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A War That Never Ends:
Internal Conflicts, External Interventions, and the Civil Wars in Afghanistan

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The civil war in Afghanistan lasted for over two decades until it finally came to an end in 2001. During this horrific period of time, two million Afghan were killed and over five million fled the country.¹ Many families lost their livelihood and beloved ones while the entire country has been suffering from socio-economic and political meltdown. It brings to our attention why there was such a catastrophic event in the past and how the civil war is still impacting Afghanistan today. It is difficult to analyze a single cause for the Afghanistan civil war because it involves different circumstances and different actors associated with it. But the most consistent trend is that the Afghanistan civil war was catalyzed by internal conflicts and exacerbated by external actors. This pattern of internal conflict followed by external intervention repeated itself during the civil war between 1978 and 2001 and even during the peace-making process of post-2001.

Three phases of the Afghanistan civil war will be discussed in this paper. During the first phase from 1978 to 1989, the Afghan Communist Party, the People's Democratic

¹ Timothy C. Dowling, *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Beyond* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 7.

Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), triggered the Afghanistan civil war. However, the war exacerbated when external actors—the Soviet, the United States, and Muslim communities—joined the war. When external players left Afghanistan in 1989, the civil war became an internal conflict again. From 1989 to 2001 in the second phase, the civil war started with internal conflicts based on ethnic differences. However, the war was exacerbated by “bad neighbors” who supported different ethnic groups that are related to their own ethnic representations. The civil war ended with the U.S. intervention that eventually removed the Taliban and “bad neighbors” from power in 2001. However, the peace-making process has not been very successful because ethnic divisions still create internal conflicts while the U.S. exacerbates these conflicts by favoring certain groups over others. In a concluding remark, alternatives to end the vicious cycle in Afghanistan today will be suggested.

Cold War from 1978 to 1989

Since the end of World War II in 1945, Afghanistan monarchy carried out rapid modernization. Many countries around the world contributed massive amounts of foreign aid to Afghanistan, so that the country can become a buffer zone between the Soviet and the U.S.-controlled Pakistan. By the 1970s, more than twenty nations operated bilateral aid including the U.S, all Western European countries, most of Eastern European communists, and wealthy Muslim nations.² The King Zahir and the Prime Minister Daoud utilized the capital to reform the country by paving roads, establishing air

² Nancy Peabody Newell and Richard S. Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan* (London: Cornell University Press, 1981), 41.

connections, opening up telecommunications, diversifying agricultural industries and expanding education system.³ Consequently, the middle class grew largely from a few hundred to nearly 100,000 during these periods.⁴ However, rapid modernization created greater instability because growing literacy rate outpaced available opportunities by large. Between 1965 to 1973, many secondary school graduates were unable to receive higher education because expansion of secondary schools outpaced expansions of universities.⁵ Furthermore, massive migrants moved from the countryside to cities and started to put pressure on the job market with increased competition. These problems exacerbated when Western aid fell dramatically after the Afghanistan monarchy failed to repay its debt to foreign donors.⁶

The Afghanistan civil war in 1978 started out as a conflict between two internal factions. Specifically, the elites against the communists who mobilized popular support based on the marginalized population. The communists, the PDPA, earned wide support because the economic disparity was large between ordinary citizens and elites. According to the “greed theory” interpreted by famous economist Herschel Grossman, revolutions occur to “permanently change distribution of income through either an alteration of existing property rights or the replacement of the ruling elites.”⁷ In Afghanistan, greed of ruling elites was a motivation for communist rebels to replace existing institutions. In the midst of the economic crises and social instability of the 60s and 70s, opportunities were skewed toward ruling elites. Mostly those who found jobs were from elite networks

³ Ibid, 42.

⁴ Ibid, 45.

⁵ Hamidullah Amin and Gordon B. Schilz, *A Geography of Afghanistan* (University of Nebraska, Centre for Afghanistan studies, 1976), 169.

⁶ Richard S. Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 95-116.

⁷ Herschel I. Grossman, “Kleptocracy and Revolutions,” *Oxford University Press* 52, no. 2 (April, 1999): 269.

within Kabul or from powerful tribal families while majority of population remained unemployed.⁸ Students who were well-educated but marginalized by the structural injustice, started to join the PDPA because the party promised equality and fair re-distribution of income. Consequently, the PDPA played a large role when Prime Minister Daoud overthrew the King Zahir in 1973. However, problems persisted even after the new Republican government came to power. Daoud and its elite supporters remained greedy while the majority of the population was marginalized from opportunities. Much of the institutional weakness remained the same, economic crises further widened, and unemployment rates were increasing.⁹ However, instead of making concessions, Daoud further pushed for oppressive means to strengthen its dictatorship; increased revenue for public security, military and police.¹⁰ Daoud initially suppressed the PDPA because the PDPA was the strongest political opposition in the country. When Daoud began massive purging of the PDPA leaders, the PDPA launched a coup in April 1978;¹¹ eventually, the PDPA overthrew Daoud and established the Marxist regime for the first time in Afghanistan.

Internal conflicts persisted even in the new Marxist regime because of an ideological split within the communist party. The PDPA was separated into moderate faction Parcham and radical faction Khalq; the former wanted to promote moderate reforms under the current system; and the latter wanted to promote radical reforms by destroying the existing system.¹² Eventually, the Khalq who occupied more powerful

⁸ Nancy Peabody Newell and Richard S. Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 56.

⁹ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹¹ Ibid, 69-71.

¹² Ibid, 72-73.

positions in the government defeated Parcham.¹³ Shortly after, the Khalq implemented radical reforms which triggered nation-wide resentments. Peasants were discontent with land reforms, which required transfer of 3 million acres of land to approximately 300,000 poor farming families.¹⁴ Most owners refused to plant their fields in fear of expropriation and tenants were reluctant to receive land due to Islamic prohibitions against taking the property of others.¹⁵ Consequently, the harvest dropped by one-third of previous year during the spring of 1979.¹⁶ Food shortages resulted in the Heart Uprising of March 1979, which ended up killing nearly 5,000 Khalq officials and Soviet residents.¹⁷ The rebellion started to spread in many other cities and even soldiers mutinied in Jalabad against the Khalq government.¹⁸ These crises led to further conflicts because the two leaders of Khalq disagreed over handling disputes: The President, Taraki, wanted to include secular resistance groups in politics so that dissidents could voice their grievances through politics rather than physical violence; however, the Prime Minister, Amin, wanted more totalitarian control over rebels using forces based on the few loyal-Marxist members.¹⁹ These disagreements led Taraki to make an assassination attempt on Amin in September 1979.²⁰ However, the attempt failed and Amin declared himself as the sole leader of Afghanistan after killing Taraki.

Civil war within Afghanistan exacerbated when external actors joined the war between 1979 and 1989. Initially, it was the Soviet invasion of 1979 that marked the

¹³ Ibid, 74.

¹⁴ Ibid, 81.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 85.

¹⁸ Ibid, 86.

¹⁹ Ibid, 88.

²⁰ Odd Arne Westad, "Prelude to Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978-1979," *International History Review* 16, no.1 (1994): 61-62.

beginning of larger- scaled civil war. The Soviet's intervention could be explained by the Brezhnev Doctrine established by Leonid Brezhnev, who was the Soviet's leader between 1964 to 1982. He argued that in the event of a threat to the communist rule, it is the duty of any Socialist nation-state to come to the fraternal assistance of any other socialist nation.²¹ The Soviets considered Afghan's communist regime weakened by nation-wide resistance and were disappointed by the Afghan government's inability to resolve issues alone. During the massive peasant uprising against the Khalq regime, the Soviet supported 5,000 Russian military advisers, and MI-24 helicopter gunships.²² However, rebels were getting much stronger while the government further weakened by a split in their leadership. Furthermore, the Soviets distrusted the new leadership under Amin, which compounded problems in Afghanistan. The Soviets were suspicious of Amin's relationship with the U.S. who at the time was the Soviet's enemy of the Cold War. The KGB officers spread rumours that Amin, who had been educated at Columbia University in New York, had been recruited by the CIA. Furthermore, Amin's meeting with the American *chargé d'affaires*, in Kabul during the autumn of 1979, fueled the Soviet's suspicions.²³ These suspicions motivated the Soviets to intervene in Afghanistan, whose communist leadership was significantly weakened by internal conflicts. On December 25, 1979, the Soviets sent 75,000 troops to Afghanistan, marching from northern provinces toward Kabul.²⁴ Within two days, they reached the presidential palace in Kabul and

²¹ Reza Hasmath, "The Utility of Regional Jus Cogens," (American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, USA, August 30- September 2, 2012): 8.

²² Ibid, 87.

²³ Germain Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview," *Defence Studies* 8, no. 3 (September, 2008): p.332.

²⁴ Ibid.

ended up killing Amin. Immediately after, the Soviet established the puppet government led by Parcham leaders who led the country until 1989.

The intervention of an external actor, the Soviet Union, into Afghanistan's internal conflict inevitably heightened the conflict in Afghanistan into a global conflict mirroring the chief ideological divisions of the time: The Cold War. The U.S. intervened in Afghanistan's civil war to resist against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The U.S. involvement could be explained by the Democratic Domino Theory. Democratic Domino Theory was conceptualized by Peter T. Leeson, and Andrea M. Dean: They argue that increases or decreases in democracy in one country will spread and "infect neighboring countries."²⁵ The U.S. under the Ronald Reagan administration, was particularly concerned about the decrease of democracy that may end up infecting the region with communism. Moreover, the region that was at stake of a spill-over was a geo-strategically important location, the Persian Gulf, which was critical for America's oil consumption.²⁶ Consequently, under the Carter and Reagan administrations, the U.S. provided a total of \$2.15 billion worth of aid to Afghanistan's rebel groups.²⁷ Furthermore, the U.S.'s channelling of weapons, such as American Stinger anti-aircraft (AA) missile that helped rebels to fight the Soviet's aircraft, is sometimes considered a significant factor that led to the defeat of Soviet troops.²⁸

The Cold War conflict was complicated by the interventions of other Muslim states from the region. Thus, the Cold War conflict took on a religious dimension that

²⁵ Peter T. Leeson, and Andrea M. Dean, "The Democratic Domino Theory: An Empirical Investigation," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3 (July 2009): 533.

²⁶ Germain Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview," *Defence Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 2008): 333.

²⁷ Ibid: 335.

²⁸ Ibid.

reflected the religious divisions of the region. Countries including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran joined the Afghanistan civil war in pursuit of Islamic fundamentalists. These Muslim states were united with Afghanistan's rebel groups under the Jihadism, which means having holy struggle to achieve Islam fundamentals.²⁹ They were willing to sacrifice their lives to liberate Islamic countries and to protect Islamic fundamentals against foreign invaders. According to a famous American journalist, William Blum, Muslim warriors gathered to struggle against godless atheistic communists in Afghanistan.³⁰ Amongst those Muslim supporters, significant participants were Saudi Arabia's billionaire Osama Bin Laden who organized Al-Qaeda; Saudi Arabia's monarchy that matched the U.S. aid of \$2.15 billion; Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) that channeled the American aid into Afghanistan.³¹

Growing external supports of Afghanistan's rebel groups shifted the balance of power against Afghanistan's communist puppet government. Afghanistan's rebel groups, also known as the mujahedeen (Islam Jihadist warriors), grew rapidly to reach 90,000 to 500,000 members.³² They were exceptionally successful in waging a guerilla warfare focusing on attacking supply routes and Soviet convoys and outposts. Moreover, mujahedeen conducted sabotage attacks against airbases, power stations, government buildings, and assassinated PDPA officials.³³ On the other hand, Afghanistan's government had been struggling to repress mujahedeen resistance. There was a lack of coordination between the Soviets and the puppet government because the Soviets were

²⁹ Hans Wehr, Edited by J M. Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1994).

³⁰ William Blum, *Killing hope: U.S military and CIA interventions since world war II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2004), 347.

³¹ Germain Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview," *Defence Studies*. 8, no. 3 (September, 2008): 335-336.

³² Ibid: 340.

³³ Ibid: 341

suspicious of mujahedeen informants within the government. But more importantly, the Soviets were not able to root out small-scaled and dispersed mujahedeen guerilla resistance in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan. The Soviet's only leverage was the Air Force but it was undermined when the U.S. provided AA missiles to the mujahedeen.³⁴ By December of 1986, the CIA estimated that the Soviets had lost \$40 million in Afghanistan since its occupation.³⁵ The Soviet occupation in Afghanistan came to an end when Gorbachev ordered the Soviet's retreat, which was completed by February of 1989.³⁶ Immediately after, the U.S. also retreated from Afghanistan, creating a power vacuum in the country. It put an end to, two decades of conflicts that initially began with internal ideological division; but grew to a larger-scale after interventions by global hegemons.

Ethnic War from 1989 to 2001

The civil war became largely internal again in 1989 when the Soviet's puppet government was left alone to face mujahedeen groups. Initially, the Najibullah government led an effective defense against the mujahedeen resistance. They benefitted from the Soviet's 300 airframes that were left behind during the evacuation;³⁷ and when mujahedeen attacked Jalalabad in March 1989, these airframes played a key role by killing 3000 out of 10,000 mujahedeen.³⁸ Meanwhile, the mujahedeen groups lacked

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid: 342.

³⁶ Rachel Dry and Alice Crites, "How Not to end a war," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2007/07/17/GR2007071700070.html>.

³⁷ Shane A. Smith, *Afghanistan after the Occupation: examining the Post-Soviet Withdrawal and the Najibullah Regime it left behind, 1989-1992* (Tampa, FL: Phi Alpha Theta, 2014), 337.

³⁸ Ibid: 323.

coordination amongst each other. American journalist, George Crile, described in 1991 that “each year it seemed that Najibullah only grew stronger and the mujahedeen only more divided, less attractive, and even maybe dangerous.”³⁹ However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 played a critical role in changing the course of the warfare. Already in a deteriorated economy, Najibullah’s government faced serious financial restraints after the Soviet aid was stopped. Consequently, the government was unable to fuel many of its aircrafts and military supply ran dry.⁴⁰ The problem exacerbated when Najibullah dismissed a few of his military commanders whom he distrusted due to ethnic differences. Those discriminated commanders with the Tajik and the Uzbek background ended up joining rebels, which significantly shifted the balance of power against the government.⁴¹ Eventually on April 1992, Najibullah was removed from power.

Internal conflicts continued because of the ‘peace spoiler’ that ruined the peace-making process. An American professor, Andrew Reiter, uses the term ‘peace-spoiler’ to describe “the use of violence or threats of violence in an overt attempt to derail or obstruct a signed civil war peace agreement, or to modify its provisions or implementations.”⁴² In the case of Afghanistan, peace-making attempts by mujahedeen rebels were undermined by the “peace spoiler”, Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar, who was the leader of the largest rebel group (the Pashtun), discredited the Peshawar Accord that proposed power-sharing amongst mujahedeen rebel groups. He wanted to spoil the peace and to destroy enemies so that he could declare himself the sole leader of the country.

³⁹ George Crile, *Charlie Wilson’s War: The Extraordinary Story of How the Wildest Man in Congress and a Rogue CIA Agent Changed the History of Our Times* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 518.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 328.

⁴¹ Ibid, 329.

⁴² Andrew G Reighter, *Fighting over peace: spoilers, peace agreements, and the strategic use of violence* (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillain, 2016), 7.

When Hekmatyar was asked to attend the Peshawar Accord, he responded “we will march into Kabul with our naked sword. No one can stop us ... Why should we meet the leaders?”⁴³ Even Osama Bin Laden, who worked extensively with Hekmatyar at the time, urged him to “go back to your brothers” but Hekmatyar refused to do so because he was confident in winning a war against his opponents.⁴⁴

Internal conflicts persisted based on different ethnic representations of Afghanistan. During this time, the civil war continued in the form of an ethnic war between the Pashtun and non-Pashtuns. Afghanistan’s largest ethnic group has been the Pashtun that includes 38% to 43% of the population; the second largest group has been the Tajik that constituted 20% of the population; then, Uzbek has been the third largest group that includes 13% of population; the Hazara contained 8% to 10% of population; and small ethnic groups made up the rest of the population.⁴⁵ The war was fought between Pashtun led by Hekmatyar against the interim government including the Tajik leader, Massoud; the Uzbek leader, Dostum; and the Hazara leader, Mazari.⁴⁶ The ethnic conflict can be explained by the ‘grievance theory,’ described by Paul Koellier and Anke Hoeffler. They state that “rebellion occurs when grievances are acute that people want to engage in violent protests.”⁴⁷ Although there was economic greed that motivated rebel groups to compete for resources, the grievances such as ethnic and religious factionalism

⁴³ Marcela Grad, *Massoud: An Intimate Portrait of the Legendary Afghan Leader* (Saint Louis, MO: Webster University Press, 2009)

⁴⁴ Roy Gutman, *How We Missed the Story: Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban and the Hijacking of Afghanistan* (Washington D.C: Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 34.

⁴⁵ David Isby, *Afghanistan* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010), 26-27.

⁴⁶ Aabha Dixit, “The Afghan Civil War: Emergence of the Taliban as Power Broker,” *Sage Publications* 2, no. 1 (1995): 111.

⁴⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 564.

exacerbated the ethnic conflict of 1992.⁴⁸ For several hundred years, Afghanistan's more than fourteen ethnic groups have been isolated from each other in a mountainous terrain of the country; each group carrying out their own distinctive culture, history, language, and religion. Thus, each ethnic group mobilized their own guerillas while competing for power.

Civil war within Afghanistan exacerbated when neighboring countries supported groups that shared similar ethnicity. The role of Afghanistan's neighbors in the midst of the ethnic war can be explained by the "bad neighbor theory." An American professor, Michael Brown, conceptualized the theory as "internal conflicts are often triggered by external contagion or spillover effects from neighboring state."⁴⁹ In the case of Afghanistan, Pakistan supported the Pashtun, Iran supported the Hazara, Tajikistan supported the Tajik and Uzbekistan supported the Uzbek. These neighboring states wanted to exert their influence in Afghanistan by strengthening its own ethnic groups. Their influence intensified when a massive influx of Afghanistan refugees reached their country. Refugees were trained as "refugee warriors," which is a term used by renowned author Astri Suhrke; she describes the term as citizens of one state who fled the country as a refugee and returns to their home state to struggle in a revolution.⁵⁰ These "refugee warriors" include millions of Afghanistan refugees who entered Pakistan;⁵¹ and a million refugees who reached Iran during civil wars. After getting trained by neighboring states,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Michael Edward Brown, *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 583.

⁵⁰ Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 276-277.

⁵¹ Ibid, 152.

these warriors were sent back to Afghanistan; consequently, fighting for their ethnic groups during the civil war.

I will argue that Pakistan was the most salient external actor that prolonged the civil war in Afghanistan. Pakistan had a special interest in the Afghanistan civil war because they wanted to establish a Pashtun government in their neighboring state. When Pakistan was channeling American aid to mujahedeen groups during the Soviet occupation, Pakistan contributed the most aid to Hekmatyar.⁵² Thus, Pakistan is partially responsible for the Hekmatyar's peace spoiling of the Peshwar Accord. But more importantly, Pakistan played a significant role in creating the Taliban who became a dominant force of the civil war. Since the 1980s, Pakistan worked together with Saudi Arabia to establish religious schools near the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵³ The students who were trained in these religious schools became later known as the Taliban. Pakistan government encouraged many Afghan refugees to join these religious schools by providing free rooms for students and a monthly salary that could support their family.⁵⁴ Consequently, the number of Taliban recruits grew exponentially. The first Taliban movement started in late 1994, when the Taliban leader, Mohammed Omar, rallied forces and occupied the Qandahar province to the south.⁵⁵ At this point, the warfare between the Hekmatyar and interim governments was at a stalemate. The Pakistan government started to view the Taliban as an alternative to Hekmatyar to accomplish the establishment of a Pashtun-led Afghanistan. Pakistan increased support to the Taliban, who started to sweep the southern part of the country. By September 1996,

⁵² Germain Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989: An Overview." *Defence Studies* 8, no. 3 (September, 2008): 336.

⁵³ Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 119.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 136-137.

the Taliban defeated the interim government as well as wiping out forces loyal to Hekmatyar. The oppositions to the Taliban fled to form the Northern Alliance including Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras; however, by the end of 2000, only five percent of lands were controlled by the Northern Alliance in a remote mountainous area while the rest were strictly controlled by the Taliban.⁵⁶ The Northern Alliance could not wage a war against the Taliban because they did not enjoy as much support as the Taliban did from Pakistan. Although Iran was the largest contributor to the Northern Alliance and helped to create the largest Shia organization in Afghanistan,⁵⁷ the differences between Shia and Sunni beliefs further divided the Alliance.⁵⁸ Therefore, the fragmented Northern Alliance that received much less support than the Taliban, was not a significant threat to the newly created regime.

The civil war in Afghanistan came to an end due to the U.S. intervening in the country after the 9/11 incident. On September 11, 2001, the heart of New York City was destroyed by the terrorist attack that caused thousands of casualties and trillions of dollars.⁵⁹ Immediately after, the CIA identified the suspects as members of Al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden. The U.S. urged the Taliban to extradite Bin Laden, however the Taliban refused to hand him over to the U.S. Partially, because Bin Laden has been Taliban's closest ally and more importantly, they underestimated the U.S.'s power. At the time, the Taliban judged the U.S.'s withdrawal from Somalia and Lebanon as signs of weakness; therefore, they considered the U.S. would not be able to intervene in

⁵⁶ Ibid, 22.

⁵⁷ Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Policy Toward Afghanistan," *The Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2, (Spring, 2006): 240.

⁵⁸ Ibid: 241

⁵⁹ Shan Carter and Amanda Cox, "One 9/11 Tally: \$3.3 Trillion," *The New York Times*, September 8, 2011, accessed on, March 30, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/09/08/us/sept-11-reckoning/cost-graphic.html>.

Afghanistan, whose solidarity was much stronger than those countries.⁶⁰ But, President Bush famously declared, “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorist.”⁶¹ The dichotomy made the Taliban equal to terrorists and the enemy of the U.S. Two weeks after 9/11, the CIA sent specialist to train the Northern Alliance so that the Northern Alliance could wage an effective war on the ground.⁶² Meanwhile, the U.S. Air Force began heavy bombardment everywhere they spotted the Taliban. Although the Taliban hid under tunnels and caves, the U.S. “bunker buster” would cremate them alive.⁶³ Those few Taliban who managed to escape to the mountains of the North were slaughtered by the Northern Alliance.⁶⁴ Within two months after U.S. intervention, the Taliban regime was driven out of power. It put an end to a decade-long conflict that started with ethnic differences; initially, internal ethnic divisions were later mirrored by external ethnic divisions; therefore, external actors were prompt to meddle in Afghanistan’s affairs.

Peacebuilding after the War since 2001

The peace-making process heightened political conflicts in Afghanistan because it could not resolve problems related to ethnic divisions. The Bonn Agreement took place on December 5, 2001 led by the U.S., NATO, and warlords of the Northern Alliance. They re-constructed Afghanistan’s institutions based on the Western legal system, implementing in the Constitution, the Supreme Court and economy.⁶⁵ However, the Bonn

⁶⁰ Mark Silinsky, *The Taliban: Afghanistan’s Most Lethal Insurgents* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 45.

⁶¹ Ibid: 47.

⁶² Ibid, 47.

⁶³ Ibid, 48.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 50.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 65.

Agreement discontented Pashtun tribes whose power was significantly reduced.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, non-Pashtuns enjoyed far greater representations in the government. Most of the generals appointed for the new Ministry of Defense were non-Pashtuns; out of 38 positions, 37 are Tajiks and one Uzbek.⁶⁷ Furthermore, hatred amongst different ethnic groups remained unresolved due to the lack of transitional justice. The warlords of the Northern Alliance committed various crimes, including the massacre and rape of Pashtuns. However, they were left unpunished and many of them are now leading the government. Consequently, many ordinary Afghans still view the government as illegitimate. Democracy with a multi-party system has shown little success in closing the gaps between different ethnic groups. Nearly every small minority group formed its own party and by 2009, a total of 110 parties were officially listed on the Ministry of Justice website.⁶⁸ Consequently, during the 2005 parliamentary election, votes were split between hundreds of candidates with many receiving tiny portions of the votes.⁶⁹ Thus, none of the parties were able to win the majority vote, and likewise, majority will of the citizens was not reflected in the winning coalitions.

The U.S. has been exacerbating the political conflict by favoring one group and by corrupting a leader. During the Bonn Agreement, Hamid Karzai was appointed as a leader of Afghanistan largely because he had strong connections to the U.S.⁷⁰ According to Khali Roman, who was Karzai's former Deputy Secretary between 2002 and 2005,

⁶⁶ Carol J. Rhipenburg. "Ethnicity and Civil Society in Contemporary Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal* 59, no.1 (Winter 2005): 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid: 42.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 9-10.

⁷⁰ Mark Silinsky, *The Taliban: Afghanistan's Most Lethal Insurgents* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 66 .

“tens of millions of dollars have flowed from the CIA to the office of Karzai.”⁷¹

Although the CIA has declined to comment on this allegation, this money was perceived as leverage for the U.S. to intervene in Afghanistan. According to Karzai’s affiliates, Karzai used money to pay-off law makers; underwrite delicate diplomatic trips; bribe during informal negotiations; and to give \$100,000 monthly paychecks to the old Uzbek warlord, Dostum.⁷² Attention was brought to a secret CIA aid to Afghanistan’s president by a U.S. Senator. In 2013, Senator Bob Corker of the Foreign Relations Committee said he put a hold on \$75 million intended for electoral programs in Afghanistan because the Obama administration failed to respond to his request for explanation.⁷³ Consequently, the rampant corruption was severely criticized by the opposition. According to the corruption perception index of 2013, Afghanistan was ranked as 175 out of 177 countries.⁷⁴

The civil war in Afghanistan could have started again in 2014 after the vote rigging.

After Karzai was removed from his office, the presidential election of 2014 fueled tension between two presidential candidates. Afghanistan’s Independent Election Committee announced the winner of the election as Ashraf Ghani who was Karzai’s protege. But Abdullah Abdullah, who was a runner-up accused Ghani of vote-rigging; because there was evidence that Ghani’s loyal supporters, election officials and

⁷¹ Matthew Rosenberg, “With Bags of Cash, C.I.A seeks influence in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 2013, accessed on March 20 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/world/asia/cia-delivers-cash-to-afghan-leaders-office.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gary Cameron, “Senator puts hold on some Afghan aid over Karzai ‘ghost money,’ *Reuters*, July 17, 2013, accessed on March 10, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-congress-idUSBRE95G11F20130617>.

⁷⁴ “Afghanistan,” *Transparency International 2013*, accessed on March 15, 2017, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results>.

stakeholders, manipulated and colluded many votes.⁷⁵ Furthermore, out of 20,561 polling stations only 1964 stations were audited; and 810 stations were recounted; and 918 stations were disqualified.⁷⁶ The vote-rigging nearly put the country back into a civil war based on ethnicity. Abdullah, who's base was Tajik supporters, was planning a coup at the time.⁷⁷ However, the coup was prevented because of the U.S.'s diplomatic intervention: the U.S. Secretary of the State, John Kerry, arbitrated the dispute between the two sides.⁷⁸ Both Ghani and Abdualah agreed to dual executive power. Eventually, many praised the peaceful transfer of power in the country including President Obama, who stated "the first democratic transfer of power in the history of that nation."⁷⁹ However, this cannot be a permanent solution while fundamental problems remain intact.

Conclusion

Civil wars in Afghanistan are largely internal conflicts aggravated by external actors. The initial phase of the civil war was triggered by the communists, who mobilized popular support based on a marginalized population, eventually leading to a collapse of the monarchy. Then, internal fighting within the communist regime de-stabilized the country. However, the civil war grew to a larger-scale when external actors came into play. The Soviets intervened in Afghanistan to consolidate communist leadership under the Brezhev Doctrine; and the U.S. supported resistance groups to prevent a regional

⁷⁵ Timor Sharan and Srinjoy Bose, "Political networks and the 2014 Afghan presidential election: power structuring, ethnicity and state stability," *Conflict, Security, and Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 621.

⁷⁶ Ibid: 620.

⁷⁷ Ibid: 620-621.

⁷⁸ Michael Crowley, "Inside John Kerry's Diplomatic Save in Afghanistan," *Time*. July 18, 2014, accessed on March 3, 2017, <http://time.com/3001703/kerry-afghanistan-civil-war/>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

spill-over effect. Also, Muslim countries supported mujahedeen under the religious norm. After external players left in 1989, the civil war became largely internal again. Initially, a war between mujahedeen versus the Soviet's puppet government has turned into an ethnic war between Pashtun and non-Pashtun. The ethnic war exacerbated when "bad neighbors," especially Pakistan, supported groups that are connected to its own ethnicity. Consequently, the Taliban grew out of religious schools in Pakistan, and eventually wiped out its oppositions in the ethnic conflict. However, the U.S. intervention ended the Taliban era. The peace-making process since 2001 has been largely obstructed by ethnic divisions and rampant corruption. Multi-party democracy has shown little success while the U.S. exacerbates political division by favoring one group over the other. The vicious cycle of internal conflict that is exacerbated by external actors still continues today. In going forward, the consociational democracy may break-off the vicious cycle. A famous Dutch political scientist, Arend Lijphart, defines consociationalism as "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy."⁸⁰ He argues that in a divided society the majoritarian model creates further conflicts because it results in the excluding of certain groups. Instead, consociationalism divides power equally amongst different groups through constitutional agreements.⁸¹ In Afghanistan, consociationalism could guarantee equal power among ethnic groups whose jurisdiction could be protected by its own ethnic leader. Each local group such as Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, and other ethnic minorities could have autonomous control over their local policies; equal redistribution of funds from the central government to local governments assures them that the central

⁸⁰ Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics* 21, no. 2 (Jan, 1969): 216.

⁸¹ Pippa Norris, *Stable Democracy and Good Governance in Divided Societies: Do Powersharing Institutions Work?* (Faculty Research Working Papers Series, Harvard University, February 2005), 4.

government will carry out adequate fiscal policies for local governments; proportional political representation guarantees their participation; and minority veto protects their rights from the tyranny of a majority.⁸² However, a precondition is necessary, which is a cooperation between domestic elites; because if there is less internal conflict, external actors may interfere less. Furthermore, global hegemons need to sympathize with small countries whose lands are being used as a proxy war between superpowers.

About the author

Chang-Dae David Hyun received his H.B.A with a concentration in political science from the University of Toronto in 2017. He was a Winner of Kathleen & William Davis Scholarship and Saul & Lois Rae Scholarship at the University College. He received a full scholarship from the Tsinghua University of China during the summer of 2017. He was a former sergeant from the Republic of Korea Air Force (2007-2010).

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⁸² Arend Lijphart, *The Power-Sharing Approach* In Conflict and Peacemaking in multi ethnic societies, edited by Joseph V. Montville (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 494-495.