

## Peace Operations: Multilateral Efforts in Afghanistan

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**Article DOI:**

10.48028/iiprds/ijdshmss.v14.i1.01

**Keywords:**

Multilateralism,  
Multilateral  
operations,  
Afghanistan, NATO,  
ISAF, RSM, UNAMA,  
EUPOL

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### Abstract

The Taliban seized control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, on August 15, 2021. The group regained control of Afghanistan after two decades. This episode happened after 20 years of multilateral peace efforts to eliminate Taliban and terrorist groups and eventually make Afghanistan a safe and stable state. Following the 9/11 incident and the defeat of the Taliban, the international community and Afghan political and military forces opposed to the Taliban met in Bonn to determine the task of the successor government. Therefore, the international community conducted multilateral peace operations to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. However, this study argues that multilateral operations and efforts were unsuccessful in Afghanistan. In addressing the main question, what were the reasons for the lack of success in multilateral efforts in Afghanistan? This study analyses four multilateral peace operations: ISAF and RSM, NATO, UNAMA, and EUPOL, while delving into the factors contributing to the inadequacy of these operations. The research delves deeper into the issue using a qualitative research approach known as content analysis. Findings demonstrate that divisions among members on the main task and the increase in NATO forces, lack of cohesion between NATO and the U.S. in Afghanistan, impact of war crimes on Afghan civilians, legal restrictions, significant deficiencies in PRTs and inability to meet commitments, disregard for Afghan cultural traditions and beliefs, and weakness of the central government of Afghanistan in providing stable security and sovereign actions, are the factors of failure.

## **Background to the Study**

At the beginning of the 21st century and after 9/11, the West, under the U.S. leadership, placed the Taliban and Al-Qaeda on its security agenda. (Nooralivand & Khalilipoor Roknabadi, 2019). After the 9/11 attacks and the Taliban's refusal to surrender Al-Qaeda leaders to the United States, the U.S. and a coalition of 11 other nations, primarily composed of NATO member states, initiated a significant military intervention in Afghanistan. This action was in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1373 and 1368, which focused on combating terrorism. The result of this coordinated effort was the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the international community held a meeting of political and military forces opposed to the Taliban to determine the task of the successor government. They predicted a three-stage process for the establishment of the new government of Afghanistan. The Bonn Conference marked the initiation of the process, establishing a six-month interim structure named the "Interim Administration of Afghanistan." Following the subsequent phase of the "transitional government," the process concluded by establishing new government structures in alignment with the new constitution of Afghanistan (Bozorgmehri, 2010, 142).

The Bonn Agreement consisted of two annexes. The first annex aimed to guarantee Afghanistan's security during the interim and transitional phases, while the second appendix focused on defining the role of the U.N. in the interim period. As outlined in the initial annexe, the responsibility for ensuring the security of the interim and transitional governments rested with the U.N.'s forces until the establishment of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and security forces. The forces took the title of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In August 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed command of the ISAF. Afghanistan was the first country that NATO entered outside its traditional territory, Europe and North America (Nooralivand & Khalilipoor Roknabadi, 2019). Thus, the U.S., NATO member states and other international partners started multilateral peace operations in Afghanistan to fight against terrorism and transform Afghanistan from instability and insecurity to stability and security. However, despite four operations, the multilateral mission was unsuccessful in Afghanistan, and the Taliban regained power after twenty years.

Therefore, the objective of the study is to investigate and understand the failure of multilateral operations in Afghanistan over two decades. Through an in-depth analysis of four critical multilateral peace operations- the International Security Assistance Force and the Resolute Support Mission (ISAF and RSM), NATO, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan- the study aims to unravel the specific factors that led to the overall failure of these efforts. Hence, the study first examines the activities of these operations and then identifies and examines the influential factors in their failure. The central question guiding the research is: What were the reasons for the lack of success in multilateral efforts in Afghanistan? To answer this, the research meticulously examines divisions among members on the main task and the increase in NATO forces, lack of cohesion between

NATO and the U.S. in Afghanistan, the impact of war crimes on Afghan civilians, legal restrictions, significant deficiencies in PRTs and inability to meet commitments, disregard for Afghan cultural traditions and beliefs by specific NATO forces, and weakness of the central government of Afghanistan in providing stable security and sovereign action. Thus, employing a qualitative research method and content analysis, the study intends to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics that contributed to the observed failures.

Moreover, this study is significant because it examines the intricate details of multilateral peace operations in Afghanistan and identifies the contributing factors to their failure. The study tackles a crucial question of how well foreign initiatives worked to advance stability and peace in Afghanistan. Consequently, the significance of this research lies first in its contribution to multilateral peace operations and their effect on the Afghan situation. Reviewing four significant multilateral peace operations in Afghanistan is necessary to reach the critical contribution, which is to examine the reasons behind the failure of the multilateral operation. Second, it offers insightful information on the difficulties international forces face in conflict resolution. Delving into particular factors that contribute to the failure of these operations enhances a nuanced comprehension of the intricacies at play. Thirdly, the research adds to the broader academic conversation by deepening our insight into the dynamics of multilateral peace operations and how they influence regions entrenched in conflict.

### **Conceptual Clarification: Multilateralism**

In the realm of international relations, multilateralism is a widely used diplomatic term signifying collaboration among multiple states. It distinguishes itself from unilateralism, which involves the independent actions of a single state, and bilateralism, which entails interactions between two states. The concept of multilateralism emerged for the first time in the 20th century as a model of diplomacy alongside bilateral diplomacy. Berridge and James, authors of *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, consider multilateralism to establish relations between three or more states in permanent or temporary international relations (Wisema, 2011, 7-13). Multilateralism is a term coined by Miles Kahler and conceptualised as “international governance” or “global governance” by many people. Robert Keohane (1990) defines multilateralism as coordinating international policies in groups of three or more states. Opposition to “bilateral discriminatory agreements”, believed to increase the influence of the powerful over the weak and escalate international conflicts, constituted the core of this concept. Multilateralism includes many states and institutions, defined as sets of stable and related rules, formal or informal, prescribing behavioural roles, imposing activities, and forming expectations. Robert Keohane (1990) believes that multilateralism was institutionalised when stable roles and rules emerged in international relations; therefore, the formation of institutions and organisations has been prominent compared to other forms of multilateralism.

Moreover, multilateralism refers to the conditions in which several states or international organisations cooperate to achieve a specific goal or deal with a problem (*The American*

*Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2017). According to Ruggie (1993), multilateralism involves coordinating three or more states based on specific principles that govern their interactions. Therefore, Ruggie (1993), by examining a set of examples of multilateralism that was common to the general public, concluded that the common aspect of multilateral arrangements is the existence of a set of rules that regulate the relations between groups consisting of three or more states by general principles of behaviour.

Furthermore, multilateralism embodies a general institutional form and tacitly refers to organisational arrangements that define and confirm the states' authority rights. Multilateralism unravels common issues of the states. Multilateralism is “coordinated initiatives and diplomatic strategies involving multiple states, supported by the international community, utilising pre-established rules and guidelines to achieve synchronised policies” (Drezner, 2008, 194). Furthermore, multilateralism involves several actors voluntarily interacting through international cooperation. This interaction is initiated by employing common norms and principles and applying identical rules to all actors (Bouchard & Peterson, 2011). One of the main aspects of multilateralism is the focus on “institutionalism” (Dehshiri, 2004, 58). Institutionalism emphasizes the role of institutions, intergovernmental organisations, nongovernmental organisations, and normative structures in establishing international peace and security stability. International organisations and multilateral institutions work to achieve cooperation (Karimifard, 2014). In essence, multilateralism is a joint approach involving three or more countries, as opposed to unilateral and bilateral strategies. It emerged in the 20th century to address global challenges, emphasizing justice and collective efforts. Institutionalised through international organisations, it promotes cooperation, coordination and rules-based interactions for the benefit of international peace and security.

## **Multilateral Peace Operations**

### **International Security Assistance Force and the Resolute Support Mission**

In December 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the Taliban's defeat, Afghan leaders convened at the Bonn Conference to deliberate on the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. According to the agreement, the international community formed a transitional government to manage the situation in Afghanistan and establish security. Under Annex 1 of the Bonn Agreement, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) called for empowering the Afghan National Army (ANA) to assume responsibility for the country's security. It also mandated the deployment of forces to safeguard Kabul and its environs, facilitating the interim government's effective execution of its duties (United Nations Security Council, 2001). On December 20, 2001, in response to the Afghan government's request, the UNSC sanctioned the establishment of ISAF for Afghanistan. The initial duties of ISAF involved ensuring security in and around Kabul to support the Afghan interim government. Subsequently, in 2003, its scope expanded beyond Kabul and its vicinity. Under the United Kingdom's command, the newly organized ISAF force comprised soldiers and other resources from eighteen states (Institute for the Study of War, 2009). The number of military personnel deployed by ISAF

increased steadily over four years, peaking at about 9000 in 2005. One year later, ISAF deployed more than 30,000 troops nationwide. As ISAF's presence grew in the Eastern and Southern parts of Afghanistan, its soldiers became more actively engaged in insurgency operations (Institute for the Study of War, 2009).

Furthermore, Barack Obama authorised an increase of approximately 30,000 additional U.S. troops in 2009, and ISAF introduced a new counterinsurgency strategy (Marsh, 2014). ISAF stood as one of the most extensive and formidable missions for NATO, constituting one of the largest coalitions in history. At its peak, the force comprised over 130,000 members from 50 NATO and allied partner nations. Nevertheless, the most substantial contingent consistently originated from the United States (France 24, 2021). Moreover, as part of a broader international initiative, ISAF's role involved enhancing the Afghan government's capacity to exert authority throughout the nation (NATO, 2022). On September 23, 2008, through Resolution 1883, the UNSC reaffirmed NATO's leadership of ISAF and urged NATO to undertake essential measures. These measures included ensuring security, upholding the rule of law and order, fostering good governance and development, reforming the justice system, and providing training to local police forces for countering narcotics (Morelli & Belkin, 2009). In 2011, the international community established a gradual transition to full Afghan security responsibility known as "Inteqal." In December 2014, ISAF's mission came to an end, and Afghan forces took complete control of their nation's security (NATO, 2022, August 31). Until 2020, when the ISAF drawdown commenced, the RSM deployed approximately 15,000–17,000 military personnel. Finally, The RSM began its complete troop withdrawal in May 2021 and completed it at the beginning of September 2021 (Pfeifer & van der Lijn, 2021).

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

Under a UNSC mandate, NATO allies and partner states had military forces stationed in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2022). In 2003, NATO officially assumed command of ISAF; by 2006, its operations extended to Afghanistan. NATO's initial operations in Afghanistan were characterised by a "light footprint" strategy, relying on minimal resources and on-the-ground personnel. The designers of this strategy aimed to foster local ownership of the actual reconstruction work (Morelli & Belkin, 2009). When NATO commenced operations in Afghanistan in 2003, there was a strong emphasis on military stabilisation. This concentration resulted from the precise delineation of responsibilities in development outlined in the Bonn Agreement (2001) and the Tokyo Agreement (2002). These agreements designated lead states for specific development tasks, creating a strict division of labour. As an illustration, the United States assumed the responsibility of establishing the Afghan army, Germany undertook the task of re-establishing the Afghan police, Japan focused on demobilisation and reintegration, the United Kingdom fought against drugs, and Italy took on the responsibility of creating the Judicial System. According to NATO, Afghanistan would experience warlord democratisation. Armed groups would demobilise and settle disputes through Western-style elections rather than violence due to the strong division of labour between military stabilisation and development stipulated in the Bonn Agreement (Rubin, 2006).

Moreover, NATO used Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) as its primary direct means of rebuilding Afghanistan. The overarching goals of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) encompass promoting economic development, expanding the central government's influence across Afghanistan's provinces, and implementing as well as coordinating projects for the country's development and reconstruction. NATO introduced PRTs in response to the expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul and to support the processes outlined in the Bonn Agreement. (Stapleton, 2011). PRTs, as part of state-building initiatives, undertook the construction of schools, hospitals, and basic infrastructure such as roads, drinking water, and electricity. They also built buildings and infrastructure for district and provincial administrations. NATO's task was to provide security for PRT operations, while the responsibility of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Afghan authorities was to oversee civilian initiatives (Larsen, 2013).

### **United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

According to the U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1401, on March 28, 2002, UNAMA was established. On March 16, 2023, UNSCR 2678 extended the mandate, subject to annual reviews to accommodate changes in the nation's needs, for an additional year (UNAMA, 2023). UNAMA was a civilian mission with only a few uniformed personnel, including a few military advisors, some lightly armed guards, and three to four police advisors. The Kabul Headquarters of UNAMA deployed 75 international staff and some national staff. The UNAMA established one regional office in each of the following cities: Bamiyan (Central Highland), Jalalabad (East), Gardez (Southeast), Kandahar (South), Herat (West), Mazar-e-Sharif (North), and Kunduz (Northeast). Each regional office employed approximately 15 foreign employees (Peace Operations Backgrounder, 2002).

### **The European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan**

In 2007, the EUPOL initiated its mission in Afghanistan to train police forces within the Ministries of Interior Affairs (MIA), Afghan Attorney General's Office (AGO), and Ministry of Justice (M.J.) in the areas of rule of law and respect for human rights (BBC, 2014). The mission was the second-largest civilian mission under the E.U.'s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). The mission oversaw, mentored, counselled and trained senior management at the Afghan MIA, Afghan M.J., and AGO levels in Kabul and various other regions. It had 200 local employees and 290 international staff, most of whom were police officers and experts in the rule of law (European Commission, 2014). In 2008, the European Union (E.U.) increased its staff from 200 to 400, reaching a peak of 353 personnel (Pfeifer & van der Lijn, 2021). Ultimately, the EUPOL mission concluded on December 31, 2016, after a decade. (Shahriar, 2016).

### **Persistent Insecurity in Afghanistan and Its Intensification Over Time**

Following the Taliban's defeat in Afghanistan, observers anticipated that the country would experience peace and political stability. However, subsequent events revealed that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda remained active in both Afghanistan and Pakistan

(Bozorgmehri, 2019). Over the past two decades, intimidation, violence, and terror-related activities have led to a heightened level of insecurity in the country. Initially, the leader and members of the Taliban instigated insecurity in Kandahar and Helmand before 2008. Subsequently, it extended to the country's eastern regions, including Khost, Paktia, and Paktika. By 2012, it had spread to the country's northwestern provinces, such as Badghis and Kunduz (Koehler, Gosztonyi, & Böhnke, 2011). In 2014, the ISIS group began operating in certain parts of the country. The activities of various groups challenging the Afghan government have resulted in adverse political consequences. Beyond affecting political elites, security threats have had a negative impact on civilians. According to the UNAMA report, the security situation in Afghanistan was worse in 2008 than in the years following 2001. Since 2008, groups opposing the government, including the Taliban, have infiltrated the peripheral areas of Afghanistan, employing tactics such as terror (European Asylum Office, 2016). Despite the signing of the U.S.-Taliban political agreement in 2020, the frequency of terrorist activities in the country did not decrease (Osmani, Simbar, & Niakoui, 2022).

In addition, in 2011, the Taliban and the Haqqani Network (H.N.) escalated their destructive actions, employing various tactics such as suicide attacks, explosives, and rockets in the South, East, Southeast, and the capital of Afghanistan (General Assembly & UNSC, 2011). The number of terrorist attacks in that year amounted to 1,665, representing an increase compared to the 1,620 attacks recorded in 2010 (General Assembly & UNSC, 2011). The number of suicide attacks increased by 50%. In recent years, such as in 2018, which marked the peak of ISIS activity in Afghanistan, the Khorasan branch of ISIS was responsible for 40% of civilian casualties (General Assembly & UNSC, 2018).

To put it concisely, the war in Afghanistan claimed the lives of more than 47,245 civilians. By April 2021, around 66,000 to 69,000 individuals in the Afghan army and police and over 51,000 Taliban fighters had lost their lives. The war resulted in the deaths of 171,000 to 174,000 people in Afghanistan. However, the actual toll is likely higher, considering unaccounted deaths resulting from disease, lack of access to food, water, infrastructure, or other indirect consequences of the conflict. The Cost of War Project estimates that considering the ratio of indirect to direct casualties in contemporary conflicts, the number of those indirectly killed in this war could be as high as 360,000. These estimates do not encompass individuals who died in Pakistan during the war in Northwest Pakistan (Owlapps, 2021). From the beginning of the war on October 7, 2001, to the end of 2014, a total of 3,485 NATO/ISAF personnel, in addition to civilians, lost their lives. U.S. service members constitute 68% of all fatalities. Another 20% comes from the United Kingdom, Canada, and France (Areppim: Information, Pure and Simple, 2015). The United States experienced the highest number of foreign fatalities in Afghanistan, with more than 2,400 military deaths and over 20,700 injuries. According to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), a website that tracks the deaths and injuries in wars such as Afghanistan, Britain suffered the second-highest loss of personnel among other NATO coalition members with 455 fatalities. In 2019, President Ashraf Ghani announced that over 45,000 members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) suffered fatalities since 2014 (Pfeifer & van der Lijn, 2021). The

situation in Afghanistan, despite the involvement of forces from approximately 50 countries, including efforts against the insurgency, Taliban, and ISIS, did not significantly improve or change.

### **Factors of the Failure of Multilateral Operations and Efforts in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has experienced significant advancements over the past two decades. Post-2002, millions of Afghan girls attended school, and more Afghan women than ever actively participated in public life, including holding political office in areas controlled by the Afghan government. Afghan media played an active role in facilitating general discussions in government-controlled regions, although they faced the constant risk of threats and acts of violence from authorities, security personnel, government-affiliated militias, and the Taliban. Despite these achievements, they were fleeting and limited scope (Gossman, 2021). However, the progress and accomplishments could not prevent the collapse of the Afghan government and the perceived failure of the international community, attributed to various factors.

### **Divisions among Members on the Main Task and the Increase in NATO Forces**

The American army assigned NATO forces after the occupation of Afghanistan. The goals of ISAF and NATO centred on security stabilisation programs and operations and laying the groundwork for the transfer of power to locally elected officials. Nevertheless, after their initial defeat, the Taliban and other insurgent groups did not withdraw from the battlefield. Instead, they operated against the American army and NATO forces (Bozorgmehri, 2010). The conflict persisted, and ultimately, the Taliban took control of the capital, Kabul, on August 15, 2021. The U.S. and the German Federal Army (GFA) hastily withdrew, leaving behind local allies. Concurrently, with the escalating instability, the ANA disbanded (Ali, 2023).

NATO assumed command of ISAF in August 2003. Although this change in the command seemed to be effective, division between the U.S. and NATO arose as time passed. The U.S. request for NATO to expand its original mission of stabilisation and counterinsurgency initially categorised as non-combat operations, resulted in a division, subsequently compelling NATO, in collaboration with the U.S., to participate in military operations, effectively transitioning into a state of war. This request caused severe divisions among NATO members. The American perspective, situated at one end of the spectrum, advocated for increased utilisation of NATO's capabilities, emphasising the involvement of NATO in military conflicts – a position supported by the United Kingdom and Canada. Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, situated on the other side of the spectrum, vehemently opposed altering the mission of NATO forces. However, France believed that in an emergency, NATO forces should enter military operations supporting international coalition forces against terrorism (Shafiei, 2009).

Moreover, the soldiers lacked the coordination to confront the insurgents in Afghanistan, and military units operated in less dangerous areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009). None of the allies were ready for such a war (Rynning & Hilde, 2022). The expeditionary



forces of most countries were well-suited for security operations but had yet to undergo the requisite training for independent battles and field warfare. It was crucial to undertake the critical task of increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan. The NATO command announced the necessity of increasing the forces in every situation and meeting with the group of member states. However, most states needed to respond more adequately to this requirement. The then U.S. Secretary of State, "Gates," consistently criticized the NATO states in Afghanistan for not supplying additional forces. In December 2007, he declared the deployment of 7,500 new troops to ISAF (Bozorgmehri, 2010). In response to the escalating Taliban attacks in 2007 and 2008, the NATO command proclaimed the necessity of deploying three additional forces to Afghanistan (Bozorgmehri, 2019). The reluctance to dispatch additional troops stemmed from the perspectives of both the public and NATO member states regarding the nature of the war in Afghanistan. There was a disparity in the level of sensitivity among the states towards the situation in Afghanistan. Not all states recognized the potential threat posed by Taliban rule in Afghanistan to the security of their territories. Consequently, this resulted in an uncoordinated and disorganized multilateral operation in Afghanistan.

#### **Lack of Cohesion between NATO and the United States in Afghanistan**

A significant issue between NATO and the U.S. in Afghanistan was the insufficient coordination among the U.S. and its allies. Examining the conduct and actions of NATO member states in Afghanistan reveals that NATO members operated as an uncoordinated group. Each state pursued distinct interests, objectives, policies, and programs in Afghanistan over the years. Despite NATO's presence in Afghanistan as a cohesive organisation with its members acting under a unified command, most states had divergent plans and approaches, particularly in the realms of counterterrorism and the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Moradi, 2014).

#### **Impact of War Crimes on Afghan Civilians: The Unseen Toll on Remote**

The people in remote and rural areas experienced the effects of war both physically and psychologically. The Trump administration intensified airstrikes between 2016 and 2020. While these airstrikes decreased the strength of the Taliban, they had a psychological impact on the people in rural areas. Notably, 1,600 children accounted for 40% of the casualties during these operations (Gossman, 2021). The continuous raids and special operations had a detrimental impact on the support base of the Afghan government in the rural areas of the country. Not only did this harm extend beyond air operations, but it also affected various other aspects. Australia faced serious allegations regarding war crimes committed by its special forces in the Uruzgan province. These allegations included accusations of killing children, throwing detainees off cliffs, and arming individuals who had been summarily executed. Likewise, in 2012, U.S. special forces detained, tortured, and killed 17 civilians in the Nerkh district, and no legal action was taken against them. The Afghan victims of these crimes never obtained justice; as a result, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has called for investigations into the actions of all parties involved, including the Taliban, Afghan government forces, and the U.S. military and CIA. In response to the ICC's jurisdiction, the U.S. has sought to obstruct any inquiry (Gossman,

2021). Additionally, the rural population received limited attention from the central government, fostering a sense of distrust in international operations within these areas.

### **Legal Restrictions**

The legislative bodies of numerous NATO member states-imposed limitations on deploying their forces to Afghanistan's remote areas. For instance, the forces of certain nations did not have authorisation to move into the Southern regions, and some forces, such as the German forces, faced restrictions on night operations. Despite not officially announcing limits, these countries were typically excused from engaging in specific missions (*Report to Congress, 2007*). During the summit conference in Riga, Latvia, in November 2006, the U.K., the U.S., the Netherlands, and Canada urged NATO states to eliminate these legal restrictions. At the summit in Bucharest in 2008, the alliance member states reiterated the call to remove these legal impediments. However, the NATO command in Afghanistan grappled with these issues. The requirement for unity of command and high manoeuvrability to effectively confront or attack the Taliban militia forces posed practical obstacles to the implementation of successful operations. Consequently, France, Italy, and Spain lifted the restrictions (Morelli & Belkin, 2007).

### **Significant Deficiencies in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Inability to Meet Commitments**

Lacking a pre-existing model, the formation of PRTs was based on the policies and models of the founding countries. These teams adopted various organisational and operational models, underscoring the imperative for enhanced operational coordination and information exchange (Jones & Pickering, 2008). Different regions of Afghanistan accommodated a total of 25 PRTs. These were distributed across various commands, with twelve under the East command, five under the North command, and four under the West and South commands (Maley, 2007). The teams were to establish the foundations of a bureaucracy and good governance in different parts of war-torn Afghanistan. However, the team members were military and civilian people who had expertise in one or two areas and could not meet the diverse needs of the backward and primitive areas of Afghanistan. On the flip side, NATO fundamentally functions as a military organisation. It needed to be better equipped for carrying out construction tasks in areas related to industrial and economic infrastructure or cultural and educational institutions in the provinces of Afghanistan (Bozorgmehri, 2010).

The teams comprised military forces, civilian personnel from NATO, and Afghanistan's military and administrative forces (Bozorgmehri, 2010). German troops' task was to train the Afghan police. The German trainers argued that the Afghan police forces did not fall under the command of German forces, posing numerous challenges to the training process. When the project faced failure, Germany attributed it to corruption within the Afghan police, deeming the training efforts futile (*International Herald Tribune, 2007*). Moreover, establishing a judiciary system was one of the core tasks of ISAF. The forces needed to be more successful in training professional lawyers for the social system of Afghanistan. Italy took on the responsibility of establishing the judicial system in

Afghanistan. To achieve this goal, Italy organised the Rome Conference with participating volunteer countries to coordinate efforts in organising the justice system. However, many promised commitments were still pending and needed to be fulfilled (*Rome Conference, 2007*). In sum, the international community endeavoured to impose its own rule of law in Afghanistan, but these endeavours proved futile. Domestic and international stakeholders needed a more practical approach to bring efficiency to the system. The government's judicial system was considered only an option in numerous parts of the country. While the Afghan government successfully handled many criminal cases within its system, most civil disputes were solved through the local system and in Jirgas (Zavolestani, 2015).

### **Disregard for Afghan Cultural Traditions and Beliefs by Certain NATO Forces**

While combating terrorism and terrorists, NATO forces, at times intentionally or unintentionally, disregarded the religious, ethnic, and tribal beliefs as well as the culture of the Afghans. Persistent house inspections and disruptions to Afghan families, among other actions, gradually subjected the performance of NATO forces to criticism. Consequently, NATO forces did not make a concerted effort to familiarise themselves with Afghan culture. These conditions contributed to the failure of NATO's armed nation-building, a crucial element for achieving security stabilisation in Afghanistan according to NATO's strategy. Therefore, the Taliban capitalised on these conditions through propaganda activities targeting NATO and U.S. forces. This led to a deterioration in public attitudes towards them and their presence in Afghanistan, resulting in a negative perception (Zaei, Amininia, & Hasanpour, 2023).

### **Structural and Functional Weakness of the Central Government of Afghanistan in Providing Stable Security and Sovereign Action**

Despite multilateral operations over the past two decades, Afghanistan has struggled with enduring conflicts driven by both internal and external factors (Thier & Worden, 2017). The termination of the NATO mission gradually weakened the Afghan government and diminished its effectiveness, particularly in the realm of security assurance. This weakness hindered the establishment of stable governance in Afghanistan. With NATO's withdrawal, the central government lost its power, rendering it unable to leverage this force. In the initial three years post-NATO withdrawal, the Afghan government struggled to control various groups and movements, particularly terrorist factions, across the entire nation, partly due to some infractions by the U.S. government. This failure led to a gradual reduction in the central government's deterrent capability against terrorists, resulting in an average of 130 terrorist incidents per year over three years (Zaei, Amininia, & Hasanpour, 2023).

Furthermore, the Taliban, with the support of Pakistan, continued to extend its control. The escalation in violence has resulted in alarming civilian casualties, and the exodus of economic migrants has led to a drain of talent and investments. Criminal activities in ostensibly peaceful cities have instilled fear among the burgeoning middle class. Attempts to establish an enduring, inclusive, and legitimate political settlement, which

started in 2001 and extended through the National Unity Government (NUG) agreement in 2014, proved elusive. Governance structures faltered, and elections either resulted in division or were postponed. The improvised arrangement of a divided head of state and head of government failed to address power struggles and lacked constitutional legitimacy. The enduring competition between provincial actors and central government elites, which represented deeper issues, remained unaddressed. Conflicts over appointments, elections, and revenues occurred amid mistrust, grievances, and calls for increased autonomy. The prevailing political and constitutional system did not adequately address these problems, creating fertile ground for an insurgency supported by Pakistan and capitalising on divisions between rural communities and a government that failed to meet their needs. Insufficient capacity in national and subnational institutions impeded the practical achievement of goals, and the continuing conflict heightened divisions, presenting the possibility of a resurgence of full-scale warfare or ethnic dominance through conquest or an uneven peace agreement (Thier & Worden, 2017).

In brief, this research aimed to thoroughly explore and comprehend the shortcomings of multilateral operations in Afghanistan spanning two decades. By conducting a detailed examination of significant operations – ISAF, RSM, NATO, UNAMA, and EUPOL – the study aimed to pinpoint specific factors that led to the overall lack of success. The investigation meticulously scrutinised issues such as divisions among participating members, the escalation of NATO forces, the lack of unity between NATO and the U.S., the impact of war crimes, legal constraints, deficiencies in PRTs, shortcomings in meeting commitments, cultural insensitivity from specific NATO forces, and the fragility of the central government in Afghanistan. To recap, the study endeavours to offer a nuanced comprehension of the intricate dynamics contributing to the failures of multilateral efforts in Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

In the aftermath of Kabul's fall to the Taliban on August 15, 2021, marking the end of a two-decade-long effort to stabilise Afghanistan, it becomes evident that despite substantial multilateral endeavours, the mission did not achieve its intended goals (Eurownews, 2021). The goal was to eradicate the Taliban and terrorist groups, ultimately transforming Afghanistan into a secure and stable state. Following 9/11, the U.S., with the backing of its allies, managed to overthrow the Taliban within 60 days. Initially, NATO portrayed the war in Afghanistan with a narrative of victory. Nevertheless, over two decades of the prolonged American and allies' presence in Afghanistan, establishing an efficient and effective national security system was a key policy of the U.S. and NATO, alongside the development of governance by Afghan leaders. The sole means to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a haven for terrorists was to establish a modern security and police department tasked with protecting citizens, upholding the law, and securing borders to mitigate internal and external threats (Behroozi, 2021). Hence, NATO prioritised the fight against terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan as a top agenda item for its actions. The mission's objective was to establish stability and security in

Afghanistan, so NATO's activities and actions spanned across all parts of Afghanistan. The international community carried out four multilateral peace operation missions in Afghanistan, and despite huge expenses, human losses, and casualties, the outcome of the operations was not successful. There are numerous factors contributing to the failure, with the most significant ones, as per the study's findings, being: Challenges such as divisions among NATO members, an increase in forces, lack of cohesion between NATO and the U.S., the impact of war crimes on civilians, legal restrictions, deficiencies in PRTs, cultural insensitivity by specific NATO forces, and the weakness of the Afghan central government hindered success. Thus, for the future improvement of such missions, establishing effective multilateralism requires a thorough understanding by the European Union and the U.S. of their strengths and weaknesses, coupled with acknowledging their commonalities and differences. They should prepare for all forthcoming challenges, enhance the capabilities of the central government, concentrate on remote areas, and show respect for the cultural nuances of the conflict-affected country.

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