

SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACEBUILDING: REIMAGINING  
AFGHANISTAN'S PATH TO STABILITYJalal Ud Din Kakar<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Ayesha Ashfaq<sup>2</sup><sup>\*1</sup>Doctoral Student of International Relations, University of Lahore, Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, The University of Lahore, Pakistan<sup>1</sup>jalalkakar63@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>ayesha.ashfaq@siss.uol.edu.pkDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17709149>**Keywords**Peace-building, Development,  
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**Abstract**

Afghanistan, a nation that hosted the U.S. led peace-building mission since 2004, the objective of this peace-building mission was transformed Afghanistan into stable market-oriented economy and a stable democracy, yet the mission could not get off the ground and in the end it became clear that the effort was a hard nut to crack. The objectives of this missions remains elusive and failed to bring some concrete reforms, as policymakers tried to carry out changes but the results showed that they were barking up the wrong tree. All the two decades' efforts made by the U.S. did not bring Afghanistan a stable country, because despite trying to set up institutions, the situation kept proving that stability was easier said than done. The Western (US-led) development model has become a case in point, because of its tendency for direct military intervention as in the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, where attempts to bring about reforms often ended up being a double-edged sword. The case of Afghanistan is quite pertinent due to its time period, spanning around twenty years of NATO and ISAF forces stay, to enhance the socio-economic profile of the local populace, and initiate development through enhancing security, though efforts to work out solutions often showed that peace was walking on thin ice. This study will be benefiting from both primary face-to face interviews of the scholars from Afghanistan, US and the field experts, to understand the of peace building and understand the relations of security and development that took place in Afghanistan, as researchers attempt to look into these issues while knowing that the nexus is a bone of contention. And the paper provides a first-hand glimpse into this often-overlooked terrain in development and security studies, where the author tries to lay out findings even though the subject itself is a can of worms.

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the credible challenges for the international community in the post-Cold War era has been the growing difficult of civil conflict. In fact, all thirty major armed clashes recorded in 1995 were fought within states rather than between them. While policymakers and scholars

of conflict management have spent much time debating how best to respond to such violence, an equally critical question remains: what should be done once the fighting comes to an end? Efforts designed to keep violence from flaring up again after the end of hostilities—often referred to as post-

*conflict peacebuilding*—have been carried out in eight war-torn countries since the Cold War: Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda, and Bosnia (Paris, 1997; page, Number 55).

Further, Roland Paris believes that the work of most international agencies involved in peacebuilding seems to be guided by a single paradigm—liberal internationalism. At its core, this paradigm rests on the belief that the most reliable path to peace, both within states and across borders, lies in the establishment of market democracy—that is, a liberal democratic system paired with a market-oriented economy. In practice, peacebuilding has become a vast experiment in social engineering, one that seeks to transplant Western models of political, social, and economic organization into war-ravaged societies as a means of managing civil conflict. Put differently, it is an attempt at pacification through political and economic liberalization (Paris, 1997; page Number 56).

According to the liberal peace thesis, certain types of societies following certain norms and practices will be more peaceful; peace comes through the adoption of socio-economic and political norms and institutions that conform to the model articulated by the liberal peace paradigm, as scholars try to spell out its logic but often find it easier said than done. As per this paradigm, those institutions with democratic and market-driven institutions are more likely to have peace and development (i.e. in accordance with the liberal international order), since policymakers attempt to bring about reforms though stability remains a tall order (Newman & United Nations University Press, 2009, 1972).

The basic aim of the liberal peace agenda is to fit the fragile states into this model, as international actors attempt to set up frameworks but discover that amalgamation is a hard nut to crack. And there was a need and urgency for an international response, as a result of constructing underdevelopment and (in) security as global problems, while institutions tried to deal with crises that proved to be a vicious circle. The intervention was considered the panacea for solving all the problems of these states, by creating

a development-oriented policy with coherence, according to the needs and requirements of the fragile states, as planners attempted to carry out strategies but realized the cure was a double-edged sword (Newman & United Nations University Press, 2009, 1972). This formed one of the important basics in the backdrop of international interventions, as in the case of Bosnia and Kosovo, East Timor, Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan, where agencies tried to work out solutions but the outcomes often left them back to square one (Juichiro Tanabe, 2017).

Peace-building aims to bring peace and avoid destruction and save the world from the deadliest scourge of the war, as efforts to set up initiatives often show that war is a ticking time bomb (Krampe, 2021). According to Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary General for Peace-building Support programme she has argued that we have a record number of fatalities because of conflict by the end of 2023, 363 million people needed humanitarian assistance that was up 33% from the year before, while agencies tried to carry out relief but the crisis remained a drop in the ocean. There's something called a Global Peace Index and it has found that last year violence cost the World nearly 20 trillion us now that's 13.5% of the global GDP and that translates to about \$2,380 per person, as researchers attempt to point out the figures which reveal the tip of the iceberg. Right now about ...population is living in places that are considered fragile conflict affected and that number keeps growing, since governments try to deal with instability but peace remains a far cry (United Nations, Sep 12, 2024)

Furthermore, This research paper argued that the Afghan state has been subjected to violence, occupation, and international experimentation for many years in the name of securitization and development, with increasing intensity of these events after 2001, showing how the country was caught between a rock and a hard place while outsiders tried to carry out their agendas (Kok, 2016). It became the testing ground for different approaches and strategies of intervention, rooted in the logic of liberal peace, invoking the maxim, “there will be no development without security and no security without development,” which

often turned into a double-edged sword as interveners attempted to set up new systems. Afghanistan proved to be a classic test case for this approach, highlighting the repercussions for the interveners and the intervened, as both sides had to face the music while trying to deal with the consequences (Inada, 2024).

Both primary interviews of the experts and local population will bitterly let us in on the ground realities, and secondary literature will also weigh in to this research paper. To answer this question, this paper will look into the broader perspective of the unfulfilled promises of Afghan reconstruction, which have slipped through the cracks. Further, zooming out, one sees that the U.S. failed miserably in coming to terms with what purpose we are here in Afghanistan. This is what gives me impetus to apprehend the U.S.-led peace-building missions in Afghanistan, which remain cloaked in the events of fluidity, as truth and liability often slip through the cracks in a landscape where the fog of war never quite lifts.

**Understanding Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding:**

The objectives of the peace-building missions aimed to restore peace in war-shattered states and make them safer places, showing that stability was the need of the hour while agencies tried to bring about order. In the end of the Cold War, this became a driving force in the international community to make the world a safer place according to Roland Paris, proving that peace was often a tall order as nations attempted to set up new frameworks. Since the end of the Cold War,

one of the pervasive and most pressing challenges the international community was facing was the scourge of civil wars, which had the capacity to spread and take other nations into their flames, reminding us that conflict can be like a wildfire while policymakers struggle to deal with its consequences (Paris, 1997). Therefore, the international community has sought to establish a framework and achieve lasting peace in the world, showing that cooperation is the key to success as leaders try to work out durable solutions. Because instability in one part of the world has repercussions on other parts of the world, it proves that nations are all in the same boat while they attempt to sort out global challenges (Krampe, 2013).

Globalization has made the world inter-dependent and inter-connected; therefore, instability in Asia will have a spillover effect in Africa, proving that nations are all in the same boat while they try to deal with shared challenges (Goodhand & Sedra, 2016). Civil war is directly proportional to instability, showing that conflict is often a ticking time bomb as societies struggle to cope with its consequences. This post-conflict peacebuilding aims to turn the tide in war-shattered and war-driven societies and make them a beacon of hope for long-lasting peace, reminding us that peace is the light at the end of the tunnel while communities attempt to build up resilience (Jones, 2008).

Resolution No.	Title	Adoption Date	Key Focus	Main Actions
44/21	Enhancing international peace, security and international co-operation in all its aspects in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations	15 November 1989	Strengthen UN's role in peace, security, and global cooperation	1. <b>Calls upon</b> states to intensify efforts for peace and security 2. <b>Reaffirms</b> UN Charter principles 3. <b>Encourages</b> cooperation within UN frameworks

Table. No. 1. Resolution Number 44/21, made by Author. (No. & 44/21, n.d.15 November 1989).

Peace-making and peace-keeping operations can truly keep the conflicts at bay, showing that they can nip the problem in the bud while trying to

bring about stability. *"Their purpose is to identify and support the structures that aim to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-*

*being among the people, proving that trust is often the backbone of society as institutions try to build up resilience."* Further, Roland Paris believes that *"efforts designed to keep violence from flaring up again after the end of hostilities—often referred to as post-conflict peacebuilding—illustrate that peace is easier said than done while agencies attempt to carry out their mandates"* (Paris, 1997: pp; 55-56). According to "An Agenda for Peace," the post-conflict peacebuilding missions should include the following measures to bring an end to the violence, reminding us that success is often a tall order as practitioners try to set up lasting frameworks (Report of the Secretary-General, 17 June 1992).

- Disarming former warring parties
- Restoring law and order
- Controlling or destroying weapons
- Repatriating refugees
- Training and advisory support for security forces
- Monitoring elections
- Promoting and protecting human rights
- Reforming or strengthening government institutions
- Encouraging both formal and informal political participation

While keeping these realities in mind, the United States of America was successful in installing a weak democratic government that does not bring any sort of stability, showing that peace was always hanging by a thread while outsiders tried to set up institutions (Campbell & Alike, 2011). Prof. Dr.

Thomas Barfield believes that *"the U.S.-backed government was too centralized, and the U.S. strong support further emboldened it, yet it did not seek any kind of inclusions, proving that power without balance is often a recipe for disaster as leaders tried to hold on to authority"* (Thomas Barfield, personal communication, 2025). They failed to disarm the former warring parties, said Dr. Arshid Khan, which shows that reconciliation was easier said than done while agencies attempted to deal with the remnants of conflict (Dr. Arshid Khan, personal communication, 2025). Dr. Dost Muhammad Barach believes that for the Afghans, they were of the opinion that the U.S. had invaded them, and the democratic government failed to remove this myth, leaving the people caught between a rock and a hard place while policymakers tried to clear up misconceptions (Dr. Dost Muhammad, personal communication, 2025).

They have restored a democratic government, and further Ryan Brasher believes that *"the government was supported by foreign aid, which makes it more dependent on that aid for running the state machinery, showing that the system was built on shaky ground while leaders tried to rely on external resources"* (Dr. Ryan Brasher, personal communication, 2025). Therefore, the post-conflict peacebuilding objectives—like efforts designed to keep violence from flaring up again after the end of hostilities—do not bring any sort of stability in the context of Afghanistan, proving that peace was a far cry from reality as policymakers attempted to deal with recurring challenges.

**Post-conflict Peace-building:**

Main Focus	Key Elements / Actions
Peace-building after civil strife	Disarm warring parties and restore order Control/custody/destruction of weapons Repatriate refugees Advisory + training support for security forces Monitor elections Protect human rights Reform/strengthen government institutions Promote political participation (formal & informal)

Peace-building after international war	Cooperative projects between States (economic & social benefits) Joint development of agriculture, transportation, shared resources (water/electricity) Cultural and educational exchanges; freer travel Youth programmes Curriculum reform to reduce hostile perceptions
Peace-building in the broader peace process	Peace-building complements preventive diplomacy Preventive diplomacy = avoid crisis Peacekeeping + peacemaking = respond to conflict Post-conflict peace-building = prevent recurrence by addressing economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian issues
Special issue: Land mines	Millions of mines hinder recovery De-mining should be part of peace-keeping mandates Agriculture and transport restoration depend on mine removal Link between peace-keeping and peace-building Demilitarization boosts security and supports reconstruction
UN role in strengthening governance	UN technical assistance to reform deficient national structures Support creation/strengthening of democratic institutions Social peace is as important as strategic/political peace Promote rule of law, transparency, and good governance at all levels

Table. No.1. Post-conflict Peace-building, Made by Author, sources: (Report of the Secretary-General, 17 June 1992).

Further, three renowned and prolific writers in the field, Newman, Paris, and Richmond have argued that since the end of the Cold War, one of the pressing challenges the international community was facing was the challenges emerging from failed states, and it has the spilling capacity because of two main reasons, showing that instability is often a Pandora’s box while policymakers try to deal with its consequences (Newman & United Nations University Press, 2009, 1972, page 1).

- To begin with, violence in failed states erodes fundamental human rights, while justice is conveniently ignored (Newman & United Nations University Press, 2009, 1972, page 1).
- More critically, the weakness—or outright collapse—of a state paves the way for instability, undermining international peace and security (Newman & United Nations University Press, 2009, 1972, page 1).

**Afghanistan's Future: A House Built on Security or Development**

After 2001, U.S. state-building efforts in Afghanistan were ambitious projects aimed at

reshaping the country from a fractured, war-torn society into a functioning democracy—one that could curb terrorism and sustain peace. Yet, these undertakings ultimately exposed the limits of liberal internationalist models imposed from the outside. In the wake of the Taliban’s fall in late 2001, the Bonn Agreement set out a roadmap for Afghanistan’s political transition, calling for the creation of an interim authority, the drafting of a new constitution, and the organization of elections.

The United States, supported by NATO’s International Security Assistance Force, took the lead in providing security and steering reconstruction, while the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan oversaw civilian peacebuilding. Enormous sums were invested in rebuilding infrastructure, expanding education, advancing women’s rights, and establishing new institutions such as the Afghan National Army and Police. Yet the mission was riddled with structural flaws: a centralized presidential system clashed with Afghanistan’s decentralized tribal and ethnic realities; elections often sharpened divisions instead of fostering unity; and aid dependency entrenched corruption and patronage

networks that empowered warlords rather than strengthening legitimate institutions.

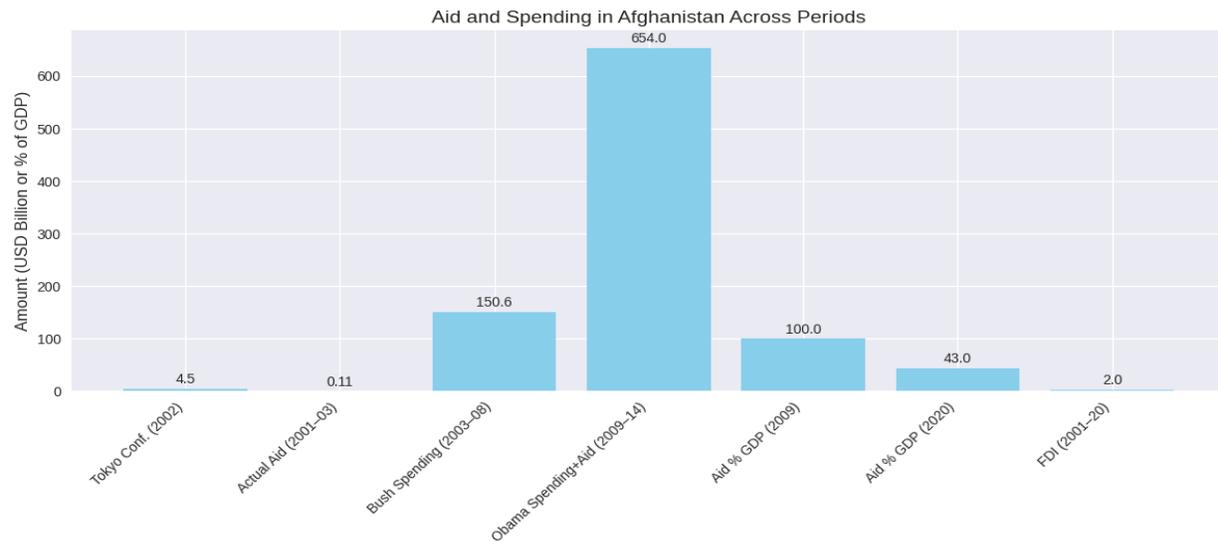
Security sector reforms produced forces that remained heavily reliant on foreign funding and logistics, while counterinsurgency campaigns failed to overcome a resilient Taliban insurgency that thrived on governance failures and rural discontent. Social development programs delivered visible gains in urban centers—especially in education and women’s participation—but these achievements were uneven and often perceived as foreign impositions (Campbell & Alike, 2011).

The state-building project was undermined by a military-first approach that prioritized battlefield victories over political reconciliation, leaving the Afghan government without genuine legitimacy or public trust, showing that governance was built on shaky ground while foreign actors tried to push through their agendas (Fukuyama, 2004). The swift collapse of Afghan forces in August 2021 and the Taliban’s return underscored the fragility of two decades of U.S. investment and exposed the risks of building institutions dependent on external actors and detached from local realities, proving that the system was hanging by a thread as planners attempted to lean on outside support. Afghanistan’s experience shows that durable state-building cannot be imposed from outside; it requires local ownership, gradual institutionalization before liberalization, and a careful balance between security and inclusive governance, reminding us that peace must be homegrown while communities work toward long-term stability.

**Reconstruction & Aid Spending in Afghanistan (2001–2021)**

While the U.S. mission achieved temporary progress, it ultimately failed to create a resilient Afghan state—offering sobering lessons about the limits of liberal internationalism and the difficulties of exporting democracy and market reforms into societies fractured by conflict and shaped by complex regional dynamics, showing that such efforts can easily go off the rails when outsiders try to bring about change without understanding the ground realities (Of & Weakened, 2004).

After the Taliban were removed from power, there was no coherent strategy in place, showing that governance was all over the place while policymakers tried to set up new institutions. The first major factor that remains is the unfulfilled promises of Afghan reconstruction, which could have kept the people confident, proving that trust was the missing piece of the puzzle as leaders attempted to carry out reforms. Sarah Paine believes that the real problem in Afghanistan does not stem from one issue; rather, it came when the U.S. entered Afghanistan and everything needed to be built from scratch, showing that the country was back to square one while outsiders tried to work out solutions (Paine, 2024). Enrique Baltar Rodríguez has argued that, indeed, rebuilding a state was a tall order—a very expensive project and also a very big project; therefore, real state-building did not take place in Afghanistan, proving that stability was a pipe dream while agencies struggled to deal with the enormity of the task (Rodríguez, 2023).



- **Figure No. 1, "Reconstruction & Aid Spending in Afghanistan (2001–2021)" by Author, sources; (Rodríguez, 2023)**

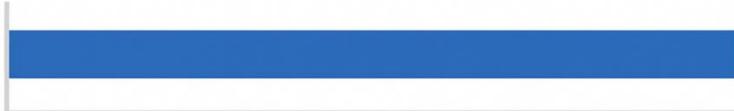
Aid and disbursements in Afghanistan have long remained a subject of debate among scholars, as many argue that proper investment was crucial for genuine state-building. After the Tokyo Conference in 2002, aid pledged for the first five years amounted to \$4.5 billion, yet only \$1.8 billion was delivered in the first year, far below the country's actual needs. Between 2001 and 2003, actual reconstruction aid stood at just \$110 million, out of \$2.9 billion granted, with most of the funds directed toward humanitarian assistance (Rodríguez, 2023). During the Bush era (2003–2008), U.S. spending in Afghanistan reached \$150.6 billion, while Iraq received a staggering \$589.3 billion in the same period. Under the

Obama administration (2009–2014), military spending in Afghanistan rose to \$580 billion, alongside \$74 billion in aid, of which 61 percent (\$45.3 billion) was allocated to security and the remainder to development. In 2009, aid accounted for 100 percent of Afghanistan's GDP, reflecting complete dependency, and although this figure dropped to 43 percent by 2020, 75 percent of the government's budget still came from aid. From 2001 to 2020, foreign direct investment remained minimal, totaling less than \$2 billion, with an annual average of only \$151.8 million, underscoring the country's weak economic foundation (Rodríguez, 2023).

### U.S. Reconstruction Spending in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

- Total reconstruction spending: \$130 billion
- Time span: 20 years (= 240 months)
- Monthly Spending: \$541.6 million per month

• Only ~13% of what was spent on military (\$825B)



### U.S. Military Spending in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

- Total military spending: \$825 billion
- Time span: 20 years (= 240 months)
- Monthly Spending: \$3.44 billion per month

• Only ~84% of what was spent on total (\$955 bil)



Figure No 2. Military vs. Reconstruction Spending in Afghanistan (2001-2021): calculated by authors; Sources (Ahmed et al., 2023)

Therefore, it can be clearly seen in the figure 2 above that the glaring disparity between the U.S. military spending and reconstruction spending speaks volumes in Afghanistan, as analysts continue to point out the imbalance. The U.S. military took up around 84 percent of the total share as compared to development, showing that priorities were skewed from the get-go while planners tried to focus on security. The U.S. military took massive amounts from 2001 to 2021, and the total spending on military was around \$825 billion, proving that resources were poured in left and right while officials attempted to carry out operations. In fact, the above figure shows per month spending was around \$3.44 billion per month, which is no small feat as the U.S. continued to shell out funds over two decades (Ahmed et al., 2023).

#### Conclusions:

To conclude, Afghanistan, a war-shattered state, has been at the center of U.S.-led peace-building efforts. The goal to consolidate peace and

transform the country into a stable market democracy, fostering inclusivity. However, despite two decades of conscientious work in Afghanistan, the effectiveness of the peace-building approach has remained limited. In fact, its strong and robotic efforts in Afghanistan largely collapsed under structural, cultural, and political misalignment. Scholar believes that in spite of lofty and arrogant promises, the real reconstruction never materialized, and genuine development—key to earning local trust—was sidelined. Instead, billions were funneled into a bloated security apparatus. As Dr. Arshad Khan noted, many Afghans believed the U.S. came not to rebuild but to occupy, a perception that fed directly into the Taliban’s narrative and bolstered their legitimacy among the population.

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