

Military-Led State-Building: The Curious Case of Iraq versus Afghanistan

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American military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan share a great many similarities. Both are usually mentioned as failures. In both cases, the ruling authorities were overthrown relatively quickly, the dictator Saddam Hussain of Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, a key difference is that when the U.S. withdrew troops from Iraq, they could sustain their security forces, government institutions, and economy, whereas, unfortunately, Afghanistan has not. This research paper uses a case-study method to analyze the factors that made the United States' efforts to state-build through military intervention more successful in Iraq and not as successful in Afghanistan. Both Iraq and Afghanistan experienced military intervention by the United States. However, the results were different; why? This thesis does not intend to say that Iraq is an excellent example of state-building through military intervention because it is clear that is not the case. It is designed to analyze and fill in the gaps in the current scholarly literature by addressing first what it means to successfully state-build and offering reasons why a "one-size fits all method" did not work in these two cases. This study argues that the United States was more successful in Iraq versus Afghanistan due to sustainability issues, diverted resources from Afghanistan to Iraq, and Afghanistan being more ethnically fragmented. This type of research is necessary because (1) leaders in the U.S. continue to assume that state-building through military intervention will be easy and do not show an understanding of the complexities involved. (2) Usually, when analyzing state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are lumped together as failures, but there are key differences, and one was more successful than the other.

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Introduction

On September 11, 2001, most knew there were talks of invading Afghanistan immediately because the ruling authority in Afghanistan, the Taliban, was harboring Osama Bin Ladin along with al-Qaeda and refused to turn them over to the United States (Kirk, 2008). A probably lesser-known fact is that the invasion of Iraq was already coming up in discussions between Vice President Richard Cheney and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, on that fateful day (Kirk, 2008). Iraq and Afghanistan are wars that lasted many years and yielded troubling results. The events from 9/11 shifted each of these wars into gear.

American military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan share a great many similarities. Both are usually mentioned as failures. In both cases, the ruling authorities were overthrown relatively quickly, the dictator Saddam Hussain of Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, a key difference is that when the U.S. withdrew troops from Iraq, they could sustain their security forces, government institutions, and economy, whereas, unfortunately, Afghanistan has not.

The U.S. government spent twenty long years in Afghanistan and \$145 billion explicitly dedicated to state-building efforts (Bamberger, 2022). In Iraq, the nine-year state-building program cost around \$60 billion and an unknown amount in billions of Iraq's own money (Bowen, 2013). These numbers do not reflect the Department of Defense's (DOD) cost of war or the billions in interest the U.S. will end up paying because of both wars, estimated to be upwards of \$6 trillion (Bamberger, 2022). More important than the monetary cost is the loss of human life. The numbers for Afghanistan are just under 2,500 American troops, and just over 1,100 troops of allies have been killed (Brown University, 2021). An estimated 20,000 U.S. troops have been injured. At a minimum, 66,000 Afghan troops have been killed, and 48,000 Afghan civilians have lost their lives (Brown University, 2021). In Iraq, 4,550 U.S. troops have died. Between 200,000 -300,000, Iraqi civilians were killed, and over 58,000 Iraqi security forces lost their lives. The extraordinary costs in life and money were

intended to fulfill a purpose, but it seems that purpose continued to evolve. The initial goal seemed to be to eliminate the threat from al-Qaeda, defeat the Taliban, and prevent terrorist groups from a safe hiding place in Afghanistan or Iraq. As the mission became more apparent, the U.S. learned they would need to build Afghan and Iraqi security forces (Bamberger, 2022) (Bowen, 2013). Coincidentally, they would need to help the government become legitimate and competent enough to win the trust of their respective citizens. Each goal, once realized, was supposed to move the U.S. government one step closer to being able to withdraw.

This research paper uses a case-study method to analyze the factors that made the United States' efforts to state-build through military intervention more successful in Iraq and not as successful in Afghanistan. Both Iraq and Afghanistan experienced military intervention by the United States. However, the results were different; why? This thesis does not intend to say that Iraq is an excellent example of state-building through military intervention because it is clear that is not the case. This study aims to fill the gaps in the current scholarly literature by first addressing what it means to successfully state-build and offering reasons why a "one-size fits all method" does not work in these two cases.

There are important lessons to learn about what went better in Iraq and what went worse in Afghanistan. Scholars have proposed several theories to explain this variation in military-led state-building success. A debate has been reignited amongst scholars by the falling of the elected government of Afghanistan to the Taliban in August 2021. These arguments can be grouped into three top categories of explanation. The first school of thought says it depends on the degree of commitment and responsibility of the interventionist state. The second group of thought amongst scholars explains that the interventionist state providing too much aid to the occupied state gives them little incentive to develop their own institutions for sustainability. Lastly, a group of scholars say that it all depends on the social and economic conditions before arriving in the occupied state.

These arguments have intriguing insights and help to explain why U.S. military-led state-building can succeed or fail. This study argues that the United States was more successful in Iraq than Afghanistan due to sustainability issues, diverting resources from Afghanistan to Iraq, and because Afghanistan is more ethnically fragmented than Iraq. This type of research is essential for two reasons; the first is that leaders in the United States continue to assume that state-building through military intervention in weak states will be easy and do not show an understanding of the complexities involved. The U.S. has been involved in these situations more than any other state in the last 100 years. The second is usually when analyzing state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are lumped together as failures, but there are key differences, and one was more successful than the other.

This thesis employs qualitative research and uses secondary sources such as peer-reviewed academic journals, news articles, books, documentary media, and government publications to conduct a case study that uses a comparative analysis of U.S. military-led state-building in Iraq from 2003-2012 and Afghanistan from 2001-2021.

Beginning with a literature review, this thesis will outline the three schools of thought mentioned previously and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. My study will show where this research can fill in the gap left by previous scholars. It will outline the research method and design employed by this study. Next, it will provide comprehensive results and analysis. This study concludes by summarizing the data and providing this analysis's scope conditions or limitations.

Literature Review

Most agree that Germany and Japan are examples of when the U.S. and its allies successfully used their respective militaries for state-building. The dynamics in Iraq and Afghanistan are entirely different. Regarding military-led state-building, scholars have proposed a few theories on what makes it successful or not. This debate has received new life because of the recent U.S.

withdrawal from Afghanistan, which snowballed into the elected government of Afghanistan being overthrown by the Taliban in August 2021. Such lines of reasoning can be grouped into three top categories of explanation. The first can be summarized by saying it depends on the degree of commitment and responsibility of the interventionist state. The second set of thought amongst scholars explains that the interventionist state providing too much aid to the occupied state provides them with little incentive to develop their own institutions for sustainability. Lastly, a group of scholars says that it all depends on the social and economic conditions before arriving in the occupied state. All three of these lines of reasoning have intriguing insights and help to explain why U.S. military-led state-building and creating strong security forces, government institutions, and economies in these regions can succeed or fail. However, they leave out a few essential factors my research will show are very important to consider. First, how well the occupied state would be able to sustain the infrastructure built by the U.S. once it left. Second, how the very invasion of Iraq diverted resources away from Afghanistan when it needed it most. Last is how fundamentally different Afghanistan and Iraq are regarding ethnic fragmentation. The next section of this paper will analyze and offer critiques of the literature of scholars in these three schools of thought.

The school of thought this thesis suggests it has the most substantial explanatory power from the three mentioned is that the social and economic conditions of the occupied state matter the most in the success or failure of U.S. military-led state-building. While there is no argument to be made that Iraq is a strong state by any means, it was much more developed than Afghanistan before either military intervention. Before getting into this argument made by scholars, we will begin by analyzing the first two arguments.

Degree of Responsibility by the Interventionist State

A leading theory amongst scholars of U.S. military-led state-building being a success or failure is that it depends on the degree

of commitment and responsibility by the interventionist state. They argue that this can be measured by how long the U.S. is willing to stay in the occupied state and how much money and personnel they are willing to commit (Dobbins, 2003). Meaning the more time, aid, and resources invested in the operation, the better the results will be. Bizhan (2018) and Dobbins (2003) both commit to these theories and say that time, aid, and resources are high on the list of the most controllable factors in making state-building a success or failure. The examples provided for this theory are found in the case of both Iraq and Afghanistan. There existed a strict divide in the Bush administration between his Department of Defense (DOD) and his Department of State (Kirk, 2008). The Department of State held the idea that each region needed a substantial number of troops and money to clear the area of insurgents, hold the area securely, and build functional Iraqi and Afghan institutions (Kirk, 2008). This counterinsurgency method was called Clear, Hold, and Build. The DOD wholeheartedly disagreed and said the Iraqi and Afghan people needed to do this for themselves (Kirk, 2008). From the beginning, Donald Rumsfeld told the people of the United States and kept an internal doctrine of “in and out” (Santos & Teixeira, U. T, 2013). The goal was to go in quickly, overthrow the repressive regimes and get out. This meant that there would be fewer troops needed and fewer resources. The DOD won this debate, and their policy was carried out, leading to the chaos that followed in both states (Kirk, 2008). The Bush administration was unwilling to admit or commit to the appropriate amount of time and resources needed to take on such a massive task of state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, it is unknown if the appropriate number of resources had been committed immediately and the level of complexity was well understood if that would have made a significant difference.

The reason that this argument has validity and may explain the difference between the slightly better success in Iraq and the failure in Afghanistan is that the conflict in Iraq received even more support and resources than Afghanistan if we compare the initial invasion

of both states (Bamberger, 2022) (Bowen, 2013). The U.S. went into the invasion of Afghanistan with the support of the United Nations and NATO, but the U.S. itself prioritized Iraq (Kirk, 2008). It is true that in the first few years into the invasion of Iraq, it was not adequately supported, and the U.S. poorly misjudged what it would take to withdraw (Kirk, 2008). However, it falls short because it does not explain the outcome when looking at the entirety of these two conflicts. The U.S. government spent twenty long years in Afghanistan and \$145 billion explicitly dedicated to state-building efforts (Robinson, 2018). In Iraq, the nine-year state-building program cost around \$60 billion (Robinson, 2018). When comparing the two, if this theory held, we would expect the state-building efforts in Afghanistan to be more successful than in Iraq. If we expand this theory beyond these two cases and look at U.S. state-building efforts in Japan and Germany, most of the institutional changes in Japan were implemented within the first three years (Monten, 2014). Similarly, in Germany, re-institutionalization took about seven years. \$45 billion was spent supporting and providing aid to Japan and Germany together, which is far less costly in terms of aid and time. Nevertheless, both examples are considered successful compared to Afghanistan (Monten, 2014). The U.S. has spent tireless amounts of manpower and money to try to establish strong security forces, government institutions, and economies.

Both states largely remained heavily reliant on the U.S. for support. Iraq has been more stable, but Afghanistan failed soon after the U.S. left (Fatah, 2020). Another flaw with this argument is assuming that the amount of money spent equals better quality results. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports that no direct correlation exists between the funds spent on reconstruction projects and the quality of the programs (Bamberger, 2022).

Too Much Aid Creates Dependence

The next scholarly grouping explains that the success or failure of military-led state-building is based on the amount of aid provided by the interventionist can lead to dependence and

failure to create an independent state. Shamiran & Alistair (2021) and Cline (2022) say there is a conflict when the interventionist state attempts to provide public services the same time as they are trying to get the domestic government to provide the public service by financing or training them. When the interventionist state provides the service, it gives little incentive to the domestic leaders to invest time and resources into providing the service themselves. For example, in Afghanistan, the United States has a vested interest in providing security forces to domestic leaders because they do not want Afghanistan to be a safe haven for terrorists (Robinson, 2018). The domestic leaders are aware of this, and they are not incentivized to develop more robust security forces because they know the United States has an interest in continuing to support them (Shamiran & Alistair, 2021). Scholars also say that the aid provided could be the only thing propping up an institution in the occupied state; therefore, it will not stand when that aid is stopped (Shamiran & Alistair, 2021) (Cline, 2022). Another problem with aid is that it could be tied to conditions placed on the funds used in state-building efforts (Robinson, 2018). For example, the interventionist state, like the U.S., may threaten to withhold aid if certain conditions are not met, like rooting out corruption from elections. When the corruption is not rooted out, will the interventionist really be able to withhold aid when it is propping up the institution? (Robinson, 2018). SIGAR lends credence to this theory by stating in its 2023 report that the risk of corruption of U.S. dollars going through the government of Afghanistan was of great concern (Robinson, 2018). This meant that U.S. officials often circumvented the Afghan government and provided assistance directly (Robinson, 2018). This meant the Afghan government was not getting the proper experience needed to sustain these institutions once the U.S. left. Specific programs would seem to be working very well, and when they were turned over to the Afghan government, they did not have the proper experience and lacked the motivation to keep them going. Yet another aspect of this theory is that when aid is propping up the occupied state,

the leaders do not have the “fear of failure” and therefore behave more recklessly (Monten, 2014).

The weakness in this argument is that this logic applies to both Afghanistan and Iraq and therefore does not explain the variation in results. For example, the security forces in Iraq relied heavily on the United States for support. They knew the United States would not allow them to fail because they had a vested interest in helping them fight the insurgency (Robinson, 2018). Nevertheless, somehow through the withdrawal, the security forces in Iraq have remained mainly the dominant force in Iraq.

Existing Social and Economic Conditions Matter

One of the strongest arguments made by scholars is that the pre-existing social and economic conditions of the occupied state matter when trying to make a successful military-led state-building operation. Dobbins (2003), Dodge (2013), and Monten (2014) tell us that when the occupied state has had prior experience with successful security forces, government institutions, and economies or has established a prior system of bureaucratic institutions, then the transition is much more successful. Other factors for success are if the government leaders have experience and knowledge that can be translated to maintain this new form of government and structure. (Monten, 2014). Taking a step outward past the two cases of Iraq and Afghanistan and taking a look at Japan and Germany again, scholars of this theory believe that the success of Japan and Germany is mainly due to the infrastructure that was in place before the military intervention that could be repurposed for setting up new institutions (Monten, 2014). This would also explain why Iraq has been slightly more successful in state-building because there was already infrastructure previously in place that trickled down to the governance of local areas (Younis, 2011). This was not the case in Afghanistan; there has not been a governing structure that had a rule on the local level outside the large cities like Kabul (Elias, 2018). This made it a somewhat smoother process to establish these formations and keep them maintained in Iraq,

explaining the absence of such in Afghanistan. Scholars say past strength is translated into future strength (Dobbins, 2003).

Dobbins (2003) and Dodge (2013) say that social conditions like the existence of prior intra-state ethnic conflict and poor economic strength will be indicators of when intervention and democratization will fail (Dobbins, 2003). When a state is divided by ethnic tensions, creating a cohesive population can be difficult, especially if one ethnic group is excluded from power (Elias, 2018). This can create further divisions and is a reason for the deterioration of developing state institutions (Elias, 2018). Also, when ethnic conflicts are in full swing, one group can create tension with the military interventionist, and if this leads to civilian casualties, more tensions will arise. A strength of this argument is that ethnic conflict remains a substantial problem in Afghanistan and Iraq. It worked well when we compared the two cases to Japan and Germany; they were relatively low levels of ethnic conflicts (Dobbins, 2003). This can also apply to Iraq and Afghanistan because Afghanistan has more local-level ethnic conflict. Scholars also contend that economic strength is another factor in the success of military-led state-building. In the case of Japan and Germany, very industrialized states, the GDP per capita at the time indicated economic security. States who are already grappling with economic insecurity, and the addition of military intervention and violent conflict can only exacerbate the problem. Afghanistan has notoriously been one of the poorest countries in the world and remains so today (World Bank, 2023). Iraq faced heavy economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations before the intervention but was a significant oil exporter (Rubin, 2006).

The strongest argument for how the U.S. was more successful in state-building in Iraq than in Afghanistan is the theory that pre-existing social and economic conditions matter. This argument is the strongest in explanatory power because all the pieces of the Iraq and Afghanistan state-building puzzle fit into this theory, unlike those in the previous two theories. It is clear that if the occupied state has had prior experience with

democracy or has already established a system of bureaucratic institutions, the transition is much more successful. Ethnic tensions and poor social-economic conditions have definitely had a decisive impact on the efforts to build a sustainable security force, government institutions, and healthy economies.

An area needing further research is how well the ideas and beliefs of the leaders of the interventionist state align with the reality of the state of affairs in the occupied state and how domestic politics shape these intervention efforts. This will not be the focus of the research to complete this project, but it is worth noting and requires more analysis.

Methodology

This thesis uses qualitative research and secondary sources such as peer-reviewed academic journals, news articles, books, documentary media, and government publications to compare U.S. military-led state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan to determine why it worked better in Iraq than in Afghanistan. First, this study begins by examining how well each state could sustain the reconstruction programs and infrastructure set in place by the United States. This can be analyzed by determining the government's experience with prior programs and what funding they had to support it once the U.S. stopped its support. In addition, analyze how well the U.S. worked with each state's government to see if these programs and/or infrastructure were a priority to them. Next, this thesis will examine how diverted resources from Afghanistan to Iraq played a role in the failure to successfully state-build in Afghanistan by analyzing what progress was made before the war in Iraq and what happened in Afghanistan post-invasion of Iraq. Last, this study will analyze what role ethnic fragmentation played in the success or failure of state-building through military intervention. Both states suffer from ethnic and/or religious conflict, but this study aims to analyze if this played a more significant role in one state versus the other.

This thesis is structured as a case study consisting of two states: Afghanistan from

2001-2021 and Iraq from 2003-2012. This study solely focuses on the United States' role in state-building. When referring to Iraq and Afghanistan, it is intended to mean the entire country within the geographical boundaries. When referring to their respective governments, it is intended to refer to the governments set in place after each U.S. military intervention and backed by the U.S. government.

These two cases were chosen to provide a relevant comparison and increase the impact of the variation of the outcome of U.S. military-led state-building in two similar states. By outlining the following similarities, we can see how much of an impact the independent variables have on the dependent variable. Iraq and Afghanistan are known for their strong religious values and tribalism (Barfield, 2011). This plays out in both regions by ethnic or religious identities exceeding their national identity, leading to conflict and instability. Iraq and Afghanistan are both predominately Muslim. Iraq has large populations of Sunni and Shia divisions of Islam, and Afghanistan's majority religious sect is Sunni (Barfield, 2011). Both states were at some point affected by British colonialism, but Afghanistan has also been subject to Russian interference. Political instability is another common thread that has led to foreign intervention and regime change.

There are several reasons why this thesis on military-led state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan is essential. The first is to have an impact on policy decision-making going forward. With the continuing political instability in the Middle East and the continued involvement of the U.S. government, it is essential that the appropriate lessons are learned and mistakes are not repeated. State-building has proven to be extremely difficult and needs to be more well-understood. This thesis can also provide additional insight into actions taken by the U.S. government that led to successful outcomes, shed light, and add transparency to the failures. It is the goal of this thesis to contribute to academic studies on state-building through military interventions and provide an analysis of the contributing variables.

Definitions

State-building

Conor Keane (2016) describes how state-building, in terms of definition, is highly vague compared to the agreement on the requirements to get it done. He says state-building is often conflated with other terms, such as nation-building and peacebuilding, which are very different (Keane, 2016). Keane defines state-building by first putting a heavy focus on the definition of the state as "the highest institutions of governance in a territory" and state-building as the "enhancement of a state's capacities" (Keane, 2016).

In the post-invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, state-building began to have a negative connotation. It became so bad that they decided to change the term used to describe these efforts towards the end of the Bush administration's last term in office (Keane, 2016). The U.S. government decided to rebrand this concept and refer to it as Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations (SRO). The United States has asserted that SROs aim is to create a "safe and secure environment through the rule of law, stable governance, and sustainable development" (Keane, 2016).

In this study, when referring to state-building, the intent is to summarize the process through a military intervention that the United States has been rebuilding or establishing for the first-time infrastructure, state institutions, security forces, and the respective economies in Iraq and Afghanistan. A state must be legitimized and provide its people with essential services. It must be able to enforce the rule of law and sustain its economic development. This thesis will measure the success and effectiveness of the dependent variable, state-building, based on the strength of state institutions, the presence and capability of strong police and security forces, and a stable economy.

Sustainability

The standard definition of sustainability is the capability to continue or support a process over time. Sustainability in this study will refer to the ability of the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan to keep their state institutions, security forces,

and economic development functioning over the long-term post-U.S. withdrawal. Some factors that can affect sustainability are the willingness of the local population to participate or the local government's prioritization for such projects and whether there is appropriate funding post foreign support.

Resources

The standard definition of resources is an amount of money, supplies, staff, or other things that can be obtained by a person/organization to function effectively. When referring to diverted resources in this thesis, it means in terms of financial support and U.S. government officials, military personnel, and contractors. This will be measured by the number of personnel or money that was allocated before the invasion of Iraq and after the invasion of Afghanistan.

Ethnic Fragmentation

The traditional meaning of ethnic fragmentation and how this study will also use it refers to a separation of identities within a single state along the lines of religion, ethnicity, tribal, clan, or local lines (Barfield, 2011). This will be measured by analyzing the difference in ethnic fragmentation between the two states and how that may have played a role in the success or failure of state-building.

Results

Case Study I: Afghanistan

After the United States had entered Afghanistan following the events of September 11th, 2001, they immediately sought help from anti-Taliban rebel tribes to defeat the Taliban. The U.S. goal was to neutralize the Taliban because the Taliban allowed terrorists and insurgents to have a stronghold there and, most notably, would not turn al-Qaeda (AQ) or Osama Bin Landin over to the United States. By November 2001, the Taliban had fallen. What remained of AQ and the Taliban had fled to neighboring Pakistan (Bamberger, 2022). It is also essential to remember that Afghanistan was entrenched in conflict for 23 years before the U.S. invasion, which took a devastating toll on its citizens and

institutions (Barfield, 2011). During this time, an interim President had been installed, Hamid Karzai. The United States created an Embassy there in 2002, and its ambassador, Ryan Crocker, noted that the country was in utter devastation and that Karzai had no real legitimacy and not much of anything to work with. He had no security forces, military or police. There were no running state institutions of any kind and basically no societal function (Bamberger, 2022). It was clear that Afghanistan needed enormous humanitarian aid and development.

According to SIGAR, state-building efforts came down to the following goals, (1) establish, train, pay, and arm the Afghan military and police. (2) Build a legitimate electoral process by providing funds for elections, hiring election officials, and providing the framework for political parties to develop. (3) Fund and build the Afghan school system with a particular focus on educating girls. (4) Try to develop a private sector by providing aid for citizens to start businesses in hopes of creating a marketplace for domestic and foreign markets. (5) Improve access to healthcare by funding facilities, providing equipment, and training medical staff. (6) Teach officials how to manage a national budget and provide techniques to prevent corruption. (6) Provide services to improve people's lives in contested areas so they would prefer the government and reject the Taliban (Bamberger, 2022). This is quite a list of ambitious goals. Fast forward 20 years later, while the U.S. has made headway in some of these areas, it has largely failed.

Sustainability in Case I:

Sustainability is a huge factor in this failure. It is not to say that sustainability has not been a focus of the U.S. Congress has on several occasions requested that programs and reconstruction efforts be required to consider sustainability before implementation. However, this was never really done and was more of a bureaucratic checkbox than an actual implementation. Another problem was the need politically to show progress; therefore, projects were rushed without taking sustainability long term into consideration (Bamberger, 2022). By 2014, Congress tried to

prohibit any new programs that the government of Afghanistan could not sustain, but this policy was not implemented on the ground.

To analyze why the Afghan government could not sustain most reconstruction efforts, we have to look at the financial capacity of its government to do so. First, it almost entirely relied on donor money for its security and state institutional support. At least \$8 billion of their \$11 billion budget for public spending came from donors (Bamberger, 2022). Perhaps those funds would be a little more manageable if the U.S. had, at times, adequately communicated its plans for spending those funds on various projects. For example, in 2008, the U.S. gave the go-ahead to a contractor to begin building two hospitals in two separate provinces. One would be a large regional hospital with 100 beds, and the other a more local hospital with 20 beds. The total cost of building both hospitals was just under 20 million (Bamberger, 2022). The problem is that the Afghan Ministry of Health did not find out about the hospitals until one year after they had started being built. What exacerbated the problem is that these hospitals would be far more expensive to run than the hospitals they were replacing (Bamberger, 2022).

Many of the problems with sustainability also came down to technical know-how. For instance, the U.S. would build roads that not only did the Afghan government not have the financial means to support the ongoing maintenance of, but it did not have the technical and logistical knowledge to maintain the roads (Bamberger, 2022). This can also be seen in programs aimed at Afghanistan's power needs. They were too expensive, and the government did not have the technological knowledge to keep them going. These projects have failed and are not currently sustained (Bamberger, 2022). SIGAR reports that the Afghan government actually has no interest in continuing projects where they did not have a say in their priority. As mentioned previously, some projects were started without even consulting the Afghan government; therefore, they did not have the same interest in seeing them succeed as the U.S. did. Overall, monitoring reconstruction projects for sustainability was almost nonexistent,

according to a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) senior official (Bamberger, 2022). The same USAID official stated that projects were rushed in order to satisfy an agency quota or congressional mandate, and the appropriate amount of time needed to develop these projects and adequately train the Afghan government on how to run them was not given.

Resources in Case I

Another important factor that played into the failure to state-build in Afghanistan was the decision to invade Iraq and make it the priority conflict. After November 2001, the Bush administration had the opportunity to build peace with the defeated Taliban and refused (Bamberger, 2022). This led the way for the Taliban to regroup and rebuild as a powerful insurgency which would ultimately contribute to the failure of state-building efforts by the United States. One of the main factors in this happening is the war in Iraq. When the U.S. decided to split its military personnel, its funding, and its focus to Iraq, it would prove to be very consequential for state-building efforts in Afghanistan. After the invasion of Iraq, even keeping security in Afghanistan proved to be very difficult. They simply did not have the means to accomplish even this critical goal of maintaining security. As Dobbins points out in the SIGAR report, the Bush administration had a decision to make about its allocation of resources; it either had to prioritize Iraq's reconstruction efforts or Afghanistan's (Bamberger, 2022). It was a deliberate choice to choose Iraq. Afghanistan was given less than 30% of the resources and funding provided to the efforts of Iraq (Kilcullen, 2009). As a result, the Taliban was able to resurge. The National Security Council, on multiple occasions, when asked what was needed to succeed in Afghanistan regarding military efforts and state-building efforts, they were consistent in its response. They needed more resources (Bamberger, 2022).

By 2009, when the Obama administration came into office and assessed the situation, they also determined that Afghanistan had been under-resourced. They decided to send a surge

of troops and funding (Bamberger, 2022). These surges came with the condition that it would only be sustained for 18 months (Bamberger, 2022). By this time, it was too late, the security situation was already progressing, and the resurgence of the Taliban was growing stronger and gaining more support among civilians (Bamberger, 2022).

Ethnic Fragmentation in Case I

State-building in Afghanistan would prove to be extremely difficult because of the ethnic fragmentation and local-level tribal conflicts. Afghanistan has a current population of 41.3 million people. Within that population are many ethnic groups. The leading ethnic group is the Pashtun which makes up about 40% of the population. Some other larger ethnic groups are the Tajik, the Hazara, the Uzbek, the Aimaq, and the Turkmen (Barfield, 2011). There are many smaller ethnic groups. In addition to the many different ethnic groups, there are local tribes who often have issues with one another over local resources or other local and tribal matters.

There was an apparent ignorance amongst all levels of leadership involved with state-building efforts, from politicians, DOD officials, Administration officials, etc., in understanding the local level politics and the needs of the Afghans at a local level. When the counterinsurgency method Clear, Hold, and Build finally did take route, it was ineffective because there was no particular focus or a demonstration of understanding of the intricacies of local-level issues. Sometimes, well-meaning projects ended up helping one group versus the other. This made

conflict on the local level much worse or created the opportunity for the Taliban to come in and create an alliance with the aggrieved party. The Taliban was becoming more effective at dispute resolution than the U.S. because they clearly understood the local level needs, conflicts, and politics (Barfield, 2011). Another issue was that because the U.S. was entirely reliant on the local Afghans for information, they were subject to manipulation and would frequently find they had been misled or, even worse, funds that were given to Afghans for local projects were being funneled to the Taliban (Barfield, 2011).

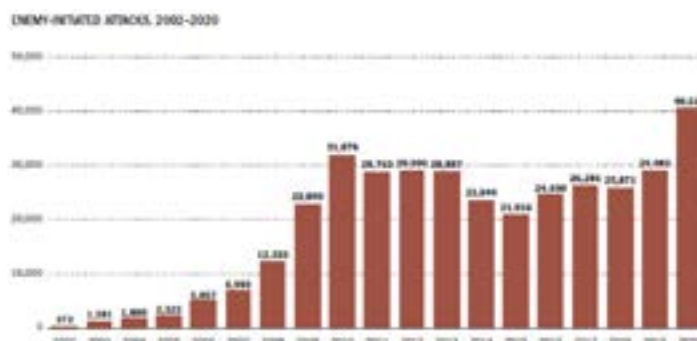
Conclusions in Case I

While it appeared the U.S. had a fighting chance to state-build in Afghanistan in the first two years of the conflict, the decision to invade Iraq, not correctly assess if the projects implemented could be sustained, and the failure to understand the ethnic and tribal conflicts would prove to be detrimental to the cause. The Afghan government was starting from absolute scratch. They had no experience with governing on a regional level and were plagued by years of war and devastation. All infrastructure had either been destroyed or nonexistent in the first place, so the U.S. was already facing an extremely difficult challenge. Combined with the factors outlined in this thesis, it becomes clear why the United States could not successfully build a state that could function without the full and complete support of the U.S.

Case Study II: Iraq

In 2003, when the U.S. invaded Iraq, the

Enemy-Initiated Attacks 2002-2022



expectation was that the war would be quick and easy. Most Americans remember that in May 2003, President Bush gave a speech in front of a massive sign on the USS Abraham Lincoln that read Mission Accomplished. As we now know, the mission was far from accomplished and arguably was never accomplished. After the invasion, the Bush Administration made two huge mistakes. The first was to disband the entire Iraqi military. There was no consideration of whether to remove the military leadership only or determine which officials may have been involved in human rights violations. Instead, everyone was let go. This was a crucial mistake because it left upward of 400,000 members of the armed services unemployed and still armed (Kirk, 2008). This left former armed service members particularly vulnerable to the persuasion of insurgents and gave them a flat-out reason to join the insurgency. Another critical mistake was known as the De-Baathification Order (Kirk, 2008). Since the Saddam regime was a part of the Ba'ath party, they ordered the removal of all Ba'athists from government offices or any institutions, even universities. The massive problem with this was that they were all the officials with the most experience in running state institutions. This was a move that Iraqi elites who had opposed Saddam supported and wanted a part in remaking the government with them in power (Kirk, 2008). The aftermath was chaos. Most existing institutions fell into shambles and significantly decreased the state's capacity to maintain civil order. There were no police or rule of law for some time. There was extensive looting that destroyed the country's infrastructure. Government buildings were looted and torn apart, people robbed and demolished banks, destroyed oil facilities, and dismantled electrical systems (Kirk, 2008). Even worse, the de-Ba'athification was seen as an anti-Sunni order (Kirk, 2008). Contentions between the Sunni and Shia sects of the Muslim religion in Iraq were already on the brink of civil war. The invasion of Iraq and subsequent actions by the U.S. assured that this civil war would break out. In addition, the entire region would become unstable and give rise to the Islamist extremist terrorist group, the Islamic State (IS).

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, I do not assert that state-building in Iraq has been a stunning success. What I do assert is that it was more successful in Iraq than in Afghanistan. According to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), the state-building efforts came down to the following goals; (1) establish an Iraqi constitution that is written and approved by Iraqis, (2) help establish institutions for free and fair elections (3) assist in strengthening local and regional government systems (4) help train elected officials to be more effective (5) assist in developing security forces that have respect for the rule of law and respect human rights (6) help Iraqis create a thriving civil society (Bowen, 2013).

Sustainability in Case II

Iraq had a better chance of sustaining the U.S. state-building efforts because they had functioning state institutions prior to the U.S. invasion. Although Iraq was a weak state under Saddam, mainly due to crippling economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations in the 1990s, it still had a functioning government. For example, in 2003, when the de-Ba'athification order was implemented, the Iraq Finance Ministry had around six thousand employees. After the order, about 20 percent of its employees were let go, mostly in leadership positions. However, they still had a significant number of employees working there with the expertise to continue running their institution (Bowen, 2013).

Another reason Iraq had more success with sustainability is that they are an oil and gas-producing country. This means they had a much better chance of having a stable economy and having the monetary means to support infrastructure projects that the U.S. had developed. At the height of reconstruction efforts in 2010, according to data from the World Bank, Iraq had a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$221 billion compared to Afghanistan, whose GDP was \$14.7 billion the same year. This means Iraq had a GDP of almost fifteen times that of Afghanistan. While not all U.S. led state-building projects were successful, there are a few that stand out. According to the Deputy

Prime Minister for Energy Affairs, Hussain al-Shahristani, one significant success that stands out is the project to develop Umm Qasr (Bowen, 2013). This port city in Basrah is a Persian Gulf city near the Shatt al-Arab River. This is Iraq's main commercial port which has proved to be an essential part of their trade. With the help of the U.S., this port is now a well-functioning port with oil terminals and large container terminals. The port has played a vital role in oil exports and importing consumer goods, food, and supplies in general. Al-Shahristani also credited the U.S. for developing Iraq's electricity capacity and a more robust education sector (Bowen, 2013). Regarding education, in 2011, Iraq's primary school enrollment was up 27% from pre-invasion levels; more than thirty thousand teachers had been trained. In addition, eight million new textbooks were given to bring the curriculum up to date. The former Minister of Interior, Jawad al-Bolani, also said they had seen successes with the strengthening and training its security forces (Bowen, 2013).

Resources in Case II

Another reason for state-building efforts in Iraq being more successful is that resources were prioritized for Iraq. The scope of the invasion of Iraq was obviously more significant than the scope of Afghanistan. In a 2007 letter to then President Bush, leaders in the Senate Democratic Caucus begged him to re-shift the focus and a majority of resources back to Afghanistan (Bamberger, 2022). Democrats felt that in order to keep America safe, stabilizing Afghanistan should have been a number one priority. By that time, it was clear that both AQ and the Taliban were strengthening in Pakistan, and the Taliban had begun taking back territories in Afghanistan. The Bush administration did not have the capacity to refocus because security issues in Iraq had already been escalating there as well. When the counterinsurgency method, Clear, Hold, and Build, was starting to gain some success in Iraq and not having much success in Afghanistan, this could have been a reason that they felt it was better to keep a continued focus on Iraq and keep the secondary focus on Afghanistan. General

George Casey, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, and Lieutenant General David Petraeus decided that the mounting insurgency required a considerably larger Iraqi force (Bowen, 2013). This significantly influenced then Ambassador John Negroponte's plans to reallocate reconstruction funds. This prompted over \$3 billion of its total \$19 billion budget to support the Iraqi Security Forces (Bowen, 2013). This is a large budget that was allocated to Iraq's security when Afghanistan was also facing major security issues.

Aside from the financially diverted resources, a considerable number of troops and other military personnel were diverted to Iraq in 2003. The number of U.S. troops or so-called "boots on the ground" in Iraq mostly stayed at around 100 to 150k (BBC, 2011). During the Iraq surge from 2007-2008, the numbers went upwards of 175k. This was done at the request of President Bush in order to provide extra security during a particular uprising in insurgency and terrorist attacks. Not until the election of President Obama, who had campaigned on a withdrawal from Iraq, did troop levels dwindle. Levels dropped below 50k in the middle of 2010 until the withdrawal in 2012. By this time, it was too late in Afghanistan to prioritize it. The Taliban was gaining too much strength, and counterinsurgency methods that were successful in Iraq were just not as effective in Afghanistan. This directly impacted state-building efforts because it is difficult to focus on building a state when you are constantly concerned about the next attack.

Ethnic Fragmentation in Case II

Iraq also has experienced its fair share of ethnic and sectarian conflict. Iraq is made up of three primary ethno-religious groups, the Sunni, the Shia, and the Kurds. The tensions between these groups erupted after the U.S. invasion. The central conflict was between the Sunni and Shia, but the Kurds in Northern Iraq have also had a conflict with the central government over resources and territory. These tensions are what led to the opportunity for AQ and IS to come in and cause even more chaos.

Even though these ethno-religious conflicts in Iraq are complicated, the ethnic conflicts in

Afghanistan are on such a local and tribal level, making things much more complicated for state-building efforts. Understanding the grievances between the Sunni, the Shia, and Kurds is less complicated than figuring out grievances on a much more local level. If the U.S. came in and built some infrastructure to make access to resources easier, like roads, access to water, or electricity, it would be much less subject to another group of people not far away having a problem with it and trying to destroy it.

What eventually made things in Iraq much smoother was the ease of the civil war in 2008. Violence had begun to decrease significantly. The Iraqi government was taking steps to address specific issues inflaming the conflict. Not to say that Iraq is entirely free of violence or extremist attacks, but it is significantly better than it was during the height of the surge. This was not the case in Afghanistan, where violent attacks continued to surge, and security issues have never really improved.

Conclusions in Case II

Many mistakes were made in Iraq, but there were stronger chances for more success. Clearly, having a pre-existing structure for governance, state institutions, and people who had experience running them is likely the most substantial reason why state-building efforts worked better in Iraq. Initially, those existing institutions were destroyed, and leaders were fired. However, when the U.S. finally reversed course, it was a smoother process than starting from scratch, as was the case in Afghanistan. Iraq being an oil and gas exporting country and having a much higher GDP gives Iraq a better advantage for sustaining its state institutions and infrastructure. Another crucial factor in why more success was seen in Iraq was the priority focus it was given. Afghanistan was not precisely neglected, but it was severely under-sourced, and one can speculate that if the U.S. never invaded Iraq and split the resources in financial terms and military personnel, things may have turned out differently. Last, despite ethnic and religious conflicts in both states, Afghanistan's conflict was significantly more fragmented and complicated.

The Iraqi government eventually quelled some of the civil conflicts with the help of the U.S., which allowed state-building efforts to have a better chance for successful implementation.

Conclusion

State-building is not the same thing as humanitarian aid. It is not supposed to be a temporary relief; it is meant to provide a building block for fragile states to maintain their security forces, economies, and institutions. They are not meant to be never-ending efforts. However, that is the situation that America found itself in with Afghanistan. We were able to leave Iraq sooner with more success because they had a better chance at sustaining the infrastructure of their institutions and the projects implemented by the United States. Afghanistan was not in a position to be able to maintain most of these projects financially. Iraq had a GDP fifteen times larger than Afghanistan. There were times when the Afghan government was not even aware of the project until the U.S. was already building it. There was fundamental neglect to understand what would be needed to sustain state-building efforts in Afghanistan.

Resources are a critical factor in successful state-building. The amount of money and personnel an effort like this, takes is substantial. When the U.S. went into Afghanistan and Bush administration officials were already planning for the invasion of Iraq, it is hard to understand how they thought splitting the resources would lead to a successful outcome in either case. The U.S. had two extremely difficult military-led state-building projects that individually required an immense effort, and it seems an intentional effort was made to prioritize Iraq in a critical time for Afghanistan.

Last, when the U.S. entered Afghanistan, it entered into a heavily ethnically fragmented state, where the conflict between groups is on a local tribe level and was highly complex. The U.S. did not take the time to understand these intricacies and instead exacerbated the issues by implementing projects that appeared to favor one side or the other. This allowed the Taliban to come in and resolve issues and gain the trust

and support of the local people. Not only did this earn the civilian trust, but it made the security issues worse for the Afghan and U.S. security forces because the people would be loyal to the Taliban and not turn them over or even hide them.

Usually, when scholars discuss Iraq and Afghanistan, they lump them together as state-building failures, and while there is merit in that, this thesis clearly disagrees. The Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told SIGIR,

“This money and the blood that was shed here is part of the price [paid by] the United States of America in cooperation with Iraq to fight terrorism...and establish the Strategic Framework Agreement.” (SIGAR, 2022, pg. 11)

One important lesson from both efforts is that saving and strengthening existing state institutions is more accessible than building them from scratch. However, the ideal lesson to be learned is that military-led state-building on the scales seen in Iraq and Afghanistan is very difficult. They cost not only vast amounts of money but, more importantly, they cost massive amounts of American lives. The rightful question is, should we even engage in military-led state-building at all? As Kilcullen (2009) rightfully asks, is it the military's place to be armed social workers?

There are specific scope and limitations of this study. While these arguments can explain why state-building efforts in Iraq were more successful than in Afghanistan, they do not account for how domestic politics and how the ideas and beliefs of U.S. officials shape what happens. We know that politics at home had significant implications for what happened overseas. We need more emphasis in future studies on how well the ideas and beliefs of the leaders of the interventionist state align with the reality of the state of affairs in the occupied state. Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld greatly influenced how things were handled in the first few years of each invasion. Along with that came all of their personal motivations, personal biases, and political ambitions. Congress had expectations and timelines for state-building efforts that caused many projects to be rushed

and not done correctly. Even President Obama making campaign promises of troop withdrawals affected the outcome of Iraq and Afghanistan. These types of individual decisions had a profound impact.

In conclusion, this thesis focused on military-led state-building in two extremely difficult situations that share a great many similarities but yielded fundamentally different results. Ultimately, sustainability, resource allocation, and ethnic fragmentation fueled conflicts that mattered the most in the outcome of successful state-building in two similar states.

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