Finally, after a long-term presence in Afghanistan and fighting terrorism and supporting stability and democracy, NATO faced extensive challenges and failures, and with the irresponsible withdrawal from Afghanistan, this country has once again come under the control all their rights and freedoms and are facing serious crises and an uncertain future.

⁸ Extremist groups that act against foreign occupying forces believe that jihad against foreign occupying forces, especially Western military forces in Islamic countries, is obligatory and necessary. They see this event as a struggle to defend Islam and the autonomy of Islamic countries. Based on their interpretation of Islamic principles, these groups believe that any kind of foreign presence and influence in the internal affairs of Islamic countries leads to corruption and sedition and must be fought with the use of jihad and violence to eliminate it. This interpretation of Jihad against foreign occupying forces usually leads to committing terrorist acts, armed attacks, and violence against foreign forces, which provoke tensions and disturbances in the region and are known as terrorist activities.

Research Methodology

In this research, I used a mix of primary sources, including NATO's official reports and Persian journal articles and newspapers data as local sources, and secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles and video documentation. This diversity ensures a balanced view of NATO's mission in Afghanistan. Methodologically, I employed a descriptive approach, using thematic analysis on documentary reports of official institutions data to understand the impact of regional politics. While local data was limited, I addressed this by incorporating perspectives from regional experts in secondary literature. In order to study the research issues and questions and provide evidence, various sources such as books, research articles and video documentaries are used. Also, in this research, in addition to prioritizing academic sources, I have tried to refer to documentary reports and articles prepared by non-governmental organizations and local and international media. In terms of time, this research is related to the period of the presence of the NATO military coalition in Afghanistan. In terms of the topic of this research, it studies the reasons for the challenges and ineffectiveness of the NATO's mission in Afghanistan. This research is presented in three chapters. The beginning part includes introduction, research method and research purpose. The first chapter is allocated to the impact of Afghanistan's social and cultural structure on the ineffectiveness of NATO mission in Afghanistan. Issues such as the challenges of democracy and the approach of United States in supporting democracy in Afghanistan have been discussed. The second chapter is the impact of the conflicting interests of Afghanistan's neighboring countries on the failure of the NATO's mission in Afghanistan is discussed. Specifically, the role of the policies of countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia on the ineffectiveness of the Western military presence in Afghanistan has been investigated. The third chapter is allocated to the NATO's challenges and strategic mistakes in Afghanistan. In general, this chapter is dedicated to explaining NATO's goals, including fighting terrorism and supporting stability and democracy, as well as the challenges that have existed for NATO in line with these goals. Also, the issue of the approach of the United States and NATO allies and the factors affecting the failure of this organization's mission in providing stable security and stability in Afghanistan have been discussed.

Research Purposes

This research seeks to find the factors affecting the NATO mission in Afghanistan. The main question is what effect the role and performance of NATO in Afghanistan had on the security and political situation of this country and to what extent the NATO mission in Afghanistan has been successful in achieving its goals and what factors have contributed to its failure or success. The United States and the NATO military coalition left Afghanistan after two decades of fighting terrorism and establishing a democratic system. US, in coordination with the NATO military coalition, was present in Afghanistan two decades ago in order to defeat terrorism and support the state building process and establish stability, democracy and human rights, but this long presence did not lead to sustainable stability and development in Afghanistan. One of the basic questions is how NATO forces with modern war experience and equipped with military strategic tools and the support of the international community could not completely eradicate terrorism and guarantee stability and democracy in Afghanistan? To better understand this issue, we need to study the factors affecting the NATO mission in Afghanistan. This research has addressed several factors, including the impact of Afghanistan's social and cultural structure on the NATO mission in this country, the role of regional countries and as well as the evaluation of NATO's Objectives, Obstacles, and Shortcomings in Afghanistan.

Literature Review

The NATO mission in Afghanistan, primarily known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), began in 2001 following the U.S.-led invasion aimed at dismantling the Taliban regime. Several studies have investigated the factors that have influenced the ineffectiveness of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Articles like *A contradictory mission? NATO from stabilization to combat in Afghanistan* written by Astri Suhrke, Suhrke criticizes NATO for shifting its mission in Afghanistan from stabilization to combat, which she believes harmed chances for lasting peace. She argues that relying on military force instead of political solutions increased violence, alienated locals, and showed a failure to understand Afghanistan's complex social and political dynamics. *A mission too far? NATO and Afghanistan, 2001–2014* written by Mats Berdal,

the article highlights that NATO's mission, rather than achieving long-term stability, often deepened the conflict and led to widespread disillusionment with the intervention.

The Failures of U.S. policy in Afghanistan and lessons learned written by Schurter, he points out that the focus on military actions, rather than political and diplomatic approaches, not only failed to defeat the Taliban, but led to the spread of violence. Berdal emphasizes that U.S. initial goals of countering terrorism and overthrowing the Taliban expanded over time to include state reconstruction and nation-building, which was beyond the capacity and understanding of foreign forces. Reasons for failure of Afghanistan national security forces written by Bayır, Bayır argues that Afghanistan's security forces were poorly trained and unprepared to handle the challenges they faced, lacking the necessary military skills, leadership, and coordination. article emphasizes that the Taliban's well-coordinated and psychological warfare tactics were highly effective, quickly defeating Afghan forces, who were ill-prepared for such sustained pressure. No easy way out: origins of NATO's difficulties in Afghanistan written by Carati. Carati argues that NATO's mission in Afghanistan lacked clear and consistent objectives, which created confusion and difficulty in defining success. Initially focused on counterterrorism and stabilizing the country, the mission expanded to include nation-building and counterinsurgency, which stretched NATO's resources and capabilities. As well as the book Redefining NATO's Role: 9/11 to Afghanistan written by Andrew R. Hoehn and Sarah Harting are the same topics somehow discussed the NATO mission in Afghanistan. The article explains that NATO's military forces were not enough to deal with the political, cultural, and social problems in Afghanistan.

NATO struggled because it didn't fully combine military and civilian efforts and lacked clear long-term goals. It also shows how NATO's role changed after 9/11, shifting from a defensive group in Europe to an active participant in global counterterrorism, with a focus on Afghanistan. Most of these researches have pointed to structural and organizational challenges of NATO. According to them, NATO was facing the problem of coordination among the member countries as well as limited resources. This has caused the operations to be carried out uncoordinated and with logistical limitations. In general, the findings of this research show that factors such as lack of coordination with Afghanistan's social

structures, organizational limitations, and internal problems of Afghan institutions have been the most important reasons for the failure of the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

In this research, I have focused on examining factors such as the influence of regional countries' policies on NATO's mission in Afghanistan, as well as the shortcomings of U.S. policy and NATO's strategic approach within the country. This research includes a review of official NATO reports, video documentation on NATO's operations in Afghanistan, and a variety of other articles. Additionally, it references books like *Afghanistan's Politics: A Narrative from Within* by Rangin Dadfar Spanta, which provides a detailed account of Afghanistan's political developments over the last two decades, and *Afghanistan's Foreign Policy* by Faramarz Tamana, which explores the structure, priorities, and principles of Afghanistan's foreign relations. In addition to consulting a range of official NATO sources, this research draws from articles such as *US Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan* by Thomas; *No Easy Way Out: Origins of NATO's Difficulties in Afghanistan* by Carati; *Wartime Logistics in Afghanistan and Beyond: Handling Wicked Problems and Complex Adaptive Systems* by Clement; *Realism in Action: Obama's Foreign Policy in Afghanistan* by Hoffman; *The Failures of US Policy in Afghanistan and the Lessons Learned* by Schurter; *Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan* by Foust; *Iran's Policy on Afghanistan: The Evolution of Strategic Pragmatism* by Keopke; *Understanding Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations in a Multilateral Context* by Adem Çakır; *Pakistan's Strategic Depth Policy in Afghanistan: Origin, Evolution, and Practical Manifestations* by Rahman; *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era* by Grare; *Democratic Aspirations and Destabilizing Outcomes in Afghanistan* by Norah Niland; *The Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan* by Murid Partaw in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*; *Overcoming the Obstacles to Establishing a Democratic State in Afghanistan* by Dennis O. Young; *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country* by James D. Fearon in *Journal of Economic Growth*; and *Why Did the Biggest US Democracy Project Fail in Afghanistan After 20 Years of War and Millions of Dollars Spent?* by Jalil Sadat.

CHAPTER I

1. The Impact of Afghanistan's Social and Cultural Structure on the Ineffectiveness of NATO Mission in The Country

Because of its strategic location, rich history, and unique social and cultural makeup, Afghanistan has consistently drawn the attention of global powers. Its ethnic diversity, tribal systems, and the strong influence of religion and tradition have posed significant challenges to foreign military and political efforts. NATO's mission in Afghanistan, which began after the events of September 11, 2001, faced not only a military war, but also a series of social and cultural obstacles that affected the effectiveness of its operations and policies. The social and cultural structure of Afghanistan, with features such as ethnic diversity, concentration of power in the hands of limited groups, and the deep influence of traditions and religious beliefs, has always created serious challenges for foreign interventions. The NATO mission in Afghanistan was also affected by this structure, especially in the face of ethnic tensions that have always been an obstacle to the formation of an inclusive political system. The concentration of power in Kabul and ignoring the needs and demands of different regions, along with the attempt to implement a model of democracy that was not compatible with the cultural and social context of Afghanistan, are among the key factors in the failure of the NATO mission. This chapter examines the political and cultural characteristics of Afghanistan and the failed experience of democracy in the country.

1.1. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country with a very diverse social and cultural structure. Due to its geographical location, this country has been called the confluence point of civilizations in the region. Afghanistan's location has made it strategically significant for trade and political influence, especially because it connects multiple regions and is near important Asian powers. Afghanistan's diverse landscape and strategic location have significantly influenced its history, culture, and political dynamics, making it a focal point in regional

and international affairs.⁹. During its historical developments, this country has always been subject to invasions and campaigns, migrations and displacements, and the rise and fall of many cultures and empires, and the result of these developments has left a wide ethnic and cultural diversity for Afghanistan. Experts in the sociology of Afghanistan have described this country as a mosaic society with a heterogeneous social and cultural structure. The cultural diversity and ethnic diversity of Afghanistan is such that this country is called "Museum of Nations" or "Treasure of Nations"¹⁰. This country is the fourth¹¹ country in Asia in terms of diversity and ethnic heterogeneity and it ranks 37th in the world¹². In general, it can be said that more than 50 ethnic groups with different cultures and languages live in this country. Several small ethnic groups in Afghanistan faced displacement and even cultural decline due to prolonged conflicts or they do not have a significant presence in the Afghan society. Specifically, there are four major ethnic groups such as Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara and Uzbek in Afghanistan, which play an essential role in the political structure and power relations¹³.

Afghanistan is a land of minorities and no ethnic group makes up the majority of the country's population. The majority of Afghan people speak Persian¹⁴ and other languages such as Pashto, Uzbeki and Turkmeni are also used among ethnic groups. The majority of Afghan people are Muslim and Hanafi, 15 to 20 percent of its citizens, who belong to the Hazara ethnic group, are Shia¹⁵. On the one hand, ethnic and cultural diversity is the reason for the uniqueness and beauty of this country, but on the other hand, ethnic divisions and ethnicization of politics have been one of the main factors of the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan. The political history of this country at least in the last half century shows

⁹ Sultan Ahmad Arya, "The role of Afghanistan's geography in development" Khurasan Zamin, (2018), Accessed: 05.12.2023, <https://www.khorasanzameen.net/php/read.php?id=4122>.

¹⁰ Ali Najafi, "Ethnic Cultural And Linguistic Diversity In Afghanistan", *The Journal of Religious-Epistemological Trends in the International Arena*, Vol. 8 (3), (2011) p. 40-42.

¹¹ James D, Fearon, "Ethnic and cultural diversity by country" *Journal of economic growth*, 8, (2003), p. 217

¹² Najafi, "Ethnic Cultural And Linguistic Diversity In Afghanistan", p. 59.

¹³ Mohammad Shahzad, "Ethnic Conflict in South Asia: A Case Study of Afghanistan", *UGC Care Journal*, Vol-40-Issue (56), (2020), p. 519.

¹⁴ Najafi, "Ethnic Cultural And Linguistic Diversity In Afghanistan" p. 59

¹⁵ Najafi, "Ethnic Cultural And Linguistic Diversity In Afghanistan", p. 40-42.

that ethnic heterogeneity and the policy of seeking superiority and monopoly of power by one ethnic group and the exclusion of other ethnic groups from the power structure have created the grounds for crisis, war and foreign intervention. After 2001 and the American invasion of Afghanistan, a new government based on democracy and elections was formed, although political and cultural diversity and pluralism were formally recognized in the new constitution, the distribution of power and national wealth has always been a deep-rooted conflict in this country¹⁶.

1.2. Ethnicity and the Construction of Political System in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has experienced various political systems over the past century. From monarchical governments and the communist regime to the Islamic Republic and the Taliban Emirate, the formation of these systems has been based on rebellion and revolution, coups d'état, elections, and, in some cases, direct foreign intervention.¹⁷ The common feature of the political systems in Afghanistan has been the ethnic monopoly of power by a specific ethnic group (Pashtun) and the violent exercise of power against other ethnic groups. In other words, it can be said that the political history of Afghanistan in recent decades has been the history of ethnic conflicts over power¹⁸. Here, without giving a detailed overview of the political developments in Afghanistan, I will briefly mention the new political process in Afghanistan that took place after the Bonn Conference in December 2001. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan practically lacked a comprehensive and national government and ethnic groups each dominated their own regions. In December of 2001, the Bonn Conference was held with the participation of various Afghan political currents with the support of the international

¹⁶ Hamza Wayezi, "Afghanistan's Crisis: Ethnic Dynamics, Challenges, and Underlying Causes", *Simorgh Cultural Institute*, No (18), (1999), p. 41-50.

¹⁷ Afghanistan has experienced different types of political systems throughout its history. Some of these systems include monarchy, republic, Islamic republic, and systems with religious identity and content. Afghanistan has gone through a long period of monarchies, including empires such as the Durrani Empire, the Ghurid dynasty, the Mughal Empire, and the Modern Era Empire. Also, the republican system was established in Afghanistan in the 1970s, followed by the Islamic Republic. In the same way, Afghanistan has experienced different Islamic systems in recent decades, including the Islamic monarchy, the Islamic Republic, and the Islamic Emirate. Each of these systems has had its own characteristics, structures, and mechanisms, playing significant roles in Afghanistan's social and political development throughout history.

¹⁸ Kiyomars Yazdanpanah, "The Role of Ethnic Groups in Shaping Afghanistan's Political Structure and Governance Since 2001" *Politics Journal*, 51, (1), (2021) p. 317.

community, which led to the "Bonn Agreement". In this agreement, the basis for the formation of the political system, the inclusive participation of ethnic groups in power and other rights and freedoms were specified and approved. The political solution and outcome of the Bonn conference was that the international community and the political forces of Afghanistan accepted the fact that Afghanistan is a country with ethnic and cultural diversity and the only way to solve the power crisis in this country is to recognize political and cultural pluralism and inclusive participation of ethnic groups in the political structure of Afghanistan. Although this political agreement had harmful consequences for Afghanistan and increased ethnic tensions and national mistrust but at least this agreement created a relative balance of power between the four major ethnic groups, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazara and Uzbeks. Thus, in the last two decades, the ethnic groups had a relative participation in the political system, the main institutions of power and national macro-decisions.

1.3. Ethnic Conflicts over Political Power in Afghanistan (2001-2021)

The complexity of Afghanistan's crisis, in addition to many other factors, is rooted in the deep ethnic conflict. Ethnicity has been the most influential political element in the entire history of this country. Ethnic elites play an essential role in the ethnic power conflict, they have always tried to advance their interests in order to gain power and maintain it by using ethnic identity and slogans. Afghanistan's experience of the past four decades clearly shows that the path to political power passes through ethnicity, and ethnicity is also the axis and foundation of politics in Afghanistan¹⁹. Ethnic tensions are one of the most important challenges in Afghanistan, which has caused political and social instability. The importance of this issue is due to the fact that ethnic tensions and differences between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns in Afghanistan have hindered political development and stability in this country, and on the other hand, cultural diversity in the multi-ethnic society of Afghanistan has complicated the process of realizing a united democratic system²⁰. The

¹⁹Sakhidad Hatif, "Democracy in the service of ethnic conflicts", *Journal of Etilaat Roz*, (2019) Accessed: 12.12.2023, <https://www.etilaa.roz.com/89100/democracy-at-service-of-ethnic-conflict/>.

²⁰ O Dennis & Colonel Young, "Overcoming the obstacles to establishing a democratic state in Afghanistan, Strategic Studies Institute", *US Army War College*, (2007), p. 10

ethnic policy of the government and the difference of ethnic elites over the division of power have had a wide impact on the public relations of the society and have increased social tension and violence among the masses of people. From the behavior of the rulers to the political culture in the society, everything has been a reflection of the ethnic power conflict in the country.

In the last four decades, the distribution of government positions was done on the basis of ethnicity instead of citizen-centered, and institutions and structures were understood and measured based on ethnic understanding and beliefs. Although in the last two decades, the presence of the international community in Afghanistan put a lot of pressure on the political parties of this country to give in to the democratic processes and adhere to the principle of electability of power and the system based on representation according to the new constitution, but the ethnic conflict of power has continued at different levels of the Afghan government. One of the factors that prolonged NATO's war in Afghanistan was the presence of ethnic tendencies in the leadership of the Afghan government. Hamid Karzai, ex-president of Afghanistan, who had ethnic relations with the Taliban and had sympathy with them. Karzai called the Taliban group his brothers many times²¹. He criticized US and NATO forces for the airstrikes on the rural areas where the Taliban were based; He has repeatedly expressed his displeasure with the airstrikes of international forces in the Taliban areas under the name of killing civilians²². Other Pashtun politicians as well as some of the Afghan security officials did not have the will to fight against Taliban due to their ethnic and linguistic ties with this militant group. During the past two decades, the practice of democracy and the presence of the international community could not make the Afghan society democratic and citizen-oriented and provide the stage of transition from ethnicity to becoming a nation. Because the platform was not favorable for such a thing, because illiberal rulers ruled in a system that was based on democracy.

²¹ Hamid Karzai's interview on BBC, Accessed: 13.12.2023, https://youtu.be/D7yp7vRB_xHg?si=HawARUx_0Hy4H9vs.

²² PBS, "American Public Broadcast Service" Accessed: 13.12.2023, https://youtu.be/6wkS9_Rj8eF0?Si=3_YOaFUqnqQIQcRC.

Tribalists and ethnocentric leaders who sought power attacked the sanctity of politics and democracy, gambled liberal values on the ethnic playground and fueled ethnic tensions as much as they could, the tribal leaders widened the ethnic divides, covered up their political and managerial failures with the flare-up of ethnic conflicts, talked about the republic but played with the ethnic card²³. One of the examples that show the ethnic tension in Afghanistan is the presidential election in 2014. The people of Afghanistan have gone to the polls 3 times in the last two decades, but the elections have been heavily influenced by ethnic tendencies. Election statistics and figures show that the candidates lacked votes and national support and only had votes in their ethnic areas. For example, in the elections of 2014, Hamid Karzai, the ex-president Ashraf Ghani from Pashtun ethnic got the most votes of Pashtun people while Abdullah had the most votes of Tajik²⁴. The election crisis of 2014, with the presidential election being extended to the second round and then not accepting the results of the election by Abdullah Abdullah's supporters, there was a possibility of a civil war between the factions of Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah, and this issue led to the formation of the national unity government with the mediation of UN and United States²⁵.

1.4. National Distrust

The phenomenon of national distrust and ethnic in Afghanistan has arisen under the influence of the ethnic and tribal structure of the Afghan society. On the other hand, the lack of national trust can be seen as a result of the political practice of Afghan elites in this country. The historical conflict of power and the unilateral and coercive rule of an ethnic group and the policy of exclusion and isolation of other ethnic groups using violence have created an environment where ethnic relations are severely in a crisis of trust. The members of each ethnic group feel that they have been betrayed by other ethnic

²³Conrad Sheeter, "Ethnicity and the Political Reconstruction of Afghanistan", *Journal of Etilaat Roz*, Accessed: 05.04.2024, [https:// www. etilaatroz.com /10 5511/ethnicity-and-political-recon stru ct i on-afg ha nistan/](https://www.etilaatroz.com/105511/ethnicity-and-political-reconstruction-afghanistan/).

²⁴ Yazdanpanah, "The Role of Ethnic Groups in Shaping Afghanistan's Political Structure and Governance Since 2001", p. 317-318.

²⁵ Noah Coburn, "Afghanistan: The 2014 vote and the troubled future of elections", *The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House*, (2015) p. 2-3.

groups, and therefore ethnic groups resort to ethnic positions and slogans²⁶. Historically, the promotion and consolidation of the idea of ethnocentrism and monopoly of power by one nation in the political background of Afghanistan prevented the participation of other ethnic groups in the power structure²⁷. The consolidation of ethnic sovereignty gradually turned into fascism among the ruling class of "Pashtun elites". This process led to oppression and severe isolation of ethnic groups living in Afghanistan such as Tajik, Uzbek and especially Hazara and Turkmen. Therefore, the results of ethnic totalitarianism and political tyranny caused by the rule of monopolistic regimes in the heterogeneous society of Afghanistan have caused ethnic tensions and mistrust among the ethnic groups living in Afghanistan²⁸. In the contemporary history of Afghanistan, ethnic exclusivity has always been dominant and has had all the political, economic and cultural privileges. Afghanistan has a multi-ethnic society in which national distrust has reached their peak in the current situation. On the other hand, several decades of war in Afghanistan have also caused conflict and suspicion among various ethnic groups²⁹. This is why the Afghan government lacked the necessary national capacity and legitimacy despite the extensive support of the United States and the international community in the past two decades. Historically people distrust in government and its rulers has been one of the main reasons for the lack of national unity and weakening the shaky foundations of the government in Afghanistan³⁰. Ethnic sensitivities have made civil relations vulnerable in Afghanistan in recent years. Appealing to ethnic rituals, the theory of more ethnic rights, and the increase of false ethnic expectations in the society, has caused the objective realities of social inequalities and structural and political problems to be hidden from the eyes. Ethnic

²⁶ Nabi Sahak, "Violence in Afghanistan has its Roots in ethnic nationalism". *Journal of Etilaat Roz*, (2015), Accessed: 17.12.2023, <https://www.etilaatroz.com/27316/%D8%AE%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%B1-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA%>.

²⁷ Mujib Rahman Rahimi, "Critique of The Political System in Afghanistan; The Impact of Constitutional Choice on Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Management in Divided Societies", *Azam Publications*, 1, (340), (2020), p. 117-118.

²⁸ Rahimi, "Critique of The Political System in Afghanistan; The Impact of Constitutional Choice on Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Management in Divided Societies", p. 90-91

²⁹ Wayeezi, "Afghanistan's Crisis: Ethnic Dynamics, Challenges, and Underlying Causes, *Simorgh Cultural Institute*, (1999), Accessed: 19.12.2023, <https://ensani.ir/fa/article/270133/%D8%A8%D8%A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86>.

³⁰ Qiamuddin Amiry, "Corruption and social trust in Afghanistan", *The Fletcher School-Al Nakhlah-Tufts University*. (2010), p. 11

politics and the politicization of ethnic identities have narrowed the space for civil interactions and the formation of nationalist perspectives. Afghanistan's elites and political leaders have paid less attention to the social contexts of these violent threats.

There is still no formal plan to manage these conflicts and social divisions, while the rise of ethnic sentiments among social groups is a serious threat to stability. This hypothesis that Afghanistan has passed the stage of ethnicism due to bitter historical experiences and no one is willing to pursue ethnic policies is an unrealistic narrative³¹. This country is severely affected by the destructive effects of ethnic suspicions and distrust among ethnic groups. Therefore, it can be said in general that the power relations in Afghanistan is an anarchic scene where each ethnic group tries to acquire more rights and privileges, and this process has limited the basis for the formation of national state and the realization of citizenship rights.

1.5. Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan

1.4.1. Obstacles and Challenges of Democracy in Afghanistan

As mentioned before, Afghanistan is a traditional society with a diverse ethnic and cultural structure. Deep ethnic divisions and social conflicts, in addition to various political and economic factors, have complicated the transition to democracy in Afghanistan. On the other hand, factors such as poverty, the low levels of awareness and literacy of the people, the influence of extremist ideas and religious tendencies in the Afghan society have also made it difficult to realize democracy. Despite these the discourse of democracy has been the dominant discourse in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001. After September 11, 2001, all the efforts of international organizations and active social forces in Afghanistan have been aimed at establishing democracy. Despite these efforts, the discourse of democracy has faced many challenges and obstacles³². After the collapse of

³¹Amin Kawa, "Ethnic tensions are a persistent source of conflict in Afghanistan" *Journal of Hasht E Sub*, Accessed: 22.12.2023, <https://8am.media/fa/nationality-the-perpetual-power-struggle-in-afghanistan/>.

³² Mohammad Reza Tajik & Ali Reza Sharifi, "Barriers to The Democracy Discourse in Afghanistan", *Magiran Academic Platform*, No (46), (2018), p. 36.

the Taliban regime in 2001 and the presence of the international community and the United States in Afghanistan, a new wave of democracy was formed in this country. Afghanistan with the support of the United States and the international community began a process that included the Establishment of republic system, parliament, elections and other democratic institutions. In 2002, the constitution was formed in Afghanistan in which the fundamental rights of residents, political and civil liberties and many other democratic values were guaranteed³³. Everyone was waiting for the increasing strengthening of democracy and its institutionalization in Afghanistan and thought that this country would achieve political and economic development in the context of new developments. After the democratic system became a common political ideal among the intellectuals and part of the political elite, its initial steps were slowly taken in Afghanistan.

With the fall of the dark era of the Taliban regime and the holding of the Bonn Conference, a huge change took place in the social-political system of Afghanistan. The new constitution last formalized in 2004 provided suitable grounds for inclusive participation and political competition, and in the light of it, many mass media grew in the fields of press, radio and television, and many groups and parties were formed. Also, the parliament, which is very important in democratic systems as its beating heart and is considered one of its components, was considered the highest legislative authority and the manifestation of the people's will in the new system of Afghanistan³⁴. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for not establishing a democratic order in Afghanistan is the low level of social awareness, and this issue is considered one of the most important challenges in the process of democratization in this country in the past 20 years. Democracy was a good choice in a newly emerging society like Afghanistan; Global support for this political method was also a powerful guarantee for this strategy; but the implementation of this system required a foundation, which unfortunately was not done as it should be.

³³ Hafiza Khurami & Shafiqa Safi, "Investigating the causes of the downfall of democracy in Afghanistan from 2001 up to 2021". *Technition Business and Management*, (2023), p. 25-26

³⁴ Tajik, "Barriers to The Democracy Discourse in Afghanistan", p. 36-38.

Four decades of war in Afghanistan had left Afghan citizens illiterate, citizens who had very little political awareness; the war and violence negatively affected the morale of the people. The poor rural people and the religious Parts of the society were pessimistic about the freedoms and democratic developments, even though they considered this process to be contrary to their religious values and beliefs. Democracy was like a project exported by western countries to Afghanistan, which was applied to the society from the state level, the government represented the management of the democracy project in a form, but the society still lacks democratic institutions. The main problem was that there was no culture building for democracy in Afghanistan to provide a social platform for it and people to welcome new developments through education and awareness. For religious people who mostly adhere to tribal and religious customs and live in villages and megacities and made the large part of the population of Afghanistan, it is a principle to follow Islamic orders that consider the ruler as the representative of Allah. This class considers electoral contests unacceptable and western-style freedom of women as haram. According to these people, democracy is a trick of the West and a tool of blasphemy. As the majority of the Afghan society is rural and traditional people, in fact, the number of people who do not accept democracy is innumerable. In the same way that the new generation of Afghanistan has accepted democracy in the cities after 2001, constructive and social programs should have been undertaken for the awareness of the traditional people. When this class achieves prosperity and awareness and sees and understands the true and positive face of democracy; they will not fight against democracy³⁵.

1.5.2. Centralization of Power

The ultimate focus of democracy is defeating the monopoly of power; because monopolization leads to the death of democracy. From 2004 onwards In Afghanistan, the monopoly of power in the hands of leaders who did not believe in democracy and democratic processes, reduced the possibility of monitoring the performance of government institutions to a minimum and undermined the independence of institutions.

³⁵ Nimrukh, "Conflict Between religion and Democracy; Is Secularism Way to Save Afghanistan", Accessed 04.01.2024, <https://nimrokhmedia.Com/2023/06/24/religion-and-democracy/>.

According to the book "How Democracies Die": Democracies may not die in the hands of army generals, but in the hands of elected leaders; Leaders like presidents and prime ministers who destroy the process that brought them to power. Some of these leaders destroy democracy very quickly, as Hitler did in Germany. Leaders who do not believe in democracy. Leaders who do not believe in democracy, as the famous saying goes, democracy without democrats leads to vulgarity. Therefore, in addition to various other factors, centralization and monopoly of power in Afghanistan was one of the important factors that on the one hand caused ineffectiveness in governance and on the other hand provided the basis for the collapse of the republican system and the failure of democracy³⁶. So, one of the main challenges that plagued democracy in Afghanistan in the past twenty years was the centralization of power and the lack of inclusive political participation. The concentration of power in countries with ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity leads to the intensification of ethnic tensions and political instability. Although the Afghan constitution recognized the ethnic diversity and political participation of different social and ethnic groups, in practice, what we have witnessed in the past twenty years has been the intense centralization of power by the rulers of Afghanistan. This is despite the fact that in a democratic system, as much as power is decentralized and citizens have the possibility to participate in major decisions, democracy is effectively realized and the government enjoys more legitimacy. On the other hand, citizens' interest in participating in elections is increasing, something that has been weak in Afghanistan in the past two decades.

As well as in addition to security problems, one of the reasons for the lack of high participation of citizens in in addition to security problems, one of the reasons for the lack of high participation of citizens in the elections was the widespread fraud in the election process.³⁷ We have witnessed the same situation in Afghanistan in the past few years. As during Ashraf Ghani's rule, especially the second period of his rule, the monopoly of

³⁶ Ramazan Ahmadi & Chman Ali Hikmat, "The fall of the Republic Government in Afghanistan and the Current Taliban Rule: A Survey of Public Attitudes. Research in Social Sciences and Technology", *Ressat*, 8(4), (2023), p. 173-177.

³⁷ Ahmad Murid Partaw, "The Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, (2023), p. 12-13.

power in the hands of a few people became the most important rule of the political game. This caused the abuse of power, called into question inclusive participation, and most importantly, undermined the principle of rule of law and equality before the law. The power was monopolized in the hands of the president, his advisor to the Security Council and his political advisor. In fact, they were the ones who decided who would come to parliament, who would become a minister, and who would work as a judge. Without their will, no person could come to power. It was natural that this situation weakened and shook the foundations of the political system day by day, until it collapsed. This can be seen even in the discussion of war and peace in Afghanistan; that is the monopoly of power had also robbed the opportunities of peace and war. There was no political will for peace and war³⁸

1.5.3. Corruption

One of the important internal factors of the failure of democracy in Afghanistan was Corruption. Widespread political corruption in Afghanistan had questioned the credibility and transparency of the government system and severely weakened the role of the people in political decision-making, which is a requirement of democracy. According to the estimates of international institutions, including the special inspector general for Afghanistan's reconstruction (SIGAR), In the past twenty years Afghanistan has been in the category of the most corrupt countries in the world³⁹. Corruption and extreme monopoly of political power had caused distrust and tension among ethnic groups on the one hand and on the other hand had caused the political system to suffer a crisis of legitimacy.

Afghan government officials at various levels were accused of widespread corruption and were running away from accountability and justice. One of the prominent manifestations of corruption in Afghanistan was the widespread fraud in the country's elections, which marginalized the people's vote and will. In fact, corruption had disintegrated the system

³⁸ Zahid, Mustafa, Centralization of Power, The Primitive Dream of Politics in Afghanistan, *Sub Kabul Journal*, (2020), Accessed: 12.06.2024, <https://subhekabul.com/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A4/pr es g hani-mof-afghani st a n/>.

³⁹ John F Sopko, “what we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction”, *SIGAR Official Website*, (2023). Accessed: 20.06.2024, <https://www.sigar.mil>.

like a virus from within, and the international community and the leadership of the system in Afghanistan did not have a codified and effective policy to fight corruption. Corruption was a plague that penetrated step by step from the beginning to the end of this system and fueled the decay of the political order and deprived it of any will to reform and stability. Widespread corruption in the country had caused the institutions to fail in their work and provide services to the people⁴⁰. The fact is that in the last two decades, Afghanistan was in the grip of a corrupt mafia system; the mafia that wasted a great historical opportunity and instead of managing wealth and extensive international support in the interests of Afghan citizens, put it into the pockets of government officials and foreign contractors⁴¹. As the 2020 report of the Transparency International organization about the ranking of countries in terms of corruption, among the 180 countries examined, Afghanistan ranked 165. Systematic and increasing corruption had turned the Afghan political system into a "power that relies on corruption" (Kleptocracy). A large number of official authorities, members of parliament and local figures in Afghanistan were involved in corruption in escaped justice⁴². The windfalls were caused by the corruption that the looters of Afghanistan built for themselves, luxurious palaces inside Afghanistan and outside Afghanistan from Dubai to Washington, from London to Istanbul and other cities of the world, their business expanded and their travels and spending circles prospered day by day. In addition, contractors from the US government were also part of the factors of corruption in Afghanistan. They also looted millions of dollars in the name of rebuilding Afghanistan. In this way, the terrible looting and the increasing corruption of the past two decades, inflicted heavy blows on the body of the political order and society of Afghanistan.

The credibility of democracy and political institutions of the country gradually disappeared. The distance between the people and the regime increased day by day, the fighting spirit of the security forces was lost and the ground for recruitment was provided for the anti-regime groups. As a result, these cases contributed to the sudden deterioration

⁴⁰ Partaw, "The Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan", p. 16-17.

⁴¹ Rangin Dadfar Spanta, "*Afghanistan's Politics: A Narrative from Within*", Azam Publication, 1, (11), (2018), p. 311.

⁴² Partaw, "The Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan", p. 16

of the country's political system. If we look at the history of Europe, post-war Europe was able to revive itself by joining the Marshall Plan and set the wheels of its economy even better than the first day was circulated. This process only took 5 years and cost 13 billion dollars⁴³. United States has spent far more than the Marshall Plan budget in reconstruction of Afghanistan⁴⁴. But Afghanistan could not stand on its own feet with a period of nearly 20 years and spending an estimated 2.3 billion dollars⁴⁵; Because Afghanistan was drowned in administrative corruption. According to the reports of the International Transparency Organization, Afghans paid bribes equal to twice the domestic revenue of their country and a quarter of the aid pledged by the international community at the Tokyo meeting. Considering that half of the population of Afghanistan has to pay bribes to receive public services in government institutions, it can be said that paying bribes willingly or unwillingly has become a custom in Afghanistan. Administrative corruption had created a system where employees from the lowest offices to the highest government bodies were hired based on family ties or bribery, and the lack of the right person in the right place and the lack of meritocracy destroyed the roots of government and democracy⁴⁶.

1.5.4. Ignoring the Role of Ethnic Groups in the Stability of Afghanistan

One of the factors of ineffectiveness of NATO's mission in Afghanistan has been investing in a centralized government consisting of pro-Western groups and neglecting the comprehensive participation of ethnic groups in the direction of Afghanistan's stability. In the past twenty years, the United States and its supported governments in Afghanistan have failed to implement a comprehensive and effective policy in order to consolidate a

⁴³ WORLD BANK, "Lessons from The Marshall Plan" Accessed: 22.10.2024, <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/27506>.

⁴⁴ John F Sopko, "SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program and Lessons from the Long War", SIGAR Official Reports. Accessed: 22.06.2024, <https://www.sigar.mil/allreports/>.

⁴⁵ John F. Sopko. What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction. SIGAR Reports, (2023), p. 103.

⁴⁶ Mohammad Salem Safari, "How Corruption Destroyed the Republican System from The Within", *Etilaat Roz Journal*, Access: 09.01.2024, <https://www.etil.aatroz.com/152392/%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%8>.

democratic and legitimate system⁴⁷. These governments have never been able to institutionalize order and have never succeeded in shaping the relations between people and the nature of social relations based on the values and standards that were desirable in their opinion. There may be many reasons for the failure of democracy and NATO's mission in Afghanistan, but one of the factors is undoubtedly the lack of role of the ethnic groups in the consolidation of stability and democratic system⁴⁸. There is wide ethnic and cultural diversity in Afghanistan, therefore, any government and foreign power that does not pay attention to Afghanistan's ethnic considerations and social realities, the process of consolidating stability and establishing national sovereignty will be very difficult and even impossible. One of the important political realities of Afghanistan is ethnic diversity and power sharing, something that has always been neglected by the US-backed elites in Afghanistan. Therefore, US support for the centralized government of Afghanistan, ignoring the role of ethnic groups and the monopoly of power by the ruling group in Kabul are the factors that gradually made the Afghan government face crisis of legitimacy and failed democracy in Afghanistan⁴⁹.

One of the actions that the United States and NATO took in order to support the central government and reconstruction of Afghan National Army was to disarm anti-Taliban military groups called National Resistance Front (Northern Alliance). These forces, which had the experience of fighting against terrorism and the Taliban, a less part of them were integrated into the Afghan National Army, and most of its commanders became unemployed. On the one hand, this process led to the weakening of ethnic groups and on the other hand, it caused the reduction of the power and effectiveness of the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan. As well as In order to stabilize the sovereignty of the central government, US launched extensive propaganda against Afghan Mujahidin leaders and used the term warlord⁵⁰ to describe the jihadi leaders and commanders, most of who

⁴⁷ Norah Niland, "Democratic aspirations and destabilizing outcomes in Afghanistan" *Watson Institute for International Studies Research Paper*, (2014), p. 2-6.

⁴⁸ Hussain Daheshiar, "Afghanistan; Ethnic Diversity and Divisible Sovereignty", *Quarterly of Political Strategic Studies*, 4, (3), (2012), p. 77.

⁴⁹ Daheshiar, "Afghanistan; Ethnic Diversity and Divisible Sovereignty", pp. 78.

⁵⁰ Warlords are those who seek to gain their personal interests through war and using violence. This term has been used in Afghanistan by analysts and the press of western countries to discredit some political factions in Afghanistan. Warlord is specifically used in Afghanistan for jihadi leaders and former military

belonged to the Northern Alliance, and a psychological war began against these forces. The policy of discrediting traditional leaders was followed in order to consolidate the power of the central government and on the other hand to weaken the power of political leaders who were the opposition of the president supported by the United States and NATO⁵¹. U.S. took several important actions in this direction, firstly, it spread negative propaganda against them, and at the same time, through human rights institutions, it introduced Afghan jihadi leaders and commanders as violators of human rights. During Ashraf Ghani's rule, a large number of generals and military commanders belonging to the Northern Alliance, who had effective experience in fighting the Taliban, were dismissed or retired due to political reasons. The National Resistance Front or the Northern Alliance in 2001 was the largest political and military current in Afghanistan, consisting of military leaders and commanders from various ethnic groups, mostly non-Pashtun. The United States and NATO allies have carried out extensive political and diplomatic measures in order to disarm the Northern Alliance and influential political and military groups in Afghanistan, and the results of these efforts have led to the agreement of all armed groups to disarm and form a national army.

However, based on the US policy and the government supported by it in Afghanistan, these commanders and forces, who were from different ethnic groups and had experience of war and resistance against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, were gradually isolated and marginalized. Some influential anti-Taliban figures that were in the Afghan army were dismissed under the name of reforms in the security institutions⁵². By ignoring the historical role of the ethnic, religious and political groups of the Afghan people, America and NATO failed to use the non-governmental potential in this country to fight the Armed opposition and establish stability. This caused these groups to either take a stand against the West or adopt a neutral position. Therefore, one of the reasons for the failure of

commanders who fought against the Soviet Union between 1979 and 1989 and then Al Qaida and the Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001.

⁵¹ Bahadur Aminian, "The U.S. Strategy for State Building in Afghanistan", *Quarterly Journal of Political Studies*, 8 (8), p. (2012), p. 79-80.

⁵² Aminian, "Strategy The U.S. Strategy for State Building in Afghanistan", p. 80-81.

democracy NATO's mission in Afghanistan was ignoring the importance of the participation of ethnic groups in the direction of stability and security⁵³.

⁵³ Nabi Muradi, "The Reason for The Failure Of US and NATO in Afghanistan", Accessed: 25.12.2023, <http://mashal.org/blog/20-%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%B%8C%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C>.

CHAPTER II

1. Afghanistan's Foreign Policy and The Role of Neighboring Countries in The Failure of NATO's mission in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's neighboring countries, especially Pakistan and Iran, have played a significant role in shaping the country's internal conditions and influencing NATO's military mission in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's foreign policy, which has always been influenced by the need to balance between regional and international powers, could not establish stable and effective cooperation with its neighbors. By supporting the militant groups and Iran through influence in the political and social structures of Afghanistan, Pakistan directly or indirectly contributed to the increase of instability in the country. These factors have had wide consequences on the ineffectiveness of NATO's mission in providing stable stability in Afghanistan. This chapter tries to examine the influence of neighboring countries' policies on Afghanistan's political and security developments.

2.1. Afghanistan's Foreign Policy

2.1.1. Afghanistan's Foreign Policy From 2001 Onwards

Since the independence of Afghanistan in 1919, more than a century has passed since the contemporary diplomacy of this country. During these hundred years, Afghanistan, which is located in one of the most sensitive regions of the world, has had many ups and downs in its foreign policy. This country spent the first sixty years in relative peace but poverty and backwardness, and the rest in "direct occupation and proxy wars" of the big countries of the world and the regional powers, but at the same time, it has been accompanied by relative progress. One of the stable and dominant trends in Afghanistan's foreign policy has always been to adopt a policy based on the principle of neutrality⁵⁴. Afghanistan's foreign policy makers believe that this country is extremely vulnerable to foreign interventions. The foreign policy of this country has always been under the heavy shadow of regional and global powers. The leaders of Afghanistan thought that if the powerful

⁵⁴ Nasir Ahmad Andisha, "Neutrality in Afghanistan's Foreign Policy", *Universitäts-Und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt*. (2015), pp. 3-4.

countries of the region and the extra region agree on the neutrality of Afghanistan and the government adopts a policy of non-intervention based on the principle of neutrality, Afghanistan will have a safe path towards stability and progress. Afghanistan's foreign policy has undergone extensive changes in the last twenty years. From 2001 to 2014, Afghanistan was in the center of the world's attention. Because of what the international order after September 2001 required, many countries attached importance to Afghanistan. The great powers of the world allocated extensive political, military and economic support in the fight against terrorism and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

As a country that was in political isolation for many years, Afghanistan quickly entered into two-way interaction with the world. Afghanistan's foreign policy after 2001 was aligned with the US military and security strategy in the region. During this period, Afghanistan began to modernize its political, economic and military structures and relied heavily on international aid to advance reforms. The strategy of aligning with the United States on the part of the Afghan government gradually faced the challenge and sensitivity in the region to the military presence of the United States and NATO, and the continuation of Afghanistan's foreign policy faced a challenge. The region's countries imagined the short-term presence of the United States in Afghanistan, which led to regional and global cooperation in order to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan comprehensively.

By accepting the unilateralism of the United States in response to the incident of September 11, 2001 and the strategic cooperation with the United States, the regional powers were waiting for the end of this country's mission in Afghanistan, in order to independently benefit from the opportunities of economic, political and security cooperation with Afghanistan⁵⁵. After 2014, global focus on Afghanistan gradually decreased, and Afghanistan's foreign policy at this stage was unsuccessful efforts to attract more economic and military resources from Western allies. Until 2014, the international community provided these resources to Afghanistan according to its desire, because the western countries were interested in Afghanistan and worried about the future of this

⁵⁵ Mohammad Taher Tonzai, "Afghanistan's foreign policy from 2001 to 2020", *Ghalib University*, 10, 3(4), (2022), p. 48-50.

country. But developments in the field of the international system and attention to Syria, Ukraine and Iraq reduced the importance of Afghanistan.

2.1.2. Objectives of Afghanistan Foreign Policy

The main pillars of Afghanistan's foreign policy in more than a decade have been based on the following five principles.

- Development and reconstruction of Afghanistan through the attraction of international aid by adopting an economy diplomacy and development-oriented foreign policy.
- Strengthening regional economic cooperation centered on Afghanistan.
- Providing national security by creating an economy-oriented security system (Economic- based security system).
- Revival and consolidation of Afghanistan's position in the international environment, including in the regional environment of Afghanistan and the Islamic world.
- Helping the peace and well-being of the people of Afghanistan and other nations, the region and the world.

2.1.3. Five Circles of Afghanistan Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the field of interaction with regional and extra-regional countries was defined in five circles. It should be noted that after the return of the Taliban regime on August 15, 2021 following the collapse of the republic, Afghanistan lacks a legitimate government and official relations with the countries of the world. The first circle of Afghanistan's foreign policy includes neighboring countries and the region. Geographical proximity, ethnic and cultural ties, commercial and economic relations with this group of countries are prominent components of Afghanistan's interaction in this field. In addition, the civil wars of Afghanistan in the last three decades have somehow provided the ground for the influence of some regional countries in this country. Therefore, this has doubled the complexity and

importance of relations between Afghanistan and the countries of the region, especially its neighbors. Afghanistan's neighbors include Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and China. The second circle includes Islamic countries around the world. Afghanistan's connection with the Islamic world is rooted in the country's rich Islamic culture. The longevity and greatness of Islamic culture in Afghanistan and the firm belief that the people have towards the religion of Islam have made this circle and interaction with Islamic countries and the Muslim nations of the world one of the main priorities of Afghanistan's foreign policy⁵⁶. The third circle of Afghanistan's foreign policy included the country's international allies around the world. Specifically, the US, NATO allies, Japan and Australia are included in this circle.

Afghanistan's foreign policy makers view interaction with this group of countries as a platform for the country to access knowledge and the global economy and as an element that accelerates the country's all-round growth and development. This group of countries played a large role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan after 2001. The fourth circle of Afghanistan's foreign policy includes developed Asian countries such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Indonesia, Singapore and some other countries. Asian countries have a prominent position in Afghanistan's foreign policy due to their location, geographical proximity, historical relations, and religious and cultural commonalities that Afghanistan has with them. The fifth circle is Afghanistan's foreign policy and international organizations.

This circle includes large international and regional organizations. The emergence and growth of international organizations is one of the characteristics of the international system in contemporary history. Today, countless governmental and non-governmental organizations are active in various regional and international levels in various fields. The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has had extensive interaction with the following regional institutions and international organizations in the past 20 years⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ Zubeida Hassan, "The foreign policy of Afghanistan. Pakistan Horizon", *JSTOR*, 17(1), (1964). p. 54.

⁵⁷ Faramarz Tamanna, "Afghanistan Foreign Policy; Dynamism, Scope, Actions", Amiry Publication, Vol. 2. (2021), p. 40 -41.

United Nations
International Financial Institution
World Bank
International Monetary Fund
Asian Development Bank
Islamic Development Bank
World Trade Organization
European Union
NATO
ECO, SAARC and SCO regional organization
Afghanistan-centric regional frameworks – RECCA Business Forum and Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process.
Etc.

1.1. The Impact of The Policy of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries on The Failure of NATO's Mission in Afghanistan

2.2.1. Relations Between Afghanistan-Pakistan

Since the establishment of Pakistan as a country in 1947, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been full of ups and downs and have never been easy. The beginning of the tension in the relations between the two countries dates back to the time when Afghanistan, due to its border claim, was the first country to vote against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations after Pakistan's independence⁵⁸. In the last 20 years, Pakistan is considered one of the important players in the political and security developments of Afghanistan. This country has a very serious border dispute with Afghanistan. A border line (Durand)⁵⁹ was drawn between the two countries during the

⁵⁸ Frédéric, Grare, “Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era”, *JUSTOR*, (2006), p. 3.

⁵⁹ The Durand border was drawn between Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1893 when the subcontinent of India and Pakistan was under British colonial rule to prevent the influence of Tsarist Russia. But later, when Pakistan gained independence and Britain left the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan did not accept this border. Durand was a border treaty for a hundred years and the kings of Afghanistan had recognized it as a result of the pressure of the British colonial power, but after 1947 and the creation of a new country called

British colonial period in 1893, which was never recognized by the Afghan government, even during the first period of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001, which was the most loyal government to Pakistan⁶⁰. The Durand Line is considered one of the main sources of tension and crisis in the relations between the two countries in the past 77 years. This border line has divided the Pashtuns, who are one of the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan, on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. About two-thirds of Pashtuns live in Pakistan and 42% of them are in Afghanistan. Therefore, the policy of the Afghan governments has always been to try to unite the Pashtun people on both sides of the Durand border and support the political movement of Pashtuns in Pakistan⁶¹. Afghan leaders have repeatedly questioned the legal and political legitimacy of the Durand Treaty and called for its cancellation.

This issue threatens the territorial integrity of Pakistan, because Pakistan consists of four states and a tribal region that includes vast areas and this territory is considered disputed. The fear of divergence of these regions worries Pakistan. However, Afghanistan's unwillingness to recognize its borders with Pakistan is considered a serious threat to Pakistan's territorial integrity. Afghanistan's territorial claim to Pashtun-inhabited areas on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line is one of the main concerns of Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations. The Durand Line and forcing Afghanistan to give up its territorial and border claims is one of Pakistan's vital interests, Therefore, Pakistan has always tried to maintain its territorial integrity by using any means to prevent the formation of a government in Afghanistan that does not pursue a border claim against Pakistan.

Pakistan, the Afghan leaders did not recognize this border in the following 60 years, and the disputes continued until now.

⁶⁰ Adem Çakir, "Understanding Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations in a Multilateral Context," *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(1), (2023). p. 53.

⁶¹ Muhammad Saleem & Naheed S Goraya, "Border Issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan", *South Asian Studies*, 24(02), (2009), p. 208-209.

2.2.1.1. Pakistan's Support for the Taliban

Pakistan has always provided financial and intelligence support to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan in order to expand its influence and gain its interests. Pakistan's policy has been to support a weak government under the influence of Islamabad in Afghanistan. This policy has also been followed by the government of Pakistan in the past. In 1996, the Taliban group came to power in Afghanistan with the financial support of Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) and Pakistan's administration. In the past 20 years, Pakistan, with its strategic investment in the Taliban, saw this group as a tool to advance its macro policies in Afghanistan. Pakistan's policy in supporting the Taliban group consists of the multifaceted interests of Islamabad in Afghanistan; Pakistan thought that with the establishment of the Taliban regime, it would facilitate the establishment of an allied government of Islamabad in Afghanistan that would not be close to India. On the other hand, put an end to Afghanistan's claim on the Durand Line and also facilitate the safe and peaceful access of Pakistan to the markets of Central Asia⁶².

During the presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan after 2001, although Pakistan was a member of the international coalition against terrorism at the request of the United States, it practically gave shelter to the Taliban and became one of their supporters. The leadership of the Afghan government has repeatedly accused Pakistan of supporting terrorist groups, including the Taliban, based on the documents of the country's security institutions. In the last twenty years, the president and political leaders of Afghanistan have repeatedly asked the forces of the international coalition against terrorism in Afghanistan to attack the shelters of Taliban and other terrorist groups in the border areas of Pakistan. However, Pakistan has denied any role in supporting terrorist groups or sheltering its leaders⁶³. In the past twenty years, terrorist groups including the Taliban and the Haqqani network⁶⁴ in the border areas of Pakistan and Waziristan were organizing

⁶²Ehsan Jafari, "Reviewing Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in The Light of Internal and Regional Variables 2021-2022", 37, (1), (2023), p. 162.

⁶³Frédéric Grare, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era. *JUSTOR*, (2006), p. 3-5.

⁶⁴The Haqqani Network is an Islamist militant group in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This network has an intellectual and organizational alliance with the Taliban, and the leader of this network, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is on the wanted list of the United States, is the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan from 2021 onwards. The American authorities call the Haqqani network "a

complex suicide attacks and terrorist activities in different parts of Afghanistan⁶⁵. The families of Taliban leaders and military commanders lived in the cities of Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar in Pakistan. The organization of large-scale attacks by the Taliban and the Haqqani network had caused great damage to the previous government of Afghanistan and the international forces stationed in the country. The guerrilla war of the Taliban and other terrorist groups with the support of Pakistan's intelligence agency and some regional countries such as Iran had turned the United States and NATO's fight against terrorism into a war of attrition. On the other hand, contrary to the initial excitement and seriousness of the United States, the fight against terrorism gradually declined after a few years. Part of the factors of this situation was due to the lack of planning of the United States in Afghanistan.

At first, the United States focused only on revenge and destruction of al-Qaeda and the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and after this goal was achieved very quickly, the challenges of state building, long-term stability and regional issues and rivalries in Afghanistan were faced, each of which had complexity. The continuation of the war of attrition and the failure of the United States to manage and resolve the Afghan crisis gradually made the NATO allies doubtful and disillusioned. In the meantime, Pakistan, realizing that the international forces will finally end their presence in Afghanistan, intelligently resumed its dual policy against the United States in Afghanistan⁶⁶. Pakistan's double game is a kind of return to its traditional policy (supporting the Taliban and other armed Islamist groups in Afghanistan) on the one hand, and on the other hand, apparent and relative cooperation with the United States and the international coalition to fight terrorism in Afghanistan to exploit the benefits and financial support has been from the United States. Of course, this double game of Pakistan and its consequences have not gone away from the eyes of the international community,

family of criminals and border smugglers" that in the years after the entry of NATO forces into Afghanistan was a main cause of suicide attacks and casualties to the international security forces in Afghanistan. The Haqqani network is one of the main reasons for the strained relations between Pakistan and US. The United States had accused the Pakistan Army's intelligence agency, known as ISI, of supporting the Haqqani network.

⁶⁵ Grare, "Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era", pp. 7

⁶⁶ MohammadAlipour Farideh & Modarres MohammadVali, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan" *Iranian Research Letter of International Politics* 9, 1, (2021), p. 287.

especially the United States, and Pakistan has been accused many times by the United States of having connections with and supporting the Taliban. Although Pakistan was ready to cooperate after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, fearing more political pressure from the United States and the lifting of economic sanctions against it, and cooperated with the international counter-terrorism coalition in order to overthrow the Taliban regime, but this cooperation did not mean severing ties and supporting the Taliban group. Pakistan continued this policy until 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power and with the establishment of the Taliban regime, a new era was created in Pakistan-Afghanistan relation.

2.2.1.2. Pakistan's Strategic Depth Policy in Afghanistan

The concept of strategic depth has always been of interest throughout the history of Pakistan. This concept mostly refers to the deep and extensive influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan; the influence by which the Pakistani army can establish a government in Afghanistan that is friendly and close to Pakistan, but opposed to India. The purpose of this policy is to limit India's access to Afghanistan and to think of a solution to the constant concern that if India has a large presence in Afghanistan, it can cause serious damage to Pakistan's vital interests. Among the military commanders of Pakistan, only General Aslam Baig, the chief of staff of this country's army between 1988 and 1991, had a physical understanding of the concept of strategic depth and believed that the Pakistani army should deploy part of its military equipment in Afghanistan to counter a possible Indian invasion⁶⁷. The term strategic depth was proposed during the occupation of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan by the Pakistani military in the competition and defeat against India. India and Pakistan have faced each other four times over the issue of Kashmir, Pakistan has been the initiator of the war three times and Pakistan has lost in all four wars. The third India-Pakistan war in 1971 led to the separation of Bangladesh from the body of Pakistan and the Pakistani army was defeated by India and thousands of Pakistani soldiers were captured by the Indian army. After this defeat, Pakistan thought

⁶⁷ Farhan Ahmad, "Pakistan's Strategic Depth Policy in Afghanistan: Origin, Evolution and Practical Manifestations" *Research Journal of Human and Social Aspects*, 2(1), (2024). p. 38.

about strategic depth. After the partition of Bangladesh, Pakistan's military and politicians thought that they should define geography as their strategic depth. Only Afghanistan could be the right place for this strategy of Pakistan⁶⁸. This policy is followed in order to secure Pakistan's interests in security, political and economic levels. According to Pakistan's point of view, achieving strategic depth in Afghanistan requires the creation of an Islamist government close to Islamabad that will limit India's influence and economically provide Pakistan's access to the Central Asian countries. Therefore, Pakistan has always tried to support Islamist militant groups in Afghanistan to establish a government in favor of Islamabad. Of course, this policy, in addition to the negative consequences it has had on the developments in Afghanistan, has also caused heavy costs to Pakistan.

This policy has been the basis for the spread of religious extremism in the region and the rise of Islamist militant groups, including the Pakistani Taliban, known as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan TTP⁶⁹. As a result, we find that in the mindset of the decision-makers of the Pakistan Army, who are the main policymakers for Afghanistan, the policy of strategic depth does not mean the physical presence of the Pakistan Army in the event of a defeat in the territory of Afghanistan. Rather, according to the Pakistani interpretation mentioned above, strategic depth means the creation of a radical Islamist government that is in opposition to New Delhi and a close friend of Pakistan. Pakistani policy makers believe that until an Islamist government is formed, any other government that is formed in Afghanistan will be close to India and this closeness means enmity with Pakistan. With the passage of years and serious changes inside Afghanistan and the region, the Pakistani military still did not change its strategic depth policy towards Afghanistan, and this policy has continued in the past twenty years in the framework of supporting the Taliban as a group close to Islamabad.

⁶⁸ Farideh & MohammadVali, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan" p. 279.

⁶⁹ Çakir, "Understanding Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations in a Multilateral Context", p. 55-56.

2.2.1.3. The Pakistan-India Rivalry in Afghanistan

The friendship between Afghanistan and India and the influence of this country in Afghanistan has been one of the controversial factors on the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan has been the field of confrontation and proxy war between India and Pakistan for the past 20 years. Pakistan has been constantly worried about the closeness and extensive interaction between these two countries. Islamabad sees the expansion of India's increasing influence in Afghanistan as an attempt to encircle itself strategically, and on the other hand, it considers the expansion of its presence and influence in Afghanistan with the aim of achieving strategic depth very vital and a guarantee of its security and survival⁷⁰. Pakistan believes that India's policy in Afghanistan is sabotaging Islamabad-Kabul relations. India sees its interests in a strong Afghanistan and a weak Pakistan. Therefore, the investment that India has made in the field of reconstruction of Afghanistan has been made in line with these goals⁷¹. One of the most important reasons for Pakistan's support of the Taliban is Islamabad's concern about India's influence in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's concern is that India has a lot of interests in Afghanistan as well as bigger plans to limit Islamabad's influence in the country. With the expansion of strategic relations in recent years, Indian authorities have been seeking access to the profitable markets of Central Asia through Afghanistan; Because Afghanistan can contribute a lot to the growing economy of this country as a transit route for Indian goods to Central Asia⁷². Therefore, from 2001 to 2021, Pakistan was constantly worried about Delhi-Kabul cooperation and the expansion of interaction between these two countries and considered it a threat to itself. Pakistan has repeatedly protested against the Afghan government that India is seeking Pakistan's disobedience by establishing more consulates in the provinces near the Pakistani border and sending spies. Afghanistan had signed a strategic

⁷⁰ Farideh & MohammadVali, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan", p. 288.

⁷¹ Muhammad Saleem Mazhar & Naheed S Goraya, "Border Issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan", *South Asian Studies*, 24(02), (2009), p. 210.

⁷² Çakir, "Understanding Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations in a Multilateral Context", p. 60.

cooperation agreement with India in October 2011, which included military and intelligence cooperation. Islamabad has continuously interpreted India's extensive political and economic presence in Afghanistan as a threat against itself. Pakistan's military leaders believe that India is seeking to divide this country through Afghanistan by supporting the separatist and nationalist Baloch group, which is engaged in armed struggle with the Pakistani government⁷³. For this reason, it can be said that as long as the relations between Kabul and New Delhi are warm and the cooperation of these two countries continues at different levels, Pakistan will continue to support the Taliban as it has followed this policy in the last two decades. In the last twenty years, the Taliban was a strategic tool at the disposal of Pakistan's foreign policy. Therefore, one of the main reasons for Pakistan's support to the Taliban group in Afghanistan is due to the tension and conflict of interests of this country with India. Taliban is a tool of Pakistan's influence and an effective factor in challenging India's influence in Afghanistan. For this reason, Pakistan has supported the Taliban group for the past two decades.

2.2.2. Iran's Policy in Afghanistan Since 2000

Iran in Afghanistan's western neighborhood has played a major role in Afghanistan's political and security developments in the past 20 years. Considering the political and cultural influence it has had in Afghanistan; the Islamic Republic of Iran has always tried to guide the developments in Afghanistan in line with Tehran's interests. After the September 11th attacks and the US military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, as well as the subsequent fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Iran became a serious and ambitious player in the Central Asia and Middle East regions⁷⁴. Iran undoubtedly hoped that the US military intervention in Afghanistan would be short-term and most likely did not foresee those foreign forces would be present in Afghanistan for two decades. The US military invasion of Afghanistan provided a suitable platform for Iran to expand its influence in Afghanistan. On the one hand, the military intervention of the United States led to the defeat of the Taliban regime and the al-Qaeda group, which was in opposition

⁷³ Amina Khan, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations", *Strategic Studies*, 34 (3), (2014), p. 37-38.

⁷⁴ Bruce Koepke, "Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism", *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, (2013), p. 18.

to the Shiite thinking and ideology of the Iranian government, and on the other hand, the developments after September 11 paved the way for the formation of a government in Afghanistan, in which Shiite groups and Politicians close to Iran reach high positions. Iran's foreign policy in Afghanistan in the last two decades has had two basic dimensions. Considering the vast interests that Iran has in Afghanistan, on the one hand, Iran interacted with the western-backed government in Afghanistan and participated in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but on the other hand, it was against the presence of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan⁷⁵. In general, after 2001, Iran played an effective role in the formation of the new political system in Afghanistan, due to the wide influence it had among Afghan political groups, especially the Northern Alliance⁷⁶, which consisted of Persian-speaking ethnic groups and Shiite groups. Iran played a major role in encouraging political forces for national reconciliation and agreement on the new government of Afghanistan after 2001⁷⁷. For more than a decade, Iran continued the strategy of supporting the Afghan government in the field of political and economic reconstruction of this country, and at the same time, with the spread of insurgency among the Pashtun tribes and the possibility of establishing a relationship between the Afghan Sunni rebels and terrorist groups opposed to the Iranian government, such as JUNDULLAH, who It is a nationalist Baloch and Sunni group, the situation became difficult for Iran.

Iran-Afghanistan relations cooled down after the 2009 election controversies in Afghanistan and the marginalization of leaders close to Iran, and with the signing of a strategic cooperation agreement between the Afghan government and the United States, the relations between the two countries faced more challenges⁷⁸. Iran's policy in

⁷⁵ Farid Tookhy, "Iran's Response to the Taliban's Comeback in Afghanistan", *United States Institute of Peace*, (2022) p. 2.

⁷⁶ The Northern Alliance or United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan was a coalition of opposition groups to the Taliban that was formed in the 1990s. The coalition mainly included Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara ethnic groups fighting the Taliban regime. Iran played an important role in providing political, military, and financial support for this coalition. Iran played an important role in providing political, military, and financial support for this coalition in the first round of the Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001. After 2001, Iran also had close relations with the Northern Alliance, and in the past twenty years, the important leaders of this alliance were supported by Tehran.

⁷⁷ Alireza Nader & Ahmad Idrees Rahmani & Robert Stewart, "Iran and Afghanistan: A complicated relationship. Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown", *Library of Congress*, (2014), p. 6

⁷⁸ Koepke, Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism, p. 10.

supporting the Northern Alliance pursued different goals. By supporting the Northern Alliance, Iran was trying to prevent the expansion of the Taliban's influence in the northern regions and its borders, thus guaranteeing the security of its borders. On the other hand, supporting the Northern Alliance allowed Iran to expand its influence in Afghanistan and gain a better position in the regional competition with Pakistan and other countries supporting the Taliban.

2.2.2.1. Iran's interests in Afghanistan

Iran has extensive political, security, economic and cultural interests in this Afghanistan. The security of Iran's eastern borders depends on stability and security in Afghanistan. The presence of terrorist groups and drug trafficking in Afghanistan are threats to Iran's national security. Iran has also continuously sought to increase its political influence in the region and strengthen relations with the Afghan government. The main issues of Iran's foreign policy in Afghanistan in the past two decades include opposition to the presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, to the fight against drugs, water, Afghan immigrants, and the rights of the Shia and Tajik minorities in Afghanistan⁷⁹. Iran's foreign policy in the last two decades generally includes issues such as fighting against the presence of the West and NATO in Afghanistan, border security, fighting against drug trafficking, water, Afghan immigrants, and paying attention to the Shiite religious minority. Iran and Afghanistan have a long common border of about 945 kilometers that passes through mountainous and desert areas. These borders have created many challenges and concerns for both countries in terms of security, economy and society. Afghanistan is known as one of the largest producers of opium in the world, and a major part of these drugs is smuggled to Iran through the common borders. As a transit route for drugs to Europe, the Middle East and other regions, Iran has faced serious challenges in dealing with drug trafficking⁸⁰. One of the important issues in Iran-Afghanistan relations, which

⁷⁹ Ghulam Faruq Keskin & Sayyad Sadri Alibabalu & Mudassir Fatah, "Russia's and Iran's strategic policies towards the Afghanistan crisis" *Trames Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, (2020), p. 223.

⁸⁰ Ellen Laipson, "Engaging Iran on Afghanistan" *STIMSON*. Accessed: 15.02.2024, <https://www.google.com/search?q=eng+a+ging+iran+on+afghanistan&client=>.

have always caused tension between the two countries, is Iran's claim to the Hirmand River, which originates from the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan and flows into Hamon Lake in Iran. Hirmand River is one of the vital water resources for Sistan and Baluchistan region in Iran⁸¹. The lack of water in this river due to droughts and the construction of numerous dams by Afghanistan have led to a significant decrease in the flow of water to Lake Hamun. This issue has created a water crisis and serious environmental problems for Iran. Iran and Afghanistan have been trying to resolve issues related to the management of common water resources through bilateral negotiations and agreements. Among these efforts, we can mention the "Hirmand Agreement" in 1973, according to which Afghanistan committed to allocate a certain amount of water from the Hirmand River to Iran. However, the full and effective implementation of this agreement has always faced challenges⁸².

Afghan refugees in Iran are one of the basic issues that have had wide consequences on the relations between Afghanistan and Iran. Iran hosts millions of Afghan immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the beginning of the Afghan civil wars and the Soviet invasion of the country, Iran opened its doors to Afghan immigrants and millions of Afghans sought refuge in Iran. This policy was made due to the humanitarian and religious conditions of the Shiite majority in Afghanistan. Since the 1990s, the issue of immigrants has always been considered one of the pillars of Iran's foreign policy regarding Afghanistan⁸³. Iran has always used Afghan immigrants as a tool in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Iran has sometimes used Afghan immigrants as a tool for diplomatic and political pressure. For example, in water tensions with Afghanistan, Iran has used the issue of immigrants as a pyramid of pressure. Iran even threatened Afghanistan during the tensions with the United States and Western governments over the nuclear issue that if the pressures caused by the US sanctions continue, it will deport Afghan immigrants from this country⁸⁴.

⁸¹ Koepke, "Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism", p. 13.

⁸² Ellen, "Engaging Iran on Afghanistan" Accessed: 15.02.2024, <https://www.google.com/search?q=engaging+iran+on+afghanistan&client=>.

⁸³ Koepke, "Iran's Policy on Afghanistan the evolution of strategic pragmatism", p. 4.

⁸⁴ Keskin & Alibabalu & Fatah, "Russia's and Iran's strategic policies towards the Afghanistan crisis", p. 224.

2.2.2.2. Iran's Support for the Shiite Minorities in Afghanistan

One of the fields of Iran's extensive political influence in Afghanistan is the country's interaction with various ethnic groups that have cultural and religious commonalities with Iran. Iran has always supported political groups and parties in Afghanistan that are aligned with Iran's interests and goals. In the past two decades, Iran has clearly supported the Hazara community, which is a Shiite minority in Afghanistan. Also, some leaders of the Tajik tribe, which is considered one of the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan, have also been supported by Iran. Although Tajiks are not Shia, they follow the Hanafi religion, but they are very close to Iran in terms of history and culture. Persian is the common language of Iran and the majority of the people of Afghanistan⁸⁵. One of the factors of Iran's support for Afghanistan's political and ethnic groups is the expansion of this country's regional influence and competition with Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan. Iran has always tried to prevent the influence of Sunni radical groups in Afghanistan by supporting Shiite groups and Tajiks in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has tried to expand its influence by establishing religious schools and providing political and financial support to the Sunni jihadi group in Afghanistan. Considering the vast religious and cultural commonalities it has with ethnic groups such as Tajiks and Hazaras in Afghanistan, Iran has tried to expand its influence to narrow the field for radical groups such as anti-Shia Salafi groups⁸⁶. As a result, it can be said that one of the factors of the instability of political stability and the failure of international forces to maintain stability and security in Afghanistan is the conflict of interests of regional countries in this country. The ideological and political competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan is one of its examples.

⁸⁵ Ellen, "Engaging Iran on Afghanistan" Accessed: 15.01.2024, <https://www.google.com/search?q=engaging+iran+on+afghanistan&client=>.

⁸⁶ Ghulam Farooq Keskin & Sayyad Sadri Alibabalu & Mudassir Fatah, "Russia's and Iran's strategic policies towards the Afghanistan crisis" p. 222-223.

2.2.2.3. Iran's Security Concerns in Afghanistan

After 2003, when the scope of the presence of international forces gradually expanded in Afghanistan, it caused Iran's security concerns. Iran's most important concern regarding Afghanistan is the presence of foreign bases and military forces; Especially US and British troops were in this country. At the beginning of 2001, Iran, without considering the fact that the country's long-time enemy is leading a military intervention, with the aim of eliminating the Taliban and Al-Qaeda; two terrorist groups from Afghanistan did not oppose this; Because Iran considered this military intervention in line with its national interests. Iran's leadership did not want to witness the return of Afghanistan to the civil war that happened after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union forces in 1989, and for this reason initially tolerated the presence of ISAF forces in Kabul.⁸⁷ NATO's presence in Afghanistan indirectly helped Iran's security interests to some extent. The presence of USA and NATO forces in Afghanistan brought about relative stability in the eastern borders of Iran.

This situation gave Iran an opportunity to reduce its security concerns about the expansion of the influence of religious radical groups inside its borders. The biggest benefit of NATO's war on terrorism in Afghanistan for Iran was the destruction of Iran's biggest ideological enemy, the Taliban regime. As a result of the NATO military presence in Afghanistan, the eastern borders of Iran enjoyed more security and stability for years. Also, the presence of NATO partially prevented the growth and expansion of some extremist and terrorist groups that could be a direct threat to Iran's security. On the other hand, with the presence of NATO, Iran had its concerns about the long-term presence of the United States in the region. Iran thought that the long-term presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan would reduce the country's influence in the region and hinder Iran's ambitions but at the same time, the relative stability that was created was very important for Iran's security interests.

⁸⁷ Koepke, Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism, p, 13.

Iran was satisfied with the actions of international forces to provide security for the growing government of Afghanistan and the training of Afghan defense and security forces by these forces, but on the other hand, it hoped that the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan would be short-term and with the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda should leave the country. However, in October 2003; When the NATO forces expanded the range of their activities to other provinces of Afghanistan; Iran looked at these activities as a security threat that had approached the country's borders. Since the middle of 2007, Iranians' concern increased; because they felt that the US military forces could use these new military bases to attack Iran, and that is why they constantly put pressure on the Afghan government to take the lead in providing security in the country. Also, Iran demanded to specify a timetable for the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan⁸⁸. Opposition to the strategic security agreement between Afghanistan and the United States was the main guideline of Iran's foreign policy during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Iranian government believed that the Kabul-Washington strategic agreement, which was finally signed in 2012, would potentially provoke more and wider violence in Afghanistan.

Also, Iran had requested that the number of USA forces that will remain in this country after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, the long-term and medium-term plans of this country and the operational goals of the US temporary bases in Afghanistan be clarified and assured that these facilities and bases will not be a threat to Afghanistan's neighbors. Nevertheless, the Iranian authorities felt the need to implement professional training programs in the field of security, which is necessary for Afghanistan and will actually benefit Iran's security, at the same time; the Iranians preferred that this responsibility be carried out by NATO members other than from the USA and the United Kingdom⁸⁹. As a result, it can be said that the US and NATO military presence in Afghanistan had created a complicated situation for Iran; On the one hand, the fight against terrorism and the suppression of anti-Shia extremist groups and the provision of relative stability in the eastern borders of Iran were in the interest of the country's security,

⁸⁸ Koepke, "Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism", p. 14.

⁸⁹ Koepke, "Iran's Policy on Afghanistan. The evolution of strategic pragmatism", p 13-15.

but on the other hand, Iran's strategic and intelligence concerns regarding the establishment of NATO and American military bases in Afghanistan and the long-term presence of NATO in the region was always considered.

2.2.2.4. Iran's Anti-U.S. Policy in Afghanistan

Although Iran's policy was in harmony with the US military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, the country's approach towards the Western military presence in Afghanistan gradually changed. Iran continuously tried to challenge the presence of the United States and NATO by exerting political pressure on the Afghan government and supporting the armed rebellion in this country. In 2010, due to the influence that Iran had among the politicians and members of the Afghan parliament, it tried to sabotage the Kabul-Washington Strategic Agreement⁹⁰ through pressure on the leadership of the Afghan government and the parliament of this country. This agreement enabled the long-term presence of US forces in Afghanistan⁹¹. On the other hand, in recent years, Iran has tried to expand its soft influence in Afghanistan by establishing schools and cultural and religious institutions in Afghanistan. Iran's cultural policy in Afghanistan seeks to establish and strengthen cultural and historical links between the two countries and expand Iran's cultural influence in this country.

These policies, along with ideological and political policies, are part of Iran's efforts to strengthen its position in the region and protect its national interests. Also, Iran broadcasts programs in Farsi and Pashto through television and radio channels, which include news, documentaries, series and cultural and religious programs. These programs had a great impact on Afghan audiences and helped to promote Iran's views and interests. Iran has tried to reach the Afghan audience by influencing the media. These networks produced

⁹⁰ The US-Afghanistan Strategic Agreement, also known as the "Strategic Cooperation Agreement", is a document designed to define the long-term relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. This agreement was signed on May 2, 2012 in Kabul by Afghan President Hamid Karzai and US President Barack Obama. The main goals of this agreement included supporting the Afghan security forces to maintain security and fight terrorism, strengthening the rule of law, human rights and democracy in Afghanistan and supporting social development and welfare programs for the Afghan people. This agreement has played an important role in determining the framework of long-term cooperation between the two countries and has been used as a basis for other agreements and international cooperation.

⁹¹ Nader & Rahmani & Stewart, „Iran and Afghanistan: A complicated relationship. Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown”, p. 9.

and broadcast programs with cultural, religious and political content that were in line with Iran's goals⁹². After 2001 and following the USA and NATO invasion of Afghanistan, Iran sought to expand its influence and support political factions close to Tehran. Iran chose interaction with the Taliban as a strategic tool to weaken USA interests and influence in Afghanistan, and on the other hand, it tried to exert influence among the Taliban group to highlight its own role in the developments in Afghanistan. Although Iran had a hostile stance towards this group during the first period of the Taliban regime between 1996-2001, but after 2001, it turned to support and interact with the Taliban. According to Iran, Afghanistan is the focal point of Iran's grand strategy of "Looking East". This strategy aims to increase Iran's economic relations with East Asian countries Especially China, India and Japan. The focus of this strategy is to create stability in Central and South Asia. Iran was against the presence of NATO forces, especially American forces, in Afghanistan⁹³.

The presence of USA forces in Afghanistan as part of Washington's strategy with the aim of stabilization Its strategic position in the region of South and Central Asia and the Persian Gulf was considered at the cost of Iran's interests. Iran also believed that America's policies in Afghanistan in the long term would serve Iran's interests, including the establishment and stabilization of close political and economic relations between the governments of Iran and It weakens Afghanistan. In this way, Iran's position towards the Taliban after the fall of the previous Afghan government has been based on close interaction and cooperation. From Iran's point of view, the Taliban is an objective reality of the Afghan society, and regional countries such as China, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United States have relations with the Taliban and are satisfied with the group's rise in power in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, they have also concluded political agreements with the Taliban group. Therefore, Iran has had a close relationship with this group since 2021, when the Taliban returned to power. On the other hand, Iran has maintained a policy of interaction and

⁹² Nader & Rahmani & Stewart, „Iran and Afghanistan: A complicated relationship. Iran’s Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown”, p. 13-14.

⁹³ Hossien Karimifar, “Explanation of Iran's foreign policy towards the Taliban 1996-2002”, *Middle East Studies*, 105, (28), (2022), p. 60-62.

appeasement with the Taliban regime due to its foreign policy alignment with China and Russia. Although Tehran has not recognized the Taliban government, it has handed over the Afghan embassy in Tehran to Taliban representatives, and its ambassador in Kabul has kept Iran's embassy and consulates in Afghan cities open.

2.2.2.5. Support for the Taliban Insurgency

For more than a decade, Iran has supported the armed rebellion of the Taliban against foreign forces in Afghanistan in order to counter the U.S. influence in Afghanistan. These supports have included the provision of weapons, military training and even financial aid to the Taliban. One of the main reasons for Iran's support to the Taliban was actually to counter the presence and influence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Considering that Iran and America are old enemies, Iran has used every opportunity to weaken US positions in the region, including in Afghanistan. Despite ideological and religious differences, Iran and the Taliban have also had common interests. For example, both sides have been unhappy with the presence of U.S. - NATO forces in Afghanistan. In some cases, both sides have also benefited from the relative stability in the border areas of Iran and Afghanistan⁹⁴.

On the other hand, one of the reasons for Iran's support for the Taliban's war against U.S. and NATO forces has been the country's concern that the United States supports Iran's opposition groups. Iran has repeatedly claimed that the United States supports armed groups opposed to the Iranian government, including Jundullah. Jundullah is a Sunni militant group in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province that has carried out numerous terrorist operations in the past. From Iran's point of view, the United States is using Jundullah as a tool to weaken the Iranian government and create unrest in the border areas. Therefore, the financial, equipment and intelligence support of the countries of the region, especially Pakistan and Iran, to the Taliban group in Afghanistan brought the war against terrorism in this country to a state of erosion⁹⁵. The Taliban gained more power and

⁹⁴ Nader & Rahmani & Stewart, "Iran and Afghanistan: A complicated relationship. Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown", p. 14-15.

⁹⁵ Nader, Scotten, Rahmani, Stewart, Iran and Afghanistan: A complicated relationship. Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown, *Library of Congress*, p. 15-16.

influence and attacked military and civilian targets in different regions of Afghanistan. Regional support for the Taliban became one of the factors of the erosion of the US war in Afghanistan and as a result the failure of the NATO mission in this country.

2.2.3. Afghanistan-Central Asian Countries

Due to its geographical and historical location, Afghanistan has a special place in the politics of Central Asia. As a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia, this country also plays an important role in determining the relations and policies of Central Asian countries due to security and economic issues. The role of Central Asia in the political stability of Afghanistan can be review from different aspects. As a buffer state between Russia and the Indian Ocean and a transit route for goods from South Asia to Central Asia and Europe, Afghanistan has been geopolitically important for a long time, so that it has been the focus of the powers of the time. Central Asian countries, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, play an important role in international efforts to ensure stability in Afghanistan due to their common geographical location, security, economic and cultural issues⁹⁶. Central Asian countries have always been worried about the expansion of terrorist activities and extremists from Afghanistan into their borders. These countries often establish security cooperation with Afghanistan and regional powers such as Russia and China to reduce security threats. Organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are also active in this field. Central Asian countries play an important role in determining the security, stability, and economic development of the region. These countries are related to Afghanistan for various reasons, including regional security, trade and transit, and ethnic and cultural issues⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ Mohammadreza, Dehshiri & Seyed Mehdi Mirkazemi, “Afghanistan Role in Campaigns of Central Asia Security Complex from 2000 to 2020” *Scientific Quarterly Journal of Central Asia and Caucasus Studies*, 27(116), (2022) p. 34-35.

⁹⁷ Rasool Hamid, “Afghanistan as a Factor in Central Asia’s Security”, *International Journal of Applied Social Science*, 6(5), (2019), p. 1341- 1342.

2.2.3.1. Cooperation of Central Asian Countries with NATO in Afghanistan

The cooperation of Central Asian countries with NATO in Afghanistan has been formed in the field of regional security, fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, and development of transit and economic infrastructure. Central Asian countries including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have played different roles in this cooperation. Here are some aspects of this collaboration. Central Asian countries, by signing transport and air cooperation agreements, allowed NATO forces to use the airspace and land of these countries to transfer equipment and meet operational needs. Some countries, such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, provided special logistics facilities to support this operation. Central Asian countries have played an important role in providing transportation and logistics routes for NATO in Afghanistan. These countries have used transit routes to transfer equipment and materials needed by NATO forces. The northern route, which passes through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, has been one of the main NATO supply routes to Afghanistan⁹⁸.

Central Asian countries have also participated with NATO in the field of information exchange and security cooperation. This cooperation has included identifying and dealing with terrorist and extremist threats, and combating drug trafficking. In general, Central Asia's security and intelligence cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan was carried out with the aim of countering common threats and establishing regional stability. Although these cooperations were accompanied by limitations, they helped control terrorist threats and increase security in the region, and made Central Asian countries look at NATO as a strategic partner in dealing with security threats. Some Central Asian countries have allowed NATO to use their military bases for air operations and logistical support. For example, Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan has played an important role in supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan⁹⁹. As well as Central Asian countries have cooperated with

⁹⁸ Joshua Foust, "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan", *Century Foundation*, (2010), p. 18-19.

⁹⁹ Foust, "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan", p. 18-19.

NATO in the fight against drug trafficking that is transferred from Afghanistan to other parts of the world. This cooperation has included joint measures to identify and stop drug trafficking networks as well as development programs to reduce drug production in Afghanistan.

2.2.3.2. Limitations of Central Asia in Cooperation with NATO

The role of Central Asian countries in the failure of the NATO mission in Afghanistan is a complex and multidimensional issue. While these countries have played different roles in supporting the NATO mission, several factors can point to relative failures in this mission. Some of these factors are related to internal and external issues. The limited cooperation of the countries of Central Asia, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, with the NATO military mission in Afghanistan is considered one of the effective factors in the failure of this mission. Because of their security and economic policies, as well as concerns about security threats on their borders, these countries have usually settled for a limited level of cooperation with NATO. Central Asian countries were very worried about the spread of extremist groups and drug trafficking from Afghanistan to their countries due to their border with Afghanistan. These concerns caused these countries to focus more on their internal security and defense policies than extensive cooperation with NATO in order to prevent the transfer of security threats inside their borders.

While Central Asian countries had cooperation in the field of security and information with NATO, this cooperation had limitations. Lack of sufficient coordination and lack of trust between these countries and NATO could reduce the effectiveness of this cooperation. Some of these countries had concerns about the influence of NATO and the military presence of the West in the region¹⁰⁰. While Central Asian countries provided transit and logistics routes for NATO, these routes also had limitations. Problems related to infrastructure, corruption and inefficiency in transit management could lead to the reduction of the effectiveness of these routes. The limitations of the transit cooperation of

¹⁰⁰ Dehshiri & Mirkazemi, “Afghanistan Role in Campaigns of Central Asia Security Complex from 2000 to 2020”, p. 45-46.

Central Asian countries with NATO in Afghanistan was one of the serious challenges in providing and supporting logistics for military operations and the NATO mission in Afghanistan. These restrictions existed for several political, security and economic reasons. Many Central Asian countries were interested in maintaining neutrality in international disputes and maintaining balanced relations with various countries, including China and Russia. This desire for neutrality reduced the level of direct and sustainable cooperation with NATO. These transit restrictions have caused NATO to continually face logistical challenges in its operations in Afghanistan, relying on alternative and expensive routes to access the country, including through Pakistan. Also, the cooperation of Central Asian countries with NATO in the field of fighting drugs was part of joint efforts to deal with drug trafficking and ensure security in the region. Although efforts were made to combat drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asian countries, these efforts had limitations due to the extent and complexity of drug trafficking networks and the lack of sufficient resources to deal with them. This issue could have contributed to the continuation of instability and the strengthening of terrorist groups in Afghanistan¹⁰¹.

1.1.1.1. The Role of Regional Organizations

Regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) play an important role in regional security, but the coordination of these organizations with NATO had limitations. These organizations are usually under the influence of Russia and China, who have opposed NATO's greater influence in the region¹⁰². On the other hand, Central Asian countries had political considerations in their interaction with NATO due to their historical and strategic relations with Russia. These political considerations caused security and military cooperation with NATO to not be carried out fully and effectively. In general, the role of the Central Asian countries in the failure of the NATO mission in Afghanistan cannot be considered as the main factor. The failure of the NATO mission in Afghanistan is the

¹⁰¹ Foust, "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan", p. 18-19.

¹⁰² Hadi Soliemanpour & Masoud Akhshi, "Comparative analysis of NATO and SCO Behaviors in Central Asia from 2001 to 2012" *Central Asia and The Caucasus Journal*, (2016). p. 138-139.

result of a combination of internal and external factors, structural problems, cooperation limitations, and regional and international complexities. However, the role of these countries in the limitations of cooperation and its effects on NATO's mission should not be ignored.

CHAPTER III

2. Reviewing NATO's Objectives, Obstacles, and Shortcomings

NATO's goals in Afghanistan during the two decades of the organization's military presence in this country included several key goals, all of which were designed to fight terrorism, provide security, and help rebuild and stabilize Afghanistan. NATO's goals in Afghanistan changed over time from the start of the alliance's presence in 2001 to the withdrawal of its forces in 2021, but the focus of these goals was always focused on the following.

2.1. NATO's Objectives

3.1.1 Fighting Terrorism

The first and main goal of NATO after the attacks of September 11, 2001 was to overthrow the Taliban regime and destroy the Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. The Taliban had sheltered Al-Qaeda and NATO intended to eliminate these terrorist threats. On the other hand, NATO sought to prevent the Taliban and Al-Qaeda from returning to power so that Afghanistan does not once again become a safe haven for international terrorist groups. NATO's war against terrorism in Afghanistan was one of the largest and longest military operations of this organization after its establishment¹⁰³. The incident of September 11, 2001 and the suicide attack attributed to al-Qaeda on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon headquarters in Washington caused a military and political transformation in Afghanistan. Based on the Security Council Resolutions of 1362 and 1373, the anti-terrorism coalition led by the United States attacked Afghanistan to overthrow the government of the Taliban and its foreign ally, Al-Qaeda. On October 7, 2001, United States attacked Afghanistan in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks¹⁰⁴. In the

¹⁰³ Heidi Schurter, "The Failures of US Policy in Afghanistan and the Lessons Learned (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest)", *American University*, (2015). p. 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ Note: The United States invaded Afghanistan in September 2001 because of the Taliban's support for Al-Qaeda and the role of this group in the events of September 11, 2001, which led to massive terrorist attacks in US. US attributed these attacks to al-Qaeda and asked the Taliban regime to hand over the leader of al-Qaeda, who was hiding in Afghanistan at that time. The Taliban did not accept US request to hand over Al-Qaeda leaders, and finally the United States launched a military attack on Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

following days, the United States at the head of an international coalition and in coordination with the anti-Taliban forces known as the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan drove al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban regime. Bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, fled to Pakistan and Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban group, fled to the mountains, and the commanders and fighters of the Taliban either returned to their homes or took refuge in the safe nests of this group in Pakistan. Skilled diplomatic efforts led by Zalmay Khalilzad, the USA Special Envoy for Afghanistan, initiated a process that led to the establishment of a new government in Afghanistan led by Hamid Karzai, the face of Afghan reconciliation. The United States in coordination with the international community and Afghan political groups, launched the Bonn Conference for national reconciliation and the establishment of a new government in Afghanistan.

The results of this conference were the beginning of a new chapter in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement¹⁰⁵ had two parts, one of which was dedicated to the issue of providing security in Afghanistan during the temporary and transitional period and the other to the issue of the role of the United Nations in the temporary period. According to the first appendix, it was decided that until the formation of the military (national army) and security forces of Afghanistan, forces from the UN will take responsibility for maintaining the security of the interim and transitional government. The force that was formed in this way took the title of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In August 2003, NATO assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). At first, ISAF was responsible for establishing security in Kabul and its surrounding areas against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other fighters in order to prepare the ground for the establishment of a transitional government headed by Hamid Karzai. In October 2003, the UN Security Council authorized the expansion of ISAF's mission to the whole of Afghanistan, and subsequently, ISAF expanded its mission area to the whole of

¹⁰⁵ The Bonn Agreement refers to the series of agreements reached during the Bonn Conference held in December 2001 in Bonn, Germany. These agreements aimed to establish a transitional administration and a roadmap for the future of Afghanistan following the ousting of the Taliban regime. Key points of the Bonn Agreement included the formation of an interim government, the convening of a Loya Jirga (grand assembly) to select a transitional government, and commitments to uphold human rights, including women's rights. The Bonn Agreement set the stage for the political reconstruction of Afghanistan and paved the way for subsequent developments, including the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of democratic elections.

Afghanistan. After the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan was in relative peace for four years. In order to completely defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban and help for stability and democracy in Afghanistan, the United States increased the number of troops from 8,000 soldiers in 2002 to 20,000 soldiers in 2005, and thus the increase in forces continued until the following years. United States did not have a clear plan to end the war and leave Afghanistan than other killing or capturing the leaders of al-Qaeda and the Taliban; however, the political developments in Afghanistan had become a source of optimism and hope for US. In January 2004, the new constitution of Afghanistan was approved by the Constitutional Loya Jirga (grand assembly). Following that, presidential and then parliamentary elections were held¹⁰⁶. Freedom of speech, free media, women's rights and political participation, and the expansion of social and cultural activities and other civil political freedoms were the achievements that were made in the path of new developments.

But gradually the violence in Afghanistan increased¹⁰⁷. Soon, in February 2006, the Taliban returned to the field. Thousands of rebels attacked the districts and besieged the provincial centers. During the next three years, The Taliban captured most of the southern regions of Afghanistan and most of the eastern parts of this country. US forces and NATO allies were caught in heavy conflicts in these areas. By the end of 2008, the number of US soldiers stationed in Afghanistan reached more than 30,000 without having any impact on the war. Washington was still thinking about victory and had not changed its overall strategy. President George W. Bush remained determined to defeat the Taliban and win what he considered a "victory for the liberation forces"¹⁰⁸. With the inauguration of Barack

¹⁰⁶ NATO, "ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014)", Accessed: 20.11.2013, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm.

¹⁰⁷ During 2006, insecurity intensified in Afghanistan. At this year Afghanistan experienced a significant escalation in insecurity. This escalation was primarily driven by intensified insurgent activities, particularly by the Taliban and other militant groups. These groups launched more frequent and coordinated attacks against Afghan government forces, international coalition troops, and civilian targets. Additionally, there was a surge in suicide bombings and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, which inflicted heavy casualties and instilled fear among the population. Political instability, weak governance, and widespread corruption also contributed to the worsening security situation. Overall, the beginning of 2006 marked a turning point with a notable increase in insecurity across Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁸ Jalil Pazhwak, "Why US Failed in Afghanistan", Etilaat Roz Journal, Accessed: 02.12.2023, <https://www.etilaatroz.com/93123/why-did-us-fail-in-afghanistan/>.

Obama as the new president of the United States, the military developments in Afghanistan gained momentum. Barak Obama decided to send support forces to Afghanistan. Obama's administration sent about 17,000 troops to Afghanistan¹⁰⁹. With the arrival of these forces in Afghanistan, the total number of USA soldiers in Afghanistan reached about 100,000. During this period, the United States prioritized preventing the influence of Al-Qaeda, keeping the Taliban away and supporting the Afghan government, and the plan to reduce US forces was also proposed, and thus the number of US forces in Afghanistan decreased to 9,800 by 2015. The rest of the forces that remained in Afghanistan, their activities were mainly in the field of consulting the Afghan forces in the fight against terrorism.

Although Obama initially tried to intensify the war against terrorism by sending more troops to Afghanistan, but gradually this country's strategy focused on reducing military activity and transferring responsibilities to the Afghan army¹¹⁰. Although the NATO coalition was equipped with advanced military equipment and had a large presence in the whole of Afghanistan, and in recent years it was able to reduce the risk of terrorism to a great extent and establish the security and stability of Afghanistan, but gradually the situation is on the path of instability and insecurity was placed. One aspect of the fight against terrorism was dealing with drug trafficking, which was an important part of the financing of insurgent groups. NATO tried to cut off the financial resources of terrorist groups by reducing the production and trade of drugs in Afghanistan. Cultivation and drug trafficking not only affected the internal security of Afghanistan, but was considered a threat to international security¹¹¹. Financial resources from drug trafficking helped terrorism and transnational crimes. NATO was trying to target the infrastructure of drug production and distribution in Afghanistan. This included the destruction of poppy fields, heroin factories, and drug trafficking routes. NATO's military mission in Afghanistan,

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Hoffman, "Realism in Action: Obama's Foreign Policy in Afghanistan", *Political analysis*, 16(1), (2015). p. 83-84.

¹¹⁰ Arsalan Qurbani Sheikh & Mahmood Bahoosh, "U.S. Presidents Policy After September 11. 2001, And Peace Building in Afghanistan" *International Research Quarterly Journal*, 5, (16), (2015). p. 31-32.

¹¹¹ Nazanin Khurami & Hassan Ayyvazzadeh Ardabili, NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country, *Political studies of Islamic world*, 2(8), (2014). p. 14

after almost 20 years of conflict and war, finally moved towards negotiations and a political solution with the Taliban. NATO, which entered Afghanistan in 2001 after the terrorist attacks of September 11, as part of the international coalition, with the aim of fighting terrorism and establishing security in Afghanistan, overthrew the Taliban regime and suppressed the Al-Qaeda organization and other terrorist groups. However, in the end, conflicts and long-term military presence did not lead to positive results in the field of Afghanistan's stability, and it made NATO gradually come to the conclusion that a military solution alone cannot solve the problem of Afghanistan. Therefore, the negotiations started as a political process between the US and the Taliban. Ultimately, these negotiations led to the Doha Agreement in 2020 between the United States and the Taliban, which marked the gradual withdrawal of American and NATO forces from Afghanistan.

These negotiations were welcomed by all NATO allies. The Secretary General of NATO, in a statement that he presented on February 18, 2021, at the NATO Defense Ministers' Conference, said that the agreement made with the Taliban has preconditions that include reducing violence and ending the Taliban's relationship and cooperation with other terrorist groups¹¹². However, after the complete withdrawal of USA and NATO forces from Afghanistan and the dramatic collapse of the previous government of this country and the return of the Taliban regime to power in August 2021, Afghanistan has again become the base of terrorist groups. With the exception of the Khorasan branch of ISIS, which is fighting against the Taliban, all the terrorist groups based in Afghanistan are under the cover and support of the Taliban, and the Taliban leaders have close cooperation with the groups. These groups include the Al-Qaeda network to the Pakistani Taliban TTP and jihadist groups in Central Asia¹¹³. Therefore, the claim that the Taliban is not related to terrorist groups in the region is far from reality. During the war with the United States

¹¹² NATO, "Online press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the second day of the meetings of NATO Defense Ministers", (2021). Accessed 11.01.2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinion/s_181561.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹¹³ Mohammad Asfandiyar, "Two Years Under the Taliban: Is Afghanistan a Terrorist Safe Haven Once Again?" *United States Institute of Peace*, Accessed: 15.01.2024, <https://www.usip.org/publication/s/2023/08/two-years-under-taliban-afghanistan-terrorist-safe-haven-once-again>.

and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the Taliban was in contact with these groups and received support from them, and now that the Taliban are in control of Afghanistan, they have maintained their relationship with these groups.

3.1.2 Providing Security and Stability

One of NATO's goals was to provide security and reduce violence throughout Afghanistan. This mission included dealing with rebels and armed groups that were a threat to the central government and the security of the Afghan people. NATO sought to support the central government of Afghanistan so that the country could gradually take full control over its internal affairs. This support included securing elections, protecting government institutions, and creating conditions for political development. NATO's support for security and stability in Afghanistan was one of the main missions of this organization after the military operation in 2001¹¹⁴. Providing security and establishing stability was one of the primary and fundamental goals of the NATO mission, which was carried out through supporting the Afghan government and strengthening local security forces. These measures included training and equipping the Afghan military and police forces so that they can establish security in the country and prevent the resurgence of militant and terrorist groups. Also, NATO participated in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan's infrastructure and basic services to support the social and economic stability of the country. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, NATO and the international community created the Afghan National Army. This army, known as the "Afghan National Army", was established as a newly established force to defend the territorial integrity and national security of Afghanistan. NATO, along with other international partners, helped establish new military institutions in Afghanistan. These institutions included the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and training centers for the military forces¹¹⁵. NATO trained Afghan army forces through various training missions. These trainings included basic military training,

¹¹⁴ Haldun Yalçinkaya & Dilvar Arıkan Açar, "NATO peacekeeping in Afghanistan: Expanding the Role to Counterinsurgency or Limiting it to Security Assistance", *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, 2(2) (2009) p. 72-76.

¹¹⁵ Fikrat Bayır, "Reasons for Failure of Afghanistan National Security Forces", *Savşad Savunma ve Savaş Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 32(2), (2022), p. 219-220.

advanced tactics, special operations, and force management. In this context, NATO used the military forces of its various member countries. NATO also provided military advice to Afghan army commanders. These consultations were provided in various fields such as planning military operations, managing resources, and developing defense strategies¹¹⁶. Also, NATO, in cooperation with the United States and other allies, provided military equipment for the Afghan army. NATO member countries and international partners allocated significant financial budgets to meet the needs of the Afghan army. These funds were used to pay the troops, buy equipment, and meet the logistical needs of the army¹¹⁷. NATO supported the Afghan forces by providing air support and logistical assistance in major operations. These aids allowed the Afghan army to operate in difficult and remote areas without worrying about logistical and support limitations.

Also, by investing in Afghanistan's military infrastructure, such as the construction of bases and training centers, NATO helped the Afghan forces to provide the necessary structures for growth and development. Also, one of NATO's goals in Afghanistan was to support the democratic structure and institutions in this country. The total efforts that NATO made in the field of reconstruction, security, consultation, strengthening of government institutions and supporting elections were in the direction of consolidating a democratic system. The United States and NATO allies participated in development projects and infrastructure reconstruction in Afghanistan to provide the economic and social conditions necessary for the development of democracy¹¹⁸. These efforts helped to build and strengthen the democratic infrastructure in Afghanistan to some extent, although numerous political and security challenges continued to affect the country's democratic process. According to NATO's official report in 2021, the Secretary General of this organization stated that NATO invaded this country in response to an organized attack on the United States from Afghanistan and to fight international terrorism, and the efforts of NATO allies in the past two decades have been to Organized attacks on our members

¹¹⁶Andrea Carati, "No Easy Way Out: Origins of NATO's Difficulties in Afghanistan", *Contemporary Security Policy Journal*, 36(2), (2015), p. 211-213.

¹¹⁷ Lepri, "Afghanistan: The tale of a failure foretold. Policy Paper", p. 9-10.

¹¹⁸ Ardabili, Khorami, NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country, p. 25.

should not be carried out from the soil of Afghanistan. This report also adds about the rapid collapse of the previous Afghan government, which was unpredictable for NATO¹¹⁹. The noteworthy point is that, considering NATO's long presence in Afghanistan and the experience it gained in the field of fighting terrorism and the war in Afghanistan, as well as the knowledge it had of the capability and capacity of the government it supported in Afghanistan, the rapid collapse of the previous government of Afghanistan in August 2021 was unpredictable for NATO.

2.1. NATO's main challenges in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan is considered one of the most complex and challenging NATO missions in the history of this organization. This mission, which started in 2001, had the main objective of fighting the Al-Qaeda terrorist group and overthrowing the Taliban regime. But over time, this war turned into a complex conflict that included fighting local insurgencies, trying to stabilize and rebuild the country, and finally trying to get out of Afghanistan safely. The NATO mission in Afghanistan faced many challenges that greatly affected the success and effectiveness of the operations of this military organization. Problems in NATO control and command in Afghanistan were one of the main factors that negatively affected the effectiveness of the organization's missions. Lack of coordination between forces, complex command structure, operational limitations and differences between commanders and political officials made NATO unable to fully achieve its goals in Afghanistan. These problems ultimately reduced the effectiveness of the NATO mission and created greater challenges in establishing stability and security in Afghanistan. NATO's command in Afghanistan consisted of several different levels, including the International Military Command (ISAF), US-led coalition forces, and Afghan forces¹²⁰. This complex structure sometimes caused interference in decision-making and slowness in reacting to field situations. The inconsistency between these different levels of command also sometimes led to the lack of accurate implementation of

¹¹⁹ NATO. Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, (2021) Access Date: 23.03.2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_186088.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹²⁰ Carati, No Easy Way Out: Origins of NATO's Difficulties in Afghanistan. Contemporary Security Policy, p. 206-207.

plans and operations. On the other hand, sometimes the difference of views between the military commanders and the political authorities of the NATO member countries caused the decisions to be delayed or not carried out effectively. Military commanders might have preferred more aggressive approaches, while political officials favored more cautious methods for domestic or international reasons¹²¹. NATO members in Afghanistan had different goals and motivations. Some countries focused more on reconstruction and humanitarian aid, while others focused on military operations and countering the Taliban. These differences caused NATO commanders to face many challenges in creating a common and coordinated strategy¹²².

Political differences among NATO member states also affected the mission in Afghanistan. Some countries demanded to reduce their commitments in Afghanistan due to domestic political pressures, especially in the face of increasing military casualties. This issue is especially visible in European countries where public support for the war had decreased¹²³. These political pressures caused some countries to reduce their forces or limit their missions, which led to disharmony among NATO forces¹²⁴. Each of the NATO member countries pursued their own goals and priorities in Afghanistan. For example, the United States focused more on the fight against terrorism and the destruction of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, while European countries such as Germany and Italy paid more attention to reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid issues. This difference in goals and

¹²¹ Ardabili, Khorami, NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country, p. 16.

¹²² Ardabili, Khorami, NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country, p. 18-19.

¹²³ One of the biggest differences among NATO members in the war in Afghanistan was the difference in the level of military commitments. Some countries, especially the United States, sent more troops to Afghanistan and played a major role in military operations, while European countries were less willing to send more troops or be in more dangerous areas. This difference in commitments meant that the military burden of the war fell more heavily on the shoulders of a few countries, notably the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. The differences among NATO members in the war in Afghanistan were one of the main reasons for the failure of NATO's mission in establishing lasting peace and stability in this country. These differences, from the level of military commitments to political and strategic issues, made NATO unable to achieve its goals in a coordinated and effective manner. In addition, the lack of a unified strategy and solidarity among members led to instability and ineffectiveness in many NATO operations in Afghanistan.

approaches made coordination between NATO forces difficult and common strategies were not fully implemented. Until recent years, US policy focused on continuing military pressure on the Taliban to weaken the group and advance its war aims¹²⁵. Some European countries, such as Germany and Norway, were more looking for political and diplomatic solutions to end the war and supported negotiations with the Taliban. This political approach caused differences in NATO strategies. The difference in the goals and priorities of NATO member countries in Afghanistan was one of the key factors that led to inconsistency in NATO's mission and reduced the effectiveness of operations. Each NATO member country had a special approach to the mission in Afghanistan according to their national interests, internal pressures and foreign policies. Many NATO members were subject to restrictions imposed by their legislatures on sending troops to Afghanistan.

For example, the forces of some governments were not allowed to move to the southern regions of Afghanistan, or some countries, such as German forces, had restrictions on night operations. Although official restrictions were not announced by some countries, but in the area of operation, their forces were prevented from carrying out some missions. Confronting or attacking the Taliban militia forces in time required unity of command and high maneuverability, which the aforementioned limitations have practically prevented the implementation of successful operations. One of the challenges faced by the NATO mission in Afghanistan was the presence and influence of warlords and powerful local commanders in the country's political and military scene. Warlords were people who gained a lot of power during the civil wars and the struggle against the former Soviet Union, and in some areas of Afghanistan, they acted as local leaders and even as unofficial government institutions. The warlords in Afghanistan have also played a role in the failure of the NATO mission. These individuals, who were mostly local commanders with military and political power, had negative effects on the stability of the country and the success of NATO missions due to their influence and control over different regions of

¹²⁵ Ardabili, Khorami, "NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country", p. 18-19.

Afghanistan¹²⁶. Warlords often used their power and influence in different regions to control local government systems and spread corruption in government institutions. They used their position to gain economic resources and political power and led to the weakening of the central government of Afghanistan¹²⁷. Some warlords entered into deals and cooperation with the Taliban and other rebel groups to maintain their power and control over different regions. This cooperation included information exchange, logistic support and even military coordination. These actions of the warlords made NATO's efforts to deal with the rebels fail and the Taliban forces could continue to operate in some areas.

3.2.1 Governmental Corruption

Widespread corruption in Afghanistan's government institutions was one of the important factors that had a profound effect on the failure and effectiveness of the NATO mission in this country. Corruption at various government and security levels, including the army and police, caused people to lose their trust in the government and government institutions. One of the main goals of NATO was to train and equip Afghan security forces to ensure internal security. But widespread corruption in the ranks of the security forces, including the embezzlement and sale of military equipment, reduced the ability and readiness of these forces. Because of this, NATO could not create a reliable and efficient force in Afghanistan. Corruption in the governments of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani is known as one of the key factors in the failure of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Both presidents faced serious challenges in dealing with corruption in government institutions, security forces and the judicial system. This widespread corruption not only negatively affected the stability and reconstruction of Afghanistan, but also thwarted NATO's efforts to create an efficient and stable government. Corruption government of Afghanistan caused a major part of the financial aid and resources allocated for the

¹²⁶ The presence and influence of warlords in Afghanistan's politics and security has been a big challenge for the central government and the international community. By maintaining their own armed forces and control over local economic resources, they often opposed the central government and prevented the establishment of a stable and efficient government. In addition, warlords have often been accused of spreading corruption, drug trafficking, and human rights violations.

¹²⁷ Ayvazzadeh Ardabili & Khorami, "NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country", p. 21.

reconstruction and development of Afghanistan to go into the pockets of corrupt officials instead of spending on public benefit projects. This caused the ineffectiveness of the development projects and the failure to achieve the goals of NATO in the reconstruction and improvement of the social and economic situation of Afghanistan. Widespread corruption in the government caused the Afghan people to distrust NATO's goals and ability to bring about positive changes in their country. This mistrust led to a decrease in public support for the presence of foreign forces and an increase in resistance against them¹²⁸. On the other hand, the continuation of corruption and the failure to implement reforms caused the international community, especially NATO members, to reduce their support for the Afghan government over time.

The reduction of financial and military aid due to the concern of wasting resources in corrupt systems led to the further weakening of the Afghan government and increased the ability of the Taliban to advance. As a result, governmental corruption is recognized as one of the main factors of the ineffectiveness of the NATO mission in Afghanistan, which led to a decrease in public trust, weakness of the security forces, wastage of resources and inefficiency in law enforcement, and ultimately had a negative impact on the NATO mission.

2.1.1. Massive corruption in the US reconstruction program in Afghanistan

The USA reconstruction program in Afghanistan was one of the largest and most expensive post-war reconstruction efforts in modern history. According to the official report of the SIGAR¹²⁹ organization, the United States spent 143 billion dollars in the reconstruction of Afghanistan until 2021; however, the living conditions in Afghanistan remained critical. SIGAR or (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction)

¹²⁸ Ayvazzadeh Ardabili & Khorami, "NATO in Afghanistan Evaluation of its Challenges for Establishing the Security in an Islamic Country", pp. 21.

¹²⁹ SIGAR, (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) was an independent oversight body established by the United States government in 2008. The main purpose of this body was to monitor and evaluate how the financial resources and aid of the United States are spent in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and to fight corruption and mismanagement in this process. SIGAR played an especially important role in exposing corruption, inefficiencies and misuse of financial resources in various projects related to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

was an independent oversight body established by the United States government in 2008. The main purpose of this body was to monitor and evaluate how the financial resources and aid of the United States are spent in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and to fight corruption and mismanagement in this process. SIGAR played an especially important role in exposing corruption, inefficiencies and misuse of financial resources in various projects related to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The question is, what happened to the vast financial aid of the United States and where was it used? The answer to this question lies with the companies and contractors to whom the USA government entrusted this budget.

The USA reconstruction program in the areas of energy, education and health has been accompanied by many failures. For example, the development of the electricity network in Afghanistan was one of the main goals of the reconstruction program, but at the end of the reconstruction period in 2020, Afghanistan was facing a serious electricity crisis. In 2013, 30 percent of the people of Afghanistan had access to electricity, and in 2020, 35 percent of people had access to electricity in a standard form. Meanwhile, Afghanistan has enough oil and gas to fuel the power plant, as well as wide rivers to build dams and generate electricity. Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, has always faced continuous and widespread power outages, and this is despite the fact that two U.S. companies (Black Veatch) and (Louis Berger) are required to provide electricity to Kabul. The mentioned companies built a power plant to supply electricity, which was supposed to use Afghanistan's gas resources to produce electricity, but instead of using Afghanistan's gas resources; imported diesel was used as fuel. In such conditions, in 2010, the cost of using diesel was so high that importing electricity from neighboring countries was much cheaper for Afghanistan. Until 2010, due to the high cost of using diesel, this power plant could not fully supply Kabul with electricity, and finally this \$300 million project went bankrupt¹³⁰.

¹³⁰ Destruction Documentary, "How Afghanistan was the Cradle of West", Accessed: 03.05.2024, <https://youtu.be/GBbH6gDH4Hk?si=HXjBtGewgQ7cQFZj>.

3.2.3. Failure Of the Judicial System

In every country there is a judicial system that is obliged to fight corruption. At the beginning of the reconstruction period, the United States promised to establish an efficient justice system in Afghanistan. Eric Holder, the Attorney General of the United States between 2009 and 2015, speaks with complete determination about the rule of law, complete transparency and maximum justice in Afghanistan but at the end of the presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, the indicators of justice and rule of law were in the most critical situation. The reports of the World Justice Organization (WJP) in 2019 and 2020 confirm this issue. Afghanistan ranked 122nd out of 128 countries in the rule of law, and was among the last 10 countries in the implementation of regulations, and ranked 123rd out of 128 countries in civil justice. In addition to the reports of international institutions, the people of Afghanistan were extremely dissatisfied with the judicial system that the United States had established.

According to the Global Justice Project report, people had the most distrust in Afghan judges. For this reason, most of the people in the rural society of Afghanistan felt that the formal judicial system could not administer justice, so they preferred to refer to the informal judicial system to pursue their legal affairs. According to the report of the Global Justice Project, the first thing in the minds of the Afghan people regarding the courts was corruption. All these fundamental problems in the Afghan judicial system caused the International Criminal Court, or The Hague Court, to consider the Afghan judicial system completely collapsed due to its inefficiency. Therefore, widespread and organized corruption was one of the important factors in the failure of the US reconstruction process in Afghanistan. This corruption was rooted in ineffective management by the United States, foreign contractors, and corrupt Afghan government officials¹³¹.

¹³¹ Destruction Documentary, “How Afghanistan was the Cradle of West”, Accessed: 05.10.2024, <https://youtu.be/GBbH6gDH4Hk?si=HXjBtGewgQ7cQFZj>.

3.3. NATO Mistakes in Afghanistan

3.3.1 Corruption in the Reconstruction of the Afghan National Army

Afghanistan's national forces were the most important organizations that the United States created with the support of NATO allies to ensure security and stability, but Afghanistan became the most insecure country in the world in 2020 at the end of NATO's presence. Part of the ineffectiveness of the Afghan army was due to the lack of strategic equipment, especially in the air force. On the other hand, the same limited equipment that was available to the Afghan army remained unused due to the violations of the United States in military contracts. For example, the purchase of 20 decommissioned airplanes for the Afghan government was an example of the widespread disruptions of the United States in rebuilding the army. These G222 cargo planes were bought by the Pentagon from an Italian company at a cost of 486 million dollars, but these planes were sold six years later for a very small amount of 32 thousand dollars due to the lack of production of parts in the company. One of the examples of widespread corruption in the reconstruction of the Afghan army was the Pentagon's incredible spending on the uniforms of the Afghan national security forces.

From 28 million dollars to 93 million dollars were variable costs that were announced for military uniforms. According to the SIGAR report, this expense was indicative of massive corruption in the US Department of Defense. On the other hand, the military uniforms provided by the United States were inappropriate for the geographical context of Afghanistan. The corrupting restructuring of the USA in the Afghan army had other wide dimensions; foreign military officials stationed in Afghanistan promoted a number of Afghan officers who had relations with US forces to the position of commander and general in a very short time. Meanwhile, it takes 20 years to train a colonel in the USA Army. The most important result of this action was the rapid spread of corruption in the network of the Afghan armed forces. Meanwhile, it takes 20 years to train a colonel in the US Army. The most important result of this action was the rapid spread of corruption in the network of the Afghan armed forces. One of the most prominent examples of corruption was the false statistics of the number of Afghan soldiers so that the non-existent soldiers' budget would go into the pockets of corrupt contractors and commanders. Corruption among US soldiers and contractors during the reconstruction of the Afghan

army was one of the serious challenges that negatively affected US efforts to build an independent and efficient military. This corruption included the misuse of financial resources and illegal contracts, which not only led to the waste of billions of dollars in foreign aid, but also severely reduced the trust of the Afghan people in the international forces and the Afghan government¹³².

3.3.3. Establishment of an affiliated army

NATO in Afghanistan carried out extensive activities in the field of training and equipping the Afghan security forces with the aim of creating a national army to maintain internal security and deal with external threats. But, in practice, Afghanistan's security and military institutions became heavily dependent on financial support, equipment and training from NATO and Western countries. The strategy of the United States in order to establish the Afghan National Security Forces provided the basis for the formation of an army completely dependent on the support of the United States and NATO. The Afghan army was heavily dependent on military, technical, and financial support from the United States and NATO¹³³. Many military operations, especially in the field of air support, intelligence and logistics, were not possible without the help of foreign forces. This dependence made the Afghan army unable to become an independent force, and with the withdrawal of international forces, the structural weaknesses of these forces were revealed. The United States made many efforts to rebuild and strengthen the Afghan Air Force, but these efforts failed due to heavy reliance on foreign technical and logistical support. The heavy dependence of the Afghan National Army on foreign support was one of the key factors in the failure of this army to maintain security and deal with internal threats. This dependence made the army unable to become an independent and self-sufficient force, and with the reduction or withdrawal of foreign forces, it was quickly weakened. Afghanistan's experience shows that creating an independent and effective army requires the development of infrastructure, internal capabilities, and reducing dependence on

¹³² Destruction Documentary, "How Afghanistan was the Cradle of West", Accessed: 15.06.2024, <https://youtu.be/GBbH6gDH4Hk?si=HXjBtGewgQ7cQFZj>.

¹³³ John F Sopko, "Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the US Experience in Afghanistan" SIGAR Official Website, (2017) Accessed: 20.06.2024, <https://www.sigar.mil>

foreign support. One of the mistakes of the United States during the war in Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism was the interactions and indirect payments to the Taliban to ensure security and stability in different regions. In many cases, NATO forces and military contractors paid Taliban commanders and insurgent groups to provide security for their convoys passing through Taliban-controlled areas. These payments were made with the aim of preventing attacks on caravans and ensuring safe passage through these areas. An assessment by U.S. officials based in Kabul in 2009 shows that at least ten percent of the Pentagon's logistics contracts in Afghanistan, estimated at hundreds of millions, include payments to insurgents and Taliban commanders¹³⁴.

While these payments may have helped maintain security in the short term, in the long term they strengthened the Taliban and undermined NATO and the Afghan government's efforts to build a stable and independent government. Coalition-affiliated contractors responsible for reconstruction projects were also sometimes forced to pay the Taliban or local groups to secure their workers and equipment. These payments were usually justified as "security fees", but in practice they amounted to blackmailing the Taliban to prevent attacks on infrastructure and reconstruction projects. These extortions inadvertently helped the Taliban to increase their financial resources and strengthen their military power. Rather than weakening the Taliban, these payments allowed them to obtain more resources to equip and pay their forces. In addition, this issue also reduced the credibility of NATO and the Afghan government among the public, because it showed that NATO is not even able to secure its projects without interacting with the enemies. Part of the extensive efforts of NATO and the U.S. in Afghanistan after September 11th was spending very heavy budgets to create the Afghan National Army. In the first year of the establishment of the interim administration in Afghanistan in 2001, the creation of the national army and security and defense forces was discussed. Then, the process of attracting and recruiting troops to form the national army, with the support, consultation and direct supervision of the western allies of the Afghan government, led by the United

¹³⁴ Dave Clemente & Ryan Evans, "Wartime Logistics in Afghanistan and Beyond Handling Wicked Problems and Complex Adaptive Systems", *Chatham House*, (2014), p. 23-24.

States, practically began. All the affairs of the Afghan National Army, from the formation of the first military unit and recruitment of soldiers to the last days of its collapse, were carried out under the direct supervision of USA and NATO military advisors. But this does not mean that the Afghan government and the previous military had no role in the formation and management of this army; Rather, the role of Afghanistan's leadership was more neutral, because they did not have the necessary capacity to determine the lines and macro-strategic goals. Afghanistan's political and military leaders were not able to effectively use the provided capacities of NATO advisors and financial, professional and logistical assistance. Therefore, part of the factor of dependence and eventual collapse of the Afghan National Army was the inability of the country's leaders. They were unable to establish a stable national army, until this army collapsed at an astonishing speed on August 15, 2021, with the escape of Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the former president of Afghanistan.¹³⁵ Despite all this, the collapse of the Afghan National Army in August 2021 has several reasons, part of which is the strong dependence of the Afghan defense and security forces on NATO support.

Official reports and analyzes awaited by the Special Inspection Office for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and other sources, consider the dependence of the Afghan National Army on the military support of NATO and the United States as one of the main factors of the collapse of the Afghan National Army. The Afghan army was heavily dependent on equipment and technical support, including USA-supplied aircraft and vehicles, and the inability to provide this support through internal forces meant that this equipment became unusable or fell into the hands of the Taliban. One of the main reasons for this collapse was the inability of the Afghan army to be self-sufficient and the constant need for USA specialists and contractors to maintain and repair advanced equipment¹³⁶. The Afghan army was not able to provide the necessary tools and repair military vehicles

¹³⁵ Abdulsaboor Janbaaz, "Investigating the Factors and reasons for the collapse of the Afghan National Army", *Hasht-e Sub Journal*, Accessed: 22.05.2024, <https://8am.media/fa/investigating-the-causes-and-reasons-for-the-collapse-of-the-afghan-national-army/>

¹³⁶ SIGAR Reports, "Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed, *SIGAR Website*", (2023). Accessed: 29.05.2024, <https://www.bing.com/search?pc=OA1&q=SIGAR%20report%20on%20Afghan%20National%20Army>.

and aircrafts, and after the departure of foreign contractors who previously provided the technical and logistical needs of the army, the Afghan army faced extensive challenges, so that Many army units, especially the air force barracks, were unable to continue their activities due to logistical problems and lack of supplies. The reports of SIGAR, the USA Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, have examined the fundamental and structural problems of the Afghan National Army. These reports show that the Afghan army had many problems with power and self-sufficiency and was heavily dependent on the support of the United States and NATO. The main problems included mismanagement, widespread corruption, low levels of literacy and expertise among soldiers and officers, as well as high desertion rates. Despite the large investments, equipment and training provided by the US and NATO, the Afghan army was unable to carry out complex operations or even maintain its equipment and was in dire need of direct support from NATO and USA forces¹³⁷.

After the withdrawal of USA forces and the reduction of military support, these forces quickly collapsed and many equipment fell into the hands of the Taliban after August 2021. Also, SIGAR reports that USA emphasis on quick and short-term results, the haste to finalize the negotiations and the withdrawal of troops, and the lack of proper assessment of the field situation caused the Afghan defense and security forces to fail in defending the country and maintaining the political system. These factors caused the Afghan army to not have the ability to deal with the Taliban independently, and finally, with the withdrawal of the American forces, it collapsed quickly. The Air Force, which was created for the Afghan army, was also heavily dependent on foreign equipment and consultants in all aspects, and it was not able to carry out air operations and supplies without contractors who took ammunition, parts, technical and logistical matters. In this way, with the withdrawal of foreign forces and contractors, the Afghan National Army lost one of its strategic advantages in the sky, and the ground forces without the support of the Air Force were stuck on the ground and lost their maneuverability and the possibility of deployment

¹³⁷ SIGAR Report, “Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed, SIGAR Website”, (2023). Accessed: 07.06.2024, <https://www.bing.com/search?pc=OA1&q=SIGAR%20report%20on%20Afghan%20National%20Army>.

and survival. Therefore, this can be considered as a general factor of instability and collapse of the Afghan National Army at three levels. The first level is the international partners of the Afghan army, NATO and the United States, who played a key role in the creation of the Afghan army. The second is the level of the political leadership of Afghanistan, who lost the opportunity to create a strong and disciplined army due to the weakness and lack of a strategic view of the country under the broad support of NATO and the United States. And the third level is the senior Afghan military officers who were responsible for defending and organizing the forces during the fight against the Taliban and the fall of the previous government¹³⁸. The collapse of the Afghan army was a combination of factors such as the weakness of political leadership and the lack of necessary capacities in the army. It should be mentioned that from NATO's point of view, the collapse of the Afghan National Army was the result of the failure of the government leaders to stand up to the Taliban. According to the official statement presented by the NATO Secretary General on August 17, 2021, he called the fall of Afghanistan the result of failure in political leadership. The NATO Secretary General also stated that part of the Afghan security forces fought bravely against the Taliban, but the weakness in the political leadership, especially the escape of the former President of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf, hastened the collapse of the army¹³⁹.

3.3.4. Ignoring The Culture and History of Afghanistan

One of NATO's key mistakes in Afghanistan was the disregard for local culture, history, values and social structures. This neglect not only led to the failure to establish effective communication with the Afghan people, but also caused a decrease in public support for the NATO mission and an increase in local resistance. The efforts of the United States and NATO to create a central government based on the western models of governance, regardless of the historical and cultural structures of Afghanistan, failed. These models

¹³⁸ Janbaaz, "Investigating the Factors and reasons for the collapse of the Afghan National Army", Accessed: 07.06.2024, <https://8am.media/fa/investigating-the-causes-and-reasons-for-the-collapse-of-the-afghan-national-army/>

¹³⁹ NATO Report, "Press Briefing on Afghanistan by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg", (2021). Accessed: 12.06.2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_186040.htm.

were not compatible with the realities of Afghanistan, which have always tended towards decentralized and local governments. Efforts to create a strong central government without considering the need to decentralize and strengthen local institutions weakened domestic support for the government¹⁴⁰. On the other hand, in some cases, NATO forces unintentionally disrespected the Afghan people due to ignorance of local customs. For example, entering homes without permission or carrying out surprise searches that were against local culture and values caused dissatisfaction and reduced public support for NATO. These behaviors also fueled Taliban propaganda that presented NATO as a foreign and aggressive force. NATO's disregard for Afghanistan's culture, values and social structures was one of the important factors that contributed to the failure of this organization's mission in the country. Without paying attention to these important dimensions, NATO could not effectively cooperate with the Afghan people and receive local support. On the other hand, civilian casualties are also one of the factors that caused pessimism towards the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

The massive casualties of civilians in the war in Afghanistan over time caused a change in the attitude and widespread opposition of public opinion in Western countries towards the continuation of NATO's war in Afghanistan. This factor, especially in NATO member countries and the United States played an important role in shaping the public opposition to the military presence in Afghanistan and ultimately contributed to political decisions leading to the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. One of the major concerns of public opinion in the West was civilian casualties during military operations in Afghanistan. Airstrikes, night operations, and armed clashes between coalition forces and the Taliban have resulted in the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians. These casualties not only increased public discontent in Afghanistan and strengthened the Taliban, but were also criticized in the West as one of the unpleasant aspects of the war. Images and reports of civilian casualties in the Western media caused many people and human rights activists to call for an end to this war. On the other hand, civilian casualties, especially in airstrikes

¹⁴⁰ Schurter. "The Failures of US Policy in Afghanistan and the Lessons Learned (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest)", p. 23-25.

and night operations, caused many Afghans to view NATO and foreign forces as forces that do not care about their security. This mistrust increased over time and caused the Afghan people to have a negative view of NATO's military presence, even in areas not controlled by the Taliban. This situation caused public support for NATO's mission to decline and foreign forces to be seen as part of the security problem, rather than a solution to it¹⁴¹.

3.3.5. Irresponsible withdrawal from Afghanistan – 2021

The transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces and the gradual withdrawal of NATO forces were done faster than necessary. Due to the lack of effective training and equipment, the Afghan security forces were not sufficiently prepared to deal with internal threats, especially the Taliban insurgency. In 2008, an official NATO assessment showed that 62 percent of the Afghan National Army units were not suitable for combat operations even with the support of NATO forces¹⁴². Therefore, the weakness in Afghanistan's security structures caused the Taliban to quickly take control of the country after the withdrawal of NATO forces. Based on the 2020 peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban, which was signed in Doha, Qatar, USA President Joe Biden announced the withdrawal of USA and NATO forces from Afghanistan in April 2021, and September 11 was set as the final withdrawal date, but the withdrawal process The NATO coalition continued until August 2021 and on the eve of the fall of the previous government of Afghanistan. According to the official report in 2021 presented by Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO announced the withdrawal of the Resolute Support Mission forces from Afghanistan at the end of April 2021¹⁴³. The speed of withdrawal of NATO forces did not give enough time to plan and manage the transfer of power. As soon as the NATO forces left, the Taliban advanced faster than expected and eventually managed to take control of Afghanistan within a few months. This rapid collapse of the Afghan government

¹⁴¹ Documentary, “America and the Taliban: Part two – (Full documentary) Frontline”, Accessed: 18.06.2024, <https://youtu.be/CQKERL9h7Yo?si=lFykAs5aUAFwPtJ>.

¹⁴² Schurter, “The Failures of US Policy in Afghanistan and the Lessons Learned (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest)”, p. 32-33.

¹⁴³ NATO Report, “NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the release of his Annual Report 2021”, Accessed: 24.06.2024, https://www.nato.int/cp s/en/natohq/opinions_193_943.htm?selected Loc ale=en.

showed that the internal security and political structures were not yet sufficiently prepared to manage the country. On the other hand, after two decades of armed war against the Taliban, the United States finally signed an agreement with the Taliban on February 29, 2020, which is known as the Doha Agreement¹⁴⁴. One of the most important parts of the agreement was the commitment of the United States to the gradual withdrawal of all foreign military forces from Afghanistan. According to this agreement, the United States and NATO committed to withdraw all their forces from Afghanistan within 14 months, provided that the Taliban adheres to its security obligations¹⁴⁵. The official and secret negotiations of the United States with the Taliban on the one hand weakened the Afghan government and on the other hand gave the Taliban international legitimacy.

The Taliban, who were previously known as a rebel and terrorist group, were able to introduce themselves as an important political actor and gain attention at the international level. The noteworthy point is that, considering NATO's long presence in Afghanistan and the experience it gained in the field of fighting terrorism and the war in Afghanistan, as well as the knowledge it had of the capability and capacity of the government it supported in Afghanistan, the rapid collapse of the previous government of Afghanistan in August 2021 was unpredictable for NATO. However, with the passage of time and the reduction of the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, the attacks of the Taliban on the territory under the rule of the previous government of Afghanistan and the casualties of civilians also increased. In the August 13th statement, just a few days before the collapse of the Afghan government, NATO stated that would continue to support the Afghan National Army and its diplomatic presence in this country, and the Taliban must understand that if they want to dominate Afghanistan through force, they will not be recognized by international community¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁴ The Doha Agreement, signed between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, 2020, was seen as a major effort to end Afghanistan's long-running war. But the failure of this agreement to achieve its main goals, especially the establishment of a lasting peace and peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan, has been widely criticized.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Clyton, "US Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: Frequently Asked Questions" *Congressional Research Service*. (2021). p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ NATO Report, "NATO Secretary General statement on Afghanistan (2021)", Accessed: 25.06.2024, https://www.nato.int/cp/s/en/nat oh q/news_186033.htm?selectedLocale=en.

Also, in another statement dated June 14, 2021, NATO stated that NATO's military mission in Afghanistan has ended. NATO helped the Afghan government to build its security and defense institutions and assume the responsibility of providing security in the country. NATO has carried out extensive cooperation in training and equipping the Afghan National Army, and now the full responsibility of Afghanistan's security is to be handed over to these forces. The Secretary General of NATO also emphasized that the withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan does not mean the end of relations with this country and that NATO still stands by Afghanistan and continues its commitment to support the Afghan people, institutions and achievements of the past 20 years in the country. NATO's Senior Civilian Representative Office remains in Kabul for diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan¹⁴⁷.

NATO also continuously emphasized on supporting the peace and reconciliation process of the former Afghan government with the Taliban, but this process did not succeed, and with the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban quickly assumed control of the country. The massive USA military presence in Afghanistan and the start of the state building project imposed huge military costs on the country's economy. The prestigious Watson Institute of Brown University has estimated that between 2001 and 2021, the USA has spent more than 2300 billion dollars to fight terrorism in this country. Considering the expenses incurred, the USA government during the time of President Obama could not stop the process of state building in Afghanistan, nor was it willing to bear its increasing expenses. It was in such circumstances that the Afghanistan case was handed over to Donald Trump, the next president. Trump believed that the United States should avoid painful foreign commitments so as not to damage the American economy.

¹⁴⁷ NATO, "Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021", Accessed: 28.06.2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm?selectedLocale=en.

The most important element of Trump's strategy in Afghanistan was the transfer of responsibility to the Afghan people, especially to the Taliban, as the only possible option that was realized within the framework of the Doha Agreement. Finally, by announcing that state building in Afghanistan will never be successful, Trump believed that it is the duty of the Afghan people to take charge of their future and that America will not build a nation in this country again¹⁴⁸. Therefore, after negotiations without preconditions between the USA and the Taliban, an agreement Doha was signed in February 2020. In this agreement, the representatives of the established government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were removed and the Taliban, without being officially recognized by the United States, are in charge. The administration of Afghanistan affairs was entrusted to it.

Analyzing the overall content of the Doha Agreement indicates shirking responsibility USA in Afghanistan and transferring the responsibility to the group that the USA government 20 years ago to destroy them Afghanistan had invaded. The absence of threats to the national security of the United States from within the territory of Afghanistan in various parts of this agreement, especially the 5 clauses of the second part, is the most important concern of the United States, and there is no longer any talk of preserving the republican system, democracy, human rights, and preserving Afghanistan's 20-year achievements¹⁴⁹. The Biden administration, which completed the official withdrawal of USA troops from Afghanistan in its own name by denying the goal of state-building in Afghanistan, announced that the United States was pursuing two main goals in Afghanistan in which it succeeded: first, killing bin Laden, the leader of the Al-Qaeda organization. and second, to destroy al-Qaeda; But nation-building in Afghanistan is not America's goal in Afghanistan. in this way, the Biden administration marked the complete withdrawal of USA military forces and other NATO allied forces from Afghanistan, and this country was once again under the illegitimate and tyrannical rule of the Taliban.

¹⁴⁸ Mohammadniya Mahdi & Naser Pour Hassan, "US military withdrawal from Afghanistan and turning to East Asia; Transition to forced hegemony", *International Studies Journal*, 20, (1). (2023). p. 107-108.

¹⁴⁹ Mahdi & Pour Hassan, "US military withdrawal from Afghanistan and turning to East Asia", p. 110

CONCLUSION

The social and cultural structure of Afghanistan played an important and complex role in the failure of the NATO mission in this country. This failure was the result of the interaction of several factors including cultural, tribal, and social differences with NATO's military and political strategies. NATO's inability to understand and adapt to Afghanistan's social and cultural complexities, including tribal structure, ethnic diversity, the influence of religion, and the role of local leaders, was one of the main reasons for the mission's failure. NATO was trying to implement a western model of government and society that did not match the cultural and social realities of Afghanistan, and this mismatch led to the strengthening of opposition forces and the failure to establish stable stability in this country.

Afghanistan's neighboring countries each played an important role in the developments of this country according to their strategic, political and security interests. These regional actors, with their interventions, made the situation in Afghanistan more complicated and ultimately contributed to the failure of the NATO mission to establish stability and security in Afghanistan. The contradictions and conflicts between the interests of these countries and NATO's goals caused the organization's efforts to create peace and stability to face more challenges and, in the end, complete success was not achieved. The role of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan, was one of the factors influencing the ineffectiveness of the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

For security and strategic reasons, these neighboring countries significantly influenced the outcomes of counterterrorism efforts and the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Pakistan's support for the Taliban insurgency against Afghanistan's former government further complicated the counterterrorism efforts, making the conflict in Afghanistan increasingly protracted and challenging. Iran also supported the Taliban because of its opposition to the presence of USA and NATO forces in Afghanistan, and Iran's policy was to fight the American political and security influence in Afghanistan. Although the Central Asian countries participated in supporting the NATO military mission, especially in the field of transit, intelligence cooperation and the fight against drugs, but the limitations of these countries in effective cooperation with NATO also affected the results of the NATO

military mission. Afghanistan's neighboring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan, were involved in the country's internal affairs for strategic and security reasons. These interventions, especially the covert support for the Taliban and rebel groups, made NATO's mission more complicated and led to failure. The NATO mission in Afghanistan started with ambitious goals, but in practice it faced very complex challenges and strategic mistakes that led to its failure.

Inadequate understanding of Afghanistan's culture and history, excessive focus on military solutions, widespread corruption in the Afghan government and foreign contractors, and the influence of neighboring countries were among the key factors that made the NATO mission unable to achieve its desired goals. NATO relied on the Afghan government to establish stability, but this government failed to gain enough support from the people due to widespread corruption and poor public service delivery. Instead of trying to reform Afghanistan's government structure, NATO mostly limited itself to providing military security, which added to the failure of this mission. NATO did not have a deep and real understanding of the social, cultural and ethnic structures of Afghanistan. This lack of recognition caused NATO's plans and policies to be incompatible with the realities of the Afghan society, and instead of attracting people's support, it caused their dissatisfaction and mistrust.

NATO member countries sometimes had different goals and strategies in Afghanistan, and this caused inconsistency and reduced the effectiveness of the mission. Each country looked at Afghanistan depending on its interests, and these differences weakened NATO's joint operations. Some NATO countries were less willing to actively participate due to internal pressures and lack of public support for their presence in Afghanistan. NATO's mission in Afghanistan struggled largely due to its lack of understanding and respect for Afghan culture, history, and social structures. This cultural disconnect hindered effective communication with the Afghan people, reduced public support, and increased local resistance. NATO and the U.S. attempted to establish a strong central government based on Western models, disregarding Afghanistan's historical preference for decentralized governance. This approach weakened domestic support for the government, as it failed to strengthen local institutions. Additionally, actions by NATO forces such as entering homes without permission violated local customs, fueling Taliban propaganda that

portrayed NATO as an intrusive, foreign force. This cultural insensitivity was a key factor in NATO's failure in Afghanistan. This issue caused some members to think about reducing commitments and reducing their forces instead of trying to achieve long-term goals. NATO member countries had different goals and priorities in Afghanistan. Some countries focused on military and security missions, while others preferred to focus on reconstruction and development projects.

These differences caused the efforts to achieve the common goal of stability and security in Afghanistan to be dimmed. As a result, this lack of coordination and differences among NATO member states reduced the ability of the alliance to achieve its security and political goals in Afghanistan and caused the mission to face serious challenges. In general, although NATO achieved some of its short-term goals during the two decades of its military presence in Afghanistan, including the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the suppression of Al-Qaeda and other terror groups, as well as the provision of relative security and stability in Afghanistan, but in achieving the long-term goals, NATO's efforts to create a stable and independent Afghanistan and to establish a stable democratic system did not lead to success. The return of the Taliban regime in August 2021 and the fall of the Afghan government following the withdrawal of NATO forces were the result of the shortcomings of the USA and NATO strategies and deep and lasting challenges in this country.

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