# Post-conflict peacebuilding in afghanistan

[Experience](#), [Peace](#)

**Afghanistan**

The aim of the following essay will be to evaluate the impact which the ISAF and peace-keeping efforts by the United Nations have had on the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan, following the US military intervention in Operation Enduring Freedom. Following two Anglo-Afghan wars, Afghanistan gained independence in 1919 and joined the League of Nations. Its example was followed by other states which gained independence from imperial domination and governance, which following the establishment of the United Nations resulted in the shaping of the contemporary geopolitical order. Afghanistan was built by the co-ordination of flows of foreign aid and when the aid flows were directed towards the sponsoring of opposing military forces, acivil warerupted, eventually leading to the collapse of the state as the flows of foreign aid were stopped.

For most of its known history, Afghanistan remained a heterogeneous and tribal-state having multiple and conflicting legal, cultural, and political systems.

When the Soviet Union withdrew in Afghanistan in 1989, the Taliban gained supremacy within the state and the lack of consensus led to the eruption of a civil war. The period of 1992-1994 in Afghanistan was one of chaos and civil war, as the opposition factions failed to form an effectivecoalitiongovernment, thus leading to a civil war. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US and a Coalition of other states to initiate a ' war on terror', a result of the Taliban's refusal to cooperate in the apprehension of Al Qaeda's leader Bin Laden. Following the re-capturing of

the capital by the Allied forces and the dispersal of the Taliban, the foundations of Afghanistan's re-structuring were set out in the UN Bonn Agreement. In summary, it set out the path for a transition towards a western-style constitutional democracy with significant emphasis being placed onhuman rights, social justiceandgender equality.

**ISAF Mission**

Following Operation Enduring Freedom and the liberation of the capital Kabul, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1386 with which it layered the foundations of the ISAF, which was deployed initially in Kabul. The ISAF was set to operate in close cooperation with both the UN and the Afghan government whilst working the country'sreconstructionand the training of its security personnel. Its key participation in the reconstruction process was manifested by the establishment of Provisional Reconstruction Teams in provinces in the northern and western parts of the country (ibid.) Initially, ISAF's mandate was constrained to providing security in the capital city, but following UN Resolution 1510 in 2003, its mandate was expanded so as to provide security throughout the country's territory. The International Security Assistance Force is representative of all NATO member state countries and over the years has been broadened so as to include troops from non-member states such as Australia and New Zealand. The activities of the ISAF and its mission objective can be considered in line with strategies utilized for state-building and peace-making.

During its mandate from 2001 onwards, the ISAF has been established as the main provider of national security within the country, whilst at the same time

training the newly formed Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police. In addition to providing security on a national scale, the ISAF has been actively involved in the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of rogue militants, thus enabling the state to claim the monopoly overviolence. Until the expiry of its mandate at the end of 2014, the ISAF will continue to help the transitional state to train its own security forces as part of international efforts to ensure stability within the country and ensure that a peaceful transition from the civil war onto a more democratic pathway of governance is achieved.

**Evaluating ISAF**

Defining both ' success' and ' failure' in peacekeeping missions is a difficult task due to a lack of consensus with regards to their definition. It has also been suggested that peacekeeping is more likely to succeed in more developed states and in countries where the death toll is minimal. If one is to use the latter framework, then all efforts in Afghanistan are likely to be in vain. More recent research has identified six factors which appear to be of significant relevance: the successful deployment of available resources, overlap of interest among key stakeholders, emphasis on continuous conflict regulation, external cooperation as well as recognizing the specificenvironmentin which the conflict has taken place. In the case of Afghanistan however, the US-led invasion had no clear strategies for a state-building process. As a result, the initial focus on the ' war on terror' lacked a clear direction at it failed to provide a clear division between short-termgoalsof pacifying the terrorist threat and the longer-term peace-building process within the country (ibid). The invasion of Afghanistan was not about

promoting security bur rather reducing the spreading sense of insecurity in the US.

The state-building process that followed had no clear goals and was characterized by competing paradigms, as well as incompatible agendas. It can be argued that the Taliban resurgence in 2005 and the consequent lack of security in the country precluded any substantial democratization effort. However, this ignores the causal relationship between the two: failure of the political process, and an incoherent US/NATO military strategy, which provided the vacuum and space necessary for the Taliban and other counter-systemic actors to establish and expand their influence in the country. Linked to the incoherent military strategy is the limited impact of the DDR process that was to strengthen the position of the ISAF. The expansion of ISAF outside of Kabul also played a significant part in the escalation of the conflict. The escalating war ratcheted up the demand for rapid and visible results, both within Afghanistan and from domestic audiences in the contributing countries. To deliver quick and visible results, the interveners adopted measures that undermined basic precepts of state-building and by extension its contribution to peacebuilding. In order to rapidly create Afghan military capacity, for example, the international forces started rearming the militias.

A large number of resources were diverted towards training the ANA, whereas the lack of training for the ANP produced problems for the ISAF, mainly in terms of corruption and human rights abuses. The establishment of PRTs throughout the country was seen as the solution for providing security

and reconstruction at the same time (ibid.). However, their activity was characterized by a lack of clear objectives, lack of a clear commanding structure, and lack of resources. This lack of coherence is not only characteristic of the PRTs themselves, but rather to the lack of a clear strategy for the operation of ISAF, as the establishment of security needs to run parallel to economic development as part of restructuring efforts. As was noted, the availability of resources for peacebuilding has a significant impact on the successful resolution of violent conflict. Yet, the large flows of unconditioned aid are said to re-create the environment in which the civil war in the 1990s erupted and evolved.  Afghanistan is also a challenging case for the study and application of peace conditionalities, as the Bonn Agreement itself only legitimized a ' victor's peace', leaving the Taliban quite potent. Secondly, the dual nature of the process should be emphasized – building peace in a climate of the ongoing war.

The approach adopted by the Alliance forces, to create a security force whilst at the same time failing to provide an institution that is to be responsible for its management is yet another reflection of the prioritization of short-term goals over peace-making and state-building in the longer term. Although reconstruction has been a top priority and used as a political platform during the first parliamentary elections, the international spending has emphasized security over reconstruction. The long-standing conflict itself has resulted in the development of a war economy in which it is difficult for the emerging democratic state to claim the monopoly over violence. Facing considerable historical and institutional constraints, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, a part of which is ISAF, has found it difficult to implement its

ambitious democratization mandate. In conclusion, despite ISAF has achieved some successes in the training of Afghanistan's security forces and improving security (Beljan, 2013), it is difficult to claim to the mandate and goals which were set as its main tasks have been achieved. Over the period of reconstruction the country has been relying on foreign aid for the maintenance of its structures, it is still a fragile state on the brink of re-emerging conflict, as there is still a lack of a clear political settlement among the different interest parties in the country.

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