



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

IS NATION BUILDING DEAD?

by

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September 2022

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE September 2022	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE IS NATION BUILDING DEAD?			5. FUNDING NUMBERS
6. AUTHOR(S) Nathaniel C. Webb			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.			
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) This thesis explores the recent nation-building failure experienced by the United States in Afghanistan and compares it to the nation-building success achieved by the UN in Namibia. The comparison shows that nation-building success does not depend only on the actions of foreign actors, but also on the will of the target country and surrounding territories. This thesis shows that an in-depth study of Namibia by UN officials allowed for efficient and effective operations inside the country. These operations were helped along by a desire for change shared by the Namibian people and an agreed-upon and enforced ceasefire between Namibia and South Africa. The operation in Afghanistan lacked all of these key necessities and therefore struggled to unite the people or even understand what it was the people desired. In order to succeed in future nation-building operations, the United States should refrain from attempting nation-building in a kinetic environment and only begin once a firm understanding of the environment and the goals have been achieved.			
14. SUBJECT TERMS Afghanistan, nation-building, United States		15. NUMBER OF PAGES 77	16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	
			20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU

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IS NATION BUILDING DEAD?

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

from the

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the recent nation-building failure experienced by the United States in Afghanistan and compares it to the nation-building success achieved by the UN in Namibia. The comparison shows that nation-building success does not depend only on the actions of foreign actors, but also on the will of the target country and surrounding territories. This thesis shows that an in-depth study of Namibia by UN officials allowed for efficient and effective operations inside the country. These operations were helped along by a desire for change shared by the Namibian people and an agreed-upon and enforced ceasefire between Namibia and South Africa. The operation in Afghanistan lacked all of these key necessities and therefore struggled to unite the people or even understand what it was the people desired. In order to succeed in future nation-building operations, the United States should refrain from attempting nation-building in a kinetic environment and only begin once a firm understanding of the environment and the goals have been achieved.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Afghan National Army
BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
SADF	South African Defense Forces
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
SWATF	South West African Territorial Force
UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the United States's approach to nation-building to determine whether the recent state failure of Afghanistan was due to a failed United States strategy or because Afghanistan would have failed no matter what the circumstances. The thesis will explore the option of whether the failure may have also been a result of a combination of strategy and location. In order to reach an answer for the questions posed, this thesis will delve into the 1990 UN nation-building effort in Namibia. The nation-building effort in Namibia was deemed successful. By comparing the status of the countries before nation-building efforts begin, and the strategies implemented during the nation-building process, an argument can be made about whether or not the failure in Afghanistan was the fault of the United States, or simply inevitable.

A. IMPORTANCE

Beginning in 2001, the United States has been involved in Afghanistan with ever changing levels of success. In the two decades since the 9/11 attacks, thousands of U.S. troops died and trillions of dollars were spent in the pursuit of stabilizing Afghanistan.¹ While blood and money were major motivators for the United States to withdraw from Afghanistan, the real question that must be answered is whether or not the goals set forth by the United States were feasible. This paper will not seek to answer whether the United States should have invaded Afghanistan, but it will argue that with proper strategy and understanding of Afghan culture, the nation-building attempt in Afghanistan could have been met with success. This understanding is key because if the United States is to pursue any future nation-building attempts, it must understand why the previous one's failed. The lessons learned can then be used to ensure that America's blood and treasure will not be wasted on impossible or ill planned efforts.

¹ Deirdre Shesgreen, "War Rarely Goes as Planned: New Report Tallies Trillions US Spent in Afghanistan, Iraq," *USA Today*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/09/01/how-much-did-war-afghanistan-cost-how-many-people-died/5669656001/>.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before discussing the difficulties of nation-building, it must first be defined. While there is no one definition to describe this process, Altonia explains that the majority of the academic community defines nation-building as consisting of “three related but different task: unification of disparate ethnic groups; democratization; and economic reconstruction.”² This description of nation-building works perfectly when discussing the process in regard to Afghanistan and Namibia as all three task were pursued with varying levels of success. In a perfect nation-building operation, the country in question should emerge democratic, economically improved, and ethnically cooperative. The literature will show that while there are many routes to achieve this, all are difficult.

Many of the difficulties faced during the nation-building attempt in Afghanistan came from the fact that there is no agreed upon method for how a foreign entity can successfully accomplish nation-building. While there have been multiple externally-driven attempts at nation-building over the decades, most of these have resulted in failure. These failures left the international community with multiple approaches but no real recipe for success. There are two broad areas all nation-building efforts can be separated into: top-down approach and bottom-up approach. Starting from this point specific methods are then used to achieve the nation-building efforts. The primary methods used are liberalization, institutionalization, and stabilization. The debate among scholars centers around which methods, if any, are best when attempting to unify a nation and build a stable government.

Amitai Etzioni explains in his article, “Bottom-up Nation Building,” that a top-down approach is used to build a strong central government that can then enforce order throughout the rest of the country while a bottom-up approach aims to create stability and opportunity at the lowest levels with the hope that communities will eventually unify and form legitimate power in the country.³ Etzioni hypothesizes that one reason U.S. and UN attempts at top-down nation-building often fail is because failed states often lack a national

² Amitai Etzioni, “A Self-Restrained Approach to Nation-Building by Foreign Powers,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 80, no. 1 (Jan 2004): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3569290>.

³ Amitai Etzioni, “Bottom-Up Nation Building,” *Policy Review*, no. 158 (Dec 2010): 51, ProQuest.

identity. Etzioni argues that in many of the countries where nation-building is attempted “family and tribal affiliations outweigh” the needs or desires of the state.⁴ Etzioni highlights the family over state aspect by explaining that many tribal members in Afghanistan were against a dominant central government, preferring a weak central government that allowed them to retain tribal autonomy while receiving resources from the state.⁵ He goes further and explains that the formation of a national identity takes time to build, referencing the fact that it took decades and a brutal civil war for Americans to view themselves as Americans first and Virginians second.⁶

Etzioni remarks in his article, “A Self-restrained Approach to Nation-building by Foreign Powers,” that another factor to why top-down nation-building often fails is because it seeks to institute societal change through governmental means. Etzioni writes that lasting societal change almost never is initiated by the government, but by members of the society themselves.⁷ He defends his argument by pointing out that many of the societal norms western states are trying to force on the developing world, such as equal rights regardless of race or gender, were not spontaneously instituted by the government, but fought for through decades of civil protest. In his book, *Armed State Building*, Paul Miller supports Etzioni’s argument by pointing out that many of the stressors in nation-building come from trying to create a democratic government when in reality the main goal should be “public security and humanitarian assistance.”⁸

While there are multiple examples of failed externally motivated top-down nation-building, such as Rwanda, Somalia, and Haiti, there are almost none of a bottom-up attempt. This is not because bottom-up attempts are successful, but because they are rarely tried. Etzioni blames the lack of nation-building versatility on the success of Marshall Plan in Japan and Germany post WWII. In his article, “The Folly of Nation Building,” Etzioni

⁴ Etzioni, 53.

⁵ Etzioni, 57.

⁶ Etzioni, 52.

⁷ Etzioni, “A Self-Restrained Approach to Nation-Building by Foreign Powers,” 4.

⁸ Paul D. Miller, *Armed State Building Confronting State Failure, 1898-2012* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 36.

accuses U.S. officials, such as prior Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, of ignoring the multiple differences between a post WWII Germany and a post 9/11 Afghanistan.⁹ Etzioni argues that the Marshall plan was successful in Germany and Japan because both governments “had surrendered after defeat in a war” and during the rebuilding process “there were no terrorist and no insurgencies.”¹⁰ Etzioni contends that there was also a major difference in funding when it came to post WWII Germany and Japan versus the nation-building attempted in Afghanistan and Iraq, explaining that in 1948 almost 13% of the national budget went to the reconstruction of Germany and Japan, whereas in 2012, less than 1% of the national budget went to nation-building efforts in the Middle East.¹¹ Concurring with Etzioni, Miller adds that recent nation-building efforts that promoted security first or liberalization first often used the Marshall Plan as the template, not understanding that the Marshall Plan attacked all the problems at once instead of one by one.¹²

Miller writes that liberalization, institutionalization, and stabilization are used individually or concurrently to achieve the desired end state of nation-building, peace, economic success, and a democratic government. When it comes to these three methods, Miller notes that the first question that is often asked by officials is which comes first. Miller argues that this question is why most nation-building efforts fail. While each of these methods come with their own positive and negative, Miller asserts that the main issue with governments and their implementation of these nation-building tactics is something called sequencing. Sequencing, he explains, is the belief that there is a golden method that will work when attempting nation-building in any country.¹³ He continues by writing that it is implausible that there is one sequence or method that can fix any type of failed state. Miller’s argument is supported by Etzioni who also advocates that the method used in

⁹ Amitai Etzioni, “The Folly of Nation Building,” *The National Interest*, no. 120 (Aug 2012): 62, ProQuest.

¹⁰ Etzioni, 63.

¹¹ Etzioni, 64.

¹² Miller, *Armed State Building Confronting State Failure, 1898-2012*, 46.

¹³ Miller, 44.

nation-building should be based off the specifics of what the failed nation is struggling with, not off of what worked in the past in a different scenario.¹⁴

Liberalization is one of the most popular methods when it comes to nation-building by western powers because it focuses on creating a legitimate government based on western ideals. Miller explains that foreign nations desire the new government to incorporate “elections, majority rule, and representative institutions.”¹⁵ Miller observes that this desire for a democratic government in struggling nations is due to the belief in modernization theory, which theorizes that “poor, unstable, and autocratic states” could be transformed into stable and wealthy states if given the gift of democracy.¹⁶ Critics of liberalization, such as Miller himself, argue that liberalization creates more instability by abruptly creating changes at the governmental level and overall makes the job of nation-building all the more difficult. Fellow critic, Michael Barnett, insists that starting nation-building with liberalization in a failed state may “unleash societal demands before the state has developed the institutional capacity to channel, organize, and respond to those demands.”¹⁷ Barnett does not view liberalization as all bad, but he does stress the goal of democracy should be sidelined until current state capacity and legitimacy has been built up.

Miller writes that many of the critics of liberalization believe that institutionalization should be the first method when attempting nation-building. Scholars such as Samuel Huntington contend that focusing on strengthening the institutions in a post conflict state will lead to political stability.¹⁸ Other scholars go even further and claim that focusing on institutions first allow services such as water and electricity to reach the struggling population and thus give the government some legitimacy. Miller accepts Huntington’s assertions but quickly voices his skepticism at the belief that delivering services will increase legitimacy, commenting that legitimacy first comes from a shared

¹⁴ Etzioni, “The Folly of Nation Building,” 62.

¹⁵ Miller, *Armed State Building Confronting State Failure, 1898-2012*, 30.

¹⁶ Miller, 31.

¹⁷ Michael Barnett, “Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States after War,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 89, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137530>.

¹⁸ Miller, 33.

ideal of justice between the state and the society. He continues on and explains that if the ideal of justice is not shared between the state and the society, the delivery of services will not contribute to legitimacy. Roland Paris offers a similar argument to that of Huntington, noting that by focusing on institutions first in a post conflict state, social tensions can ease before discussions of elections and governance arise, allowing for a stable transfer of power.¹⁹ While Miller does paint institutionalization in a better light than liberalization, he points out that one of institutionalization's main problems is that it also creates disagreements between foreign powers and state officials in regard to what institutions come first. He notes that "even building effective institutions involves norms and culture" and if foreign states are ignorant of these norms and cultures then progress can begin to stall or backslide.²⁰

Stabilization, otherwise known as security first, is the final popular method when it comes to nation-building and focuses first on controlling the violence that plagues failed states. James Dobbins, former U.S. ambassador to the EU, strongly supports stabilization because it supports his belief that "the prime objective of any nation-building operation is to make violent societies peaceful."²¹ Dobbins furthers his point by explaining that the main goal of nation-building is to ensure "public security and humanitarian assistance," neither of which can be achieved if violence continues unabated.²² Etzioni also adds that stabilization allows the opportunity for the failed state to begin to implement positive change with fear of reprisal.²³ Etzioni expands upon his point by arguing that lasting change must come from the state itself, not a foreign power. Miller acknowledges that stabilization is the most likely method to lead to success but notes that there is a particular pitfall foreign powers fall into when pursuing stabilization. Miller writes that "the biggest danger of the 'security first' approach is that it effectively will become a 'security only'

¹⁹ Miller, 34.

²⁰ Miller, 41.

²¹ Miller 36.

²² Miller, 36.

²³ Miller, 37.

approach.”²⁴ Miller explains that when a government focuses solely on security, it often leads the government toward authoritarianism, which is usually counterproductive to nation-building efforts. This is not a concern to all scholars, as Miller remarks that some scholars believe nations such as Afghanistan cannot support democracy. Miller’s final critique of stabilization is that it is ineffective in countries such as Haiti, which has poor institutions and a failing economy.²⁵ Miller notes that countries like Haiti are not plagued by civil war and terrorism, so a security first method does nothing to help the situation.

While there is a plethora of academic writing debating the correct way to pursue nation-building, there are very few real-world examples of successful nation-building. Whether this is because countries are using a game plan that worked in one part of the world with the hope that it will work somewhere completely different or because western powers continue to push governmental change that is not realistic in many countries. Either way, scholars such as Miller assert that current nation-building strategies are lacking and will continue to fail until changes are made.

By comparing Namibia and Afghanistan, it can be argued that the key factors missing from current nation-building strategies are preparatory planning and internal drive. As mentioned before, each nation-building strategy must be unique to the country in which it is implemented. For this to be accomplished, a in depth understanding of the country must first be achieved. This means studying the environment to understand what is possible and collecting the opinions of the people who live there to understand the changes they desire. This takes time, but the results may reveal that important factors. If the people are okay with their life, there will be little internal push or support for change, making the process for externally driven change more difficult to achieve. Instead of focusing on what method of nation-building works best, people should first question whether or not nation-building would work at all in the environment in which it is being pursued.

²⁴ Miller, 43.

²⁵ Miller, 1898-2012, 44.

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II. SUCCESSFUL NATION-BUILDING IN NAMIBIA

Namibia is an example of externally driven nation-building done right. The country had been under colonial rule by Germany from the late 1800s until the end of WW1. Following the First Great War, The League of Nations placed Namibia under the trusteeship of South Africa. They would stay this way until the League of Nations was dissolved and the United Nations was formed. The UN declared Namibia an independent nation and ordered South Africa to relinquish its hold on the country. This order would lead to over a decade of civil war and strife. With the formation of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), Namibia was able to finally achieve independence in 1990. It took the UN one full year to take Namibia from a war-torn country to a stable democratic nation. Throughout this process, UNTAG encountered difficulties in the political, military, and civil sectors of Namibian society. However, through careful planning, the assistance of neighboring nations, and support from foreign powers around the globe, UNTAG was able to overcome all obstacles and achieve success.

A. SOUTH AFRICA'S PLAN FOR NAMIBIAN INDEPENDENCE

Namibia first entered into international discussion after the end of World War 1. Starting in 1884 the Republic of Namibia was under the colonized control of Germany. During this time, Germany would institute many policies that would later cause friction between Namibia and South Africa. The Germans created a “settler-dominated society” based on “strict racial segregation.” This process was not easily achieved and required a violent subjugation of the Namibian people.²⁶ After World War 1 the League of Nations took Namibia away from Germany and placed it under the responsibility of the Union of South Africa. It would stay this way until the League of Nations was dissolved and the United Nations was created. The UN ordered South Africa to release Namibia as part of decolonization movement taking place throughout the world. South Africa refused to adhere to the UN ruling, claiming that the United Nations did not have authority to nullify

²⁶ Henning Melber, *Understanding Namibia: The Trials of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

a League of Nations agreement. This surprising hiccup resulted in the “creation of the United Nations Council for Namibia and the United Nations Institute for Namibia.”²⁷ While the UN discussed how to go about enforcing their ruling, forces inside of Namibia decided to take their independence into their own hands. The South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) was formed in the 1950s. As the premier liberation movement inside Namibia, it received a unique status by the UN and was declared the only legitimate agency inside Namibia.²⁸ By the 1950s, South Africa had already institutionalized its system of apartheid in the country. The system helped protect the diamond and mineral mines while also protecting the minority white way of life. As SWAPO grew, South Africa became increasingly concerned about their hold on the country. Finally, in 1966, SWAPO military force, the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), and South Africa’s military forces engaged in battle for the first time.²⁹ The violence between the two parties would continue until 1989.

As SWAPO began to gain popularity with Namibia, South Africa began to take steps to portray SWAPO as a negative movement attempting to destroy the stability of the country. The first step that South Africa took when waging this war of narratives was to build up South African-sympathetic administrative structures. These structures were manned by ‘Representative Authorities’, meant to be an internal government of Namibia housed by South African sympathizers. South Africans placed into these positions were granted enormous privileges. While the positions came with newfound status, it was not enough to overcome the apartheid system. South Africa ensured that the new institutions and politicians were kept segregated from white political figures and facilities. After the new institutions were in place, South Africa and its sympathizers labeled SWAPO as a group of Ovambo nationalist. Part of the reason this plan was able to gain any traction at all was due to ethnic divisions in Namibia. SWAPO primarily consisted of Ovambos, the largest ethnic group in SWAPO. By claiming SWAPO only cared about Ovambos and

²⁷ Melber, 8.

²⁸ Melber, 9.

²⁹ Lise Morjé Howard, “UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes for Success,” *International Peacekeeping* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714002698>.

wanted control of the country, South Africa was able to convince other ethnic groups that it was in their best interest to work with South African forces and government. The result was the creation of the multiethnic Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). This group desired to protect Namibia from Ovambo nationalism and the threat of socialism they believed to spread by SWAPO. By spreading disinformation, South African was able to pit ethnic groups against one another while building a support group for themselves.³⁰ South Africa did not leave the fate of Namibia to just politicians. It also began a large military buildup to combat SWAPO PLAN forces. Howard explains that South Africa began to forcibly conscript all Namibians of fighting age into the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF). This force would continue to grow throughout the war, reaching a peak size of about 35,000 troops, with unofficial estimates placing their strength as high as 80,000. SWATF would be deployed into combat alongside the South African Defense Forces (SADF). The peak size of the SADF in Namibia was over 30,000, reached in 1986. In addition to the military units, South Africa also created the South West African Police (SWAPOL). Part of SWAPOL included counterinsurgency units, about 7,000 to 10,000 in strength, made up strictly by Namibians.³¹ Arguably the worst part of SWAPOL was the Koevet, a brutal group who were part of the counterinsurgency units in SWAPOL. They grew to a force of 3,000 and were known for the violence, intimidation and brutality they used against the Namibian people.³² South Africa's buildup of forces inside of Namibia, using Namibians themselves, was the major contributor to why what would have been an insurgency, instead became a civil war.

South Africa understood that even if they defeated SWAPO, the UN would not leave them alone when it came to the independence of Namibia. Understanding this, they began to make plans to create an independent Namibia, but on their own terms. In April of 1967, Dr. Miller, the Foreign Minister for South Africa, explained to the UN that they would be moving ahead in creating an independent Namibia using the model Britain used when it came to Lesotho and Botswana. This essentially meant that South Africa would

³⁰ Howard101.

³¹ Howard, 101.

³² Howard, 120.

grant Namibia a period of limited self-governance before granting them independence.³³ The major problem with this plan is that South Africa inserted their system of apartheid into the equation. Apartheid made the plan unacceptable to the UN or to the people of Namibia. The following month, South Africa pushed ahead with the plan anyway and began creating the limited government for Namibia. Michael Botha, the South African Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD), spoke with Ovambo chiefs and sold them on the idea of an executive committee overseeing Namibia. He was able to sell the idea by having the committee be staffed by Ovambo and few white South Africans on loan.³⁴ This executive committee would oversee the various segments of Namibia that South Africa would break the country into. South Africa planned to divide the country into segments, giving each ethnic group a portion of land for them to live on called a homeland. Each segment would have a council, made up of their ethnic leaders, to run the homeland. There would also be a segment of land set aside for whites to reside in Namibia. While ethnic groups would have responsibility for their homeland, South Africa would retain control of areas involving commerce, industry, justice, prisons and agriculture. This overall plan was referred to as the ‘Odendaal Commission.’ Overall, the idea behind this plan was for South Africa to create “a multiplicity of localized and uncoordinated political institutions, while on the whole tightening South Africa’s hold” on Namibia as a whole.³⁵ The idea of homelands would barely address the lack of governance Namibians had in their country, while at the same time further entrenching apartheid into the country. Even if South Africa stayed true to their word and gave Namibia independence after an unspecified amount of time of self-governance, the country would be partitioned with the whites holding the most valuable parts of the land.³⁶ This ensured that even if South Africa lost control of the country, they would be able to protect their monetary interest in the region. This was not lost on the UN, who rejected the idea and continued moving forward with discussions on Namibian independence.

³³ Laurent C. Kaela, *The Question of Namibia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 78.

³⁴ Kaela, 78.

³⁵ Kaela, 82.

³⁶ Kaela, 83.

With the UN's outright rejection of the Odendaal Commission, South Africa held a constitutional conference in September 1974 to discuss Namibia and its political future. This conference would result in the creation of the Turnhalle Constitution, South Africa's last attempt at giving Namibia independence through their own channels. In the initial meetings at the conference, South Africa expressed a willingness to ease the apartheid policies that the international community scorned. However, this was done while not allowing any non-white political parties to participate in the conference.³⁷ By 1976, the conference would convene three more times to discuss the specifics of the new Namibian government. A draft constitution was finally presented before the council in March of 1976. However, discussion on the constitution was tabled in favor of discussing Resolution 435, which had been adopted by the UN early that year in January. The resolution was worrying because it stated that elections in Namibia must be under the control and supervision of the UN and that South Africa forego all other means of Namibian independence.³⁸ Unsurprisingly, South Africa refused to even consider the UN resolution and continued forward with the creation of the Turnhalle constitution. The conference would end with the creation of a three-tier government system that left non-white ethnic majorities with less control over their future than the Odendaal Commission. Nevertheless, the council submitted the constitution to the South African government for decision.

B. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 435

In December of 1977 a proposal regarding the future of Namibia was presented to the South African government. South Africa had abandoned the Turnhalle constitution after pressure from a 'contact group', made up of the U.S., UK, France, West Germany, and Canada, visited the country to exert pressure on the government. The contact group pushed South Africa to work with the UN to create a solution amenable to both parties.³⁹ The initial proposal by the UN included the following:

³⁷ Kaela, 85.

³⁸ Kaela, 87.

³⁹ Kaela, 94.

UN supervised and controlled elections based on universal adult franchise to be held in Namibia by the end of 1978; cessation of hostilities, confinement to base of South African troops and SW APO fighters; phased withdrawal of South African troops over a period of twelve weeks, with 1500 remaining and confined to one or two bases; freeing of political prisoners and return of exiled Namibians, including SW APO personnel, so that they could participate in elections; demobilization of citizen, commando and ethnic forces, as well as dismantling of their command structures; existing police forces to continue to be responsible for law and order; appointment by the UN Secretary-General of a Special Representative to work together with the South African appointed administrator-general to ensure a smooth transition; deployment of a UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), with civilian and military components, to be at the disposal of the Special Representative; and the new constitution for independent Namibia to be drafted and adopted by the constituent assembly to be elected during the transition.⁴⁰

The overall purpose of the proposal was “for the withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia and for the transfer of power to the people of Namibia.”⁴¹ Finnish diplomat Martii Ahtisaari was chosen as the Special Representative, partly because of his appointment as UN General Assembly’s Commissioner for Namibia the previous year.⁴² South African and SWAPO representatives met in New York in February 1978 to discuss the proposal put forth by the UN. However, after only a few days, the South African foreign minister left, discontent with the proposal altogether. South Africa demanded a decrease in power for the UN when it came to the election and more South African troops retained in the country. Frustratingly, the Prime Minister of South Africa announced that they remained committed to ensuring Namibian independence by 1978, in reference to the Turnhalle Constitution that they claimed to have abandoned. The Contact Group attempted to bring South Africa back to the table by submitting changes to the proposal that left Walvis Bay in the hands of South Africa and instituted a 7-month period for South Africa to leave Namibia. South Africa accepted the proposed changes in principle because they believed

⁴⁰ Kaela, 96.

⁴¹ “Security Council Resolution 435 (1978): Namibia,” United Nations Peacemaker, 2019, <https://peacemaker.un.org/namibia-resolution435>.

⁴² Lise Morjé Howard, “United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG),” in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, ed. by Joachim A. Koops and Paul D. Williams and Norrie MacQueen and Thierry Tardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 295.

they could use the new timeline to conduct elections in Namibia without UN interference. The South Africans fully understood that this was contrary to the principle of the resolution but continued with their plan. While not completely satisfied with the proposal, SWAPO accepted it in July of 1978.

South Africa would once again back out of the agreement after a report from the Ahtisaari pointed out that the original goal of elections by the end of 1978 could no longer be met. He suggested that South African retain the seven-month transition period, but the election countdown of 12 months began afterwards. Furthermore, Ahtisaari proposed an increase in UNTAG military personnel. While SWAPO agreed with the proposed changes “South Africa rejected it, arguing that it deviated from the original” proposal that had been accepted.⁴³ Refusing to accept any changes, South Africa announced that the elections would still be held by the end of the year and started voter registration in June. The UN paid no heed to the South African complaints and the Security Council formally approved the proposal, renamed Resolution 435 on 29 September 1978. UNTAG was officially established, and it declared the voting registration, transfers of power, and any other illegal measures South Africa had taken so far in Namibia were void. While the UN had voided the actions taken so far by South Africa, they still needed their compliance in order to put Resolution 435 into action. The Contact Group attempted to once again bring South Africa back to the table, but South Africa rejected all offers. They went ahead with elections in December as they had planned. SWAPO, along with a few other political parties, boycotted the election. This did not stop South Africa from tallying votes and naming the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) victors, winning the majority of the seats in the Constituent Assembly. This new Constituent Assembly met with “the South African prime minister, the foreign minister and the defence minister” and convinced them to “accept a UN-supervised transition to independence”⁴⁴South Africa agreed to allow UN supervision only if: 1)the UN stopped supporting SWAPO unfairly, 2)UNTAG deployment size was decreased, 3)South African was able to keep soldiers in Namibia until the violence had

⁴³ Kaela, 99.

⁴⁴ Kaela, 102.

completely abated, 4) South African police retained their power until the independence process was complete, 5) UN deployed troops to Angola also. The UN decided to meet South Africa in the middle and create a demilitarized zone on the border of Angola and Namibia that would be overseen by the UN. While South Africa met with UN officials and agreed to this offer, they once again took steps to further Namibian independence in accordance with the Turnhalle constitution they claimed to have abandoned. This resulted in a political stalemate and continuation of violence that would last the next decade.

By 1988, South Africa began to feel the economic strain of waging a war in Namibia and Angola. SWAPO forces had continued to fight for independence over the decade of halted UN and South Africa discussions. At the same time, South Africa was also fighting rebel and Cuban forces in Angola. Even though large portions of South African forces were conscripts, the military operations were a heavy economic burden. By 1984, it was estimated that South Africa was spending almost one billion dollars a year fighting in Namibia. To make matters worse, many of South Africa's military officers felt that the war unwinnable.⁴⁵ SWAPO forces had the support of the people and were able to blend into the population when not fighting, or simply go to Angola. South Africa's burden only became heavier when combined with the anti-apartheid international economic sanctions. Unfortunately for South Africa, economic concerns were not all they were facing. Non-violent protests for an end to apartheid were growing in both South Africa and Namibia. Small regional organizations like churches, students, and workers, were banding together to protest the South African government. This, combined with further pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union, convinced South Africa to return to the negotiating table.⁴⁶ While South Africa returned to the table, they did not return without demands. In an effort to delay handing over independence to Namibia, South Africa demanded that all Cuban troops in Angola leave before they would cooperate with the UN.⁴⁷ South Africa pursued delaying tactics because they knew they would lose an UN-supervised election unless they bought time for the conservative groups they supported in

⁴⁵ Kaela, 114.

⁴⁶ Howard, 102.

⁴⁷ Kaela, 110.

Namibia to gain enough political strength to win.⁴⁸ In an effort to combat South African delaying tactics, the UN-Secretary General reached out to the SWAPO president, Sam Nujoma, to determine if they would be willing to sign a ceasefire. Nujoma confirmed that if South Africa agreed to abide by Resolution 435, they would halt hostilities. Angolan president, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, also informed the UN they would accept a ceasefire with South Africa if Resolution 435 was implemented in Namibia. However, South Africa remained firmly entrenched in their demands, Cuban troops must leave Angola before any UN troops would be allowed in Namibia.⁴⁹ South Africa also demanded that SWAPO be excluded from further deliberation, a demand that the United States and UK assented to. Things were finally able to proceed when the United States created a proposal for a 31-month withdrawal of Cuban troops. On 15 November 1988, representatives from South Africa, SWAPO, Cuba and Angola signed an agreement on the U.S. proposal and 1 April 1989 was scheduled as the start date of Resolution 435.⁵⁰ However, due to South Africa's unwillingness to work directly with SWAPO, the ceasefire agreement was two identical documents between the UN and South Africa, and the UN and SWAPO.⁵¹

While a start date had been decided, a few changes were to be made to the resolution since it had been written for the climate of Namibia almost a decade ago. A major change was that the size of the military detachment of UNTAG would be reduced by almost half. This demand was made by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council who felt that since they were paying for over half of the operation, they had a reasonable say so in the size of the group. This demand was not made to appease South Africa, but because they felt that since all involved parties had signed an agreement to cease hostiles, there would be less need for troops.⁵² The decrease in willingness to spend large sums of money hinted that interest, or maybe worry, in Namibia independence had declined since South Africa had finally agreed to Resolution 435. These would be the last changes made to the

⁴⁸ Kaela, 114.

⁴⁹ Kaela, 115.

⁵⁰ Kaela, 117.

⁵¹ Howard, 295.

⁵² Kaela, 119.

resolution. The UN released UNTAG to pursue its mission in Namibia. UNTAG's mission "consisted of three main components: overall establishment of UNTAG offices, military disarmament and civilian policing, and preparations for, and the holding of elections."⁵³ While UNTAG had spent the last decade planning for the mission, misunderstanding and political scheming started the mission off in disaster.

On 1 April 1989, the independence process of Namibia was almost derailed from the start when SWAPO guerrillas crossed into Namibia. They were met by the Koevoet, SWATF, and SADF, who opened fire, assuming they were launching a secret attack.⁵⁴ SWAPO responded in kind and soon both forces were sending reinforcements to the area. Since it was the first day of the operation, Ahtisaari was ill equipped to handle the sudden outbreak of violence, though even if UNTAG troops had been present, their mission did not include direct interaction in battles. Ahtisaari allowed the release of some SADF and SWATF troops from bases in Namibia in order to stop the perceived attack. After nine days of fighting, "more than 300 PLAN fighters and civilians and 13 SADF soldiers were killed."⁵⁵ All parties would receive some blame for the disaster. UNTAG felt that they could have done more if so much of their funding and support had not been cut or delayed, SWAPO believed that South Africa's insistence that they be kept out of ceasefire negotiations limited their knowledge of acceptable actions, and South Africa believed that SWAPO was intentionally noncompliant, seeking to gather more supporters in Namibia in preparation for the election. UNTAG called a meeting of SWAPO and South African representatives after the fighting had ceased to reconfirm both parties' intent to abide by the peace agreement. Surprisingly, South Africa did not use the fiasco as an attempt to delay the process or back out, instead signaling that they would abide by the agreement as long as SWAPO continued to. After an extremely rocky start Resolution 435 would begin once again. To prevent another misunderstanding, UNTAG ordered "PLAN troops to specific 'assembly points' in Namibia, where they would immediately be escorted to camps

⁵³ Howard, "UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes for Success," 108.

⁵⁴ Howard, "United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)," 298.

⁵⁵ Howard, 299.

north of the 16th parallel in Angola by UNTAG observers and observers from the South African Administrator-General's office."⁵⁶

C. UNTAG IN NAMIBIA

With the April 1st disaster behind them, UNTAG officially mobilized to set up offices throughout the country. During the next “few weeks UNTAG deployed...1,500 civilian police, 2,000 civilians, and 4,500 military, from 109 states.”⁵⁷ These members would begin to interact with every level of Namibian society, from political elites to simple farmers. This would be crucial as Ahtisaari believed that in order for UNTAG to work effectively, they must be seen as a legitimate authority in the country. He planned for UNTAG to gain legitimacy by having the staff of all “42 district and regional offices interact as much as possible with the local population.”⁵⁸ By creating a new atmosphere and promoting the benefits of reconciliation, UNTAG would hopefully be able to not only gain legitimacy, but also moral authority in the eyes of the people. This process was able to proceed at a rapid pace because of the large gap between the mandate announcing UN intention and the actual implementation of Resolution 435. Ahtisaari remained the leader of the mission the entire time and used the decades in between to visit Namibia and view the actual situation on the ground. Ahtisaari also spoke at length with Namibian elites in exile and South African officials, enabling him “to figure out the practical and political aspects” of implementing the 435 mandate.⁵⁹ Another benefit of the large time gap was that Ahtisaari was promoted to the position of Under Secretary-General for Administration in the UN. This helped him find the most talented person possible to fill each spot of the UNTAG team. Over the decade long delay, Ahtisaari was able to pick “specific individuals to fill key positions and was able to recruit others” along the way.⁶⁰ While Ahtisaari's dedication and foresight made sure mobilization proceeded smoothly, the task of

⁵⁶ Howard, “UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes for Success,” 109.

⁵⁷ Howard, 110.

⁵⁸ Howard, 112.

⁵⁹ Howard, 110.

⁶⁰ Howard, 112.

establishing UNTAG's presence throughout Namibia would still be difficult. Namibia contained two vast deserts and was one and a half times the size of France, it would take time to station personnel throughout. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (OSRSG) took on the task of ensuring that UNTAG personnel reached every corner of the country. In order to facilitate information sharing and keep everyone up to date on the latest plans and progress, OSRSG had the leaders of each UNTAG component meet each day. The information gathered was then spread further with lower-level leadership meetings afterward.

While daily meetings and Ahtisaari's desire for UNTAG interaction at all levels might seem excessive, it was necessary due to the rumors that almost immediately began to spread. Most of the Namibian population was unsure of the actual duty of UNTAG. This ignorance combined with decades of disinformation campaigns while under South African rule made Namibians somewhat mistrustful of UNTAG at first. Face to face interactions between UNTAG and Namibians were also necessary due to Namibians low literacy rate, approximately 38 percent.⁶¹ One of the more popular rumors that began to spread was that UNTAG had arrived to "take over the administration of the territory, redistribute land, and destroy [Namibian] businesses and communities."⁶² Other rumors claimed that UNTAG was a new political party or that the secret ballot would not be secret. One rumor even went so far as to claim that if you voted your hand would be cut off. To combat the rumors and other misinformation, UNTAG staff would hold local meeting open to the public to discuss what operations were occurring and what the operation was trying to achieve. They also met with students, political groups, community leaders, farmers, and veterinarians. It was not uncommon for a meeting to last over four hours. However, the tenacity paid dividends as the rumors disappeared and were replaced with increased level of dialogue across all levels the nation. Since the election would lead to a democratic government, UNTAG also ran over 200 radio program and 30 television programs providing Namibians with information detailing their rights and responsibilities. Not all efforts were positive though,

⁶¹ Howard, "United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)," 299.

⁶² Howard, "UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes of Success," 113.

the South West African Broadcasting Commission (SWABC) broadcasted disinformation constantly. However, UNTAG allowed them to continue to operate, instead choosing to borrow SWACB airwaves to put out their own messages. In nine months, UNTAG was able to utilize television, radio, meetings, merchandise and skits to inform the citizens of Namibia about what to expect in the November election.⁶³

While the office component of UNTAG was focused on spreading information, the military component focused on three main tasks: “(1) restricting to base and disarming SADF and SWAPO troops, (2) monitoring SADF withdrawal out of Namibia, and (3) demobilizing the Namibian regular and territorial units who fought against SWAPO (mainly the SWATF), dismantling their offices, and collecting and guarding their weapons.”⁶⁴ The group UNTAG had the most difficulty with was the PLAN, as they were unable to gather all of their weapons or fully demobilize them. This was mostly due to the lack of actual knowledge when it came to PLAN strength or location. It was not deemed a failure as the PLAN groups that were believed to be unaccounted for did not resume fighting, and the PLAN members that were accounted for complied with UNTAG demands. Some portions of PLAN and SWATF forces were placed in the Namibian army. To ensure both parties were treated fairly, they were placed there in equal number.⁶⁵ Due to the nature of their tasks, the military component of UNTAG did not interact much with the general population. While UN leadership expressed concern about a decreased military component in the beginning of operations, it was deemed unwarranted as SWAPO and South African troops behaved for the most part following the April 1st fiasco.

The component that struggled the most in Namibia was the Civilian Police (CIVPOL), but not due to any action of their own. Unlike the military and the office component, CIVPOL did not have clearly defined task for them to accomplish. They were told to accompany the Namibian police force while they discharged their duties. CIVPOL accomplished this by ensuring the police enforced the law fairly, guaranteeing people the

⁶³ Howard, 114.

⁶⁴ Howard, 115.

⁶⁵ Howard, 117.

right to express their beliefs without fear of harassment or bullying, and ensuring a fair and free election process at the polls. These roles enabled CIVPOL to have high visibility with the general public and gave UNTAG a measure of legitimacy and trust. However, the success when it came to police watchfulness was not equal across the board due to low number of personnel. When CIVPOL was discussed during the initial meetings in 1978, they were granted 360 personnel for a 3000 strong Namibian police force. By the time UNTAG entered the country, the Namibian police force had grown to over 8,000 members. To make matters more difficult, 3,000 of the 8,000 police were Koevoet, known and feared for their brutality. The Koevoet had not even existed when the originally planning took place in 1978.⁶⁶ In January of 1989, the number of CIVPOL members was increased from 360 to 500, but after the April fiasco and reports that Koevoet forces had been redeployed, another 1,000 CIVPOL members were sent to the country. The Koevoet forces redeploying was especially worrying because of the intense fear they placed in the people. The group was supposed to have been disbanded or confined to base in 1988, but during the chaos and confusion of April 1, decided to take it upon themselves to return to their jobs. CIVPOL was given an extra 500 members because of this and worked with the military component to track down Koevoet members acting out line. The group would be officially disbanded in October 1989.⁶⁷ After shadowing the Namibian police and finding out what their worst offenses were, CIVPOL attempted to retrain Namibian police. The re-training program they set up was four-week course, but due to lack of funding they were only able to graduate about 200 students. Another 1,000 policemen were sent to Zambia to train. Both groups were integrated back into the Namibian police force with satisfactory results. When UNTAG officially left the region, 500 CIVPOL members stayed behind on extended contracts to continue training the police. CIVPOL was successful in that the “people no longer feared” the police, but there was “widespread criticism of incompetence.”⁶⁸

Each component of UNTAG worked to complete their task in preparation for one task, the November 1989 election. The most important task before the election could take

⁶⁶ Howard, 118.

⁶⁷ Howard, 118.

⁶⁸ Howard, 121.

place was voter registration. The registration process had a shaky start, as both SWAPO and the South Africans had concerns about the process. SWAPO feared that Namibian refugees would not be able to vote, and that South Africa would send citizens to vote for their opposition, while South Africans were worried SWAPO would bring Angolans over to pack the vote in their favor. After deliberation, the UN decided on the following registration rules: “the age limit was set at 18; anyone with one Namibian parent could vote; anyone who had resided in the country for four years and signed an affidavit that they planned to stay after independence could vote...and finally, returnees with proper UNHCR documentation were permitted to register.”⁶⁹ Both parties agreed to the rules, SWAPO happy that refugees would be able to vote and South Africa content that many South Africans who had been in Namibia for the past four years would be able to vote. UNTAG then moved on to the actual process of registering Namibians to vote. They set up permanent and temporary registration centers and created mobile registration teams to ensure as many people as possible were able to vote. They even delegated three helicopters to fly to remote areas of the country. By the time all was said and done, over 700,000 people had registered to vote, well over what had been estimated. To decide which parties would be allowed to run for election, the UN created two requirements for a party to run, they must have over 2000 signatures supporting their party and they must pay a deposit of 10,000 rand (~4500\$). Ten parties were able to meet these demands, and seven would make it into the Constituent Assembly.

The final obstacle to the election came from South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha. Botha convened a press conference days before the election and falsely claimed that SWAPO forces had gathered at the border in preparation for an invasion. Unlike with the April fiasco of 1989, UNTAG was able to take quick action to prevent the situation from spinning out of control. They quickly announced the remarks as false and used their presence throughout the country to reassure the public that no invasion was coming. With no further interruptions, the voting took place between 7 and 11 November 1989. After the votes were counted, it was announced that SWAPO had won the election. The election was

⁶⁹ Howard, 123.

officially considered a success when opposing parties accepted defeat instead of voicing disagreements about the results. This moment was seen as a victory for Namibian democracy and as a victory for UNTAG for creating an “environment for free and fair general elections.”⁷⁰ Though SWAPO won the general election, they did not win with a two-thirds majority. This would become important when dealing with the constitution because it had to be confirmed by a two-thirds majority. Since SWAPO could not confirm it without help from the opposing parties, the constitution was able to better reflect the desires of the Namibian people as a whole, instead of the desires of one specific political party.⁷¹ With Namibia independent, a democratically elected government in place, and a constitution written and confirmed, the goals of the UN and the people of Namibia had been met. However, Namibia’s real test would be whether or not the democratic principles would be sustainable without the presence of the UN to enforce peace.

D. INDEPENDENCE

While Namibia had achieved independence, there were still quite a number of challenges ahead of them. South African apartheid had destroyed the balance of the country. Almost two-thirds of the population were very poor, the vast majority black, 30 percent of the workforce was unemployed, and 85 percent of employed workers received wages below the poverty line.⁷² Whites were employed in the skilled jobs, while blacks mostly had unskilled jobs. Infant mortality was high, and social pension scheme was improperly maintained and skewed in favor of whites. The whole situation was made worse by the return of over 45,000 Namibians, from exiled SWAPO supports to prior Koevoet forces.⁷³ This left Namibia in a very precarious situation after gaining independence. They could not simply kick out all of the whites and take their land. The Namibian government would have to urge their people to be patient, change would not be immediate, and it would not bring riches but rather stability. The Namibian government, under the leadership of

⁷⁰ Melber, *Understanding Namibia: The Trials of Independence*, 15.

⁷¹ Melber, 17.

⁷² Kaela, 127.

⁷³ Kaela, 127.

SWAPO, would be tested in the political and economic realms to determine if their highly sought-after democracy would survive the test of time.

1. Economic Challenges

Although the majority of Namibians were poor, the country itself was bountiful in resources. Zinc, copper, diamonds, and uranium, along with almost 50 other minerals can be found in the country.⁷⁴ Part of the reason South Africa was so against Namibian independence is because of the mineral wealth of the country. Unfortunately, Namibia struggled to have their economic wealth line up with their mineral wealth. Most of the investments in the mines came from South Africa and other Western nations, who reaped most of the profits from the mines for themselves. When the mining operations had begun under South African rule, no manufacturing industries had been set up in Namibia. South Africa had foreseen the possibility of losing Namibia and created the manufacturing industry in South Africa. This meant that Namibians had to ship the minerals out of the country to be processed.⁷⁵ The government did not have the funds to create their own manufacturing industry, nor did they want to stop mining as it would be a decrease in funds and an increase in unemployment. Finally, the mining companies in Namibia reaped huge profits, but the money stayed with the white owners and higher-level employees. Just as with manufacturing, Namibia could not afford to kick out the companies as they would have been left without the proper equipment to continue mining operations.

The fishing and farming industries had the same problems as the mining industry. During South African rule, they did not enforce fishing polices off the coast, and other foreign nations overfished the area. The newly independent government was quick to create a 200 nautical mile economic zone to prevent further fishing, but it would require time for the fish to return to the area. Namibia possessed much fertile land, enabling the creation of lucrative agriculture, cattle, and sheep farming. However, the successful agricultural businesses were run by the whites. During South Africa's occupation, 45 percent of the land went to whites, who only made-up 10 percent of the population. There were about

⁷⁴ Kaela, 128.

⁷⁵ Kaela, 128.

5,000 white farmers, with an average farm size of 20,000 acres. Meanwhile, the 140,000 black farmers were left with overcrowded land.⁷⁶ Unsurprisingly, many of the black farmers did not own the expensive equipment needed to work their meager plots, but instead were forced to lease it or take out loans.

When SWAPO was first founded, they believed in a socialist answer to all of these problems. However, as the group gained momentum they turned from socialism to capitalism. They would not take away land and redistribute it to their people or nationalize all of the industries in an effort to equally distribute profits. While it would take time for SWAPO's methods to produce results, Namibia would find itself in a better position than it had been in the past. By 2016, the World Bank reported that Namibia had cut its poverty rate in half. While education would increase, unemployment would remain a difficult challenge to overcome.⁷⁷ The scars of apartheid and colonialism are slowly healing as Namibia attempts to create better life for all of their people.

2. SWAPO Politics

While the first election in Namibia had been peaceful, it was done under the watchful eyes of UNTAG. The next election would be the first actual test of whether Namibia would continue on the path of democracy. During the first general election, SWAPO was not able to gather two-thirds of the votes and thus had to compromise with opposing parties when it came to the constitution.⁷⁸ However, during the next election, 4 years later, SWAPO was able to gain more than two-thirds of the votes and took over the parliament and thus acquired all the decision-making power. With all the power belonging to one political party, SWAPO immediately passed an amendment to allow the president a third term in office, vice the originally agreed upon two.⁷⁹ While this was surprising, the fact that there was largely no condemnation from the people or the opposition parties was

⁷⁶ Kaela, 130.

⁷⁷ "Poverty and Equity Brief: Namibia," World Bank Group, April 2021, https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_NAM.pdf.

⁷⁸ Melber, 17.

⁷⁹ Melber, 39.

even more surprising. Henning Melber theorizes that this may be due to the esteem of President Nujoma. The people of Namibia had desired independence, and President Nujoma, along with SWAPO, had been able to deliver that desire.⁸⁰ While it was understandable that the people of Namibia held their first president in high regard, the fact that SWAPO's first act with total power would be to extend the president's reign was foreboding for the future of Namibia's democracy. The situation continued to degrade in the next election in 1999. A new political party emerged, the Congress of Democrats (CoD), and seemed to have the potential to bring more representation for voters to choose from. However, the votes for SWAPO remained high and they managed to retain a two-thirds majority. This is because while the CoD did garner some popularity, the votes they gained were from existing opposition parties, not SWAPO. While the numbers portrayed SWAPO as strong, the action of the political party made it seem like they were fearful of the opposing parties. SWAPO routinely engaged in "smear campaigns and character assassinations...against anyone perceived to be in open or public disagreement with the official party line."⁸¹ SWAPO even went so far as to denounce all political opposition parties, claiming that they were European pawns attempting to civilize the people of Namibia. Essentially telling voters that loyalty to Namibia meant loyalty to SWAPO and its policies. A survey conducted by the Helen Suzman Foundation during this time determined that Namibia was the only newly independent South African state in which a defeat of the current party would not be accepted by the people or by the government itself.⁸² With the changes implemented by SWAPO and opposition parties largely reviled, Namibia faced a very real possibility of sliding into an authoritarian state.

After struggling to throw off the shackles of colonialism and foreign rule, a culture of silence had become ingrained in the people of Namibia. They believed that to support the idea of independence and democracy meant no criticisms of the people that had delivered it to them. This idea of silence when it came to the actions of the government only expanded as the government began to intertwine itself with the private sector and the

⁸⁰ Melber, 39.

⁸¹ Melber, 41.

⁸² Melber, 42.

church. Members of unions or congregations followed SWAPO religiously because the groups they were affiliated with told them that was the best way. This combined with SWAPO's continued use of governmental authorities to further their political party allowed them to win every election for two decades following Namibian independence. SWAPO worked hard to entrench the idea that their party was the government, and the government was the state. During election periods in the first decade of the 21st century, SWAPO began to use state facilities and public property to spread propaganda. They had state-owned broadcasting stations devote "disproportional time in its news programs on radio and television to reporting in favour of SWAPO."⁸³ They also began to make it all but impossible for opposing parties to hold rallies. SWAPO halted rallies in public spaces claiming that it was SWAPO territory and only they should be allowed to have rallies there. This unequalness along with voting irregularities during the 2005 election led to legal intervention. However, SWAPO was able to overcome this hurdle, with the court ruling that the count was fair and that codifying into law that certain zones would be declared no-go areas for any political party besides SWAPO.⁸⁴ The voices of those who claimed that the court's decision was made with heavy influence from SWAPO were largely ignored. With SWAPO continuing to hold the majority of the power in government, opposing parties became increasingly frustrated and began to splinter.

The 2004 elections resulted in seven different parties taking a seat in Parliament, while in the next legislative period the number of parties increased to nine. Melber argues that on the surface this seemed to be a positive development, but in reality it was not. SWAPO maintained 54 of the 72 seats, the rest were split between eight other parties.⁸⁵ While there may have been diversity, the eight parties that opposed SWAPO held no voting power in the Parliament. The situation continued to degrade as Namibians began to vote based off old ethnic regional patterns, furthering benefitting SWAPO whose ethnic base represented the majority of the country. SWAPO became so confident in their position that the president publicly declared that "all higher ranking positions in the state apparatus and

⁸³ Melber, 42.

⁸⁴ Melber, 48.

⁸⁵ Melber, 46.

state-owned enterprises out to be filled only with reliable party members”.⁸⁶ This statement received no backlash, in fact, SWAPO’s tactics of demonizing opposition parties worked perfectly. During the 2015 elections, SWAPO managed to ensure that all high-ranking political members were part of the SWAPO party. Despite SWAPO’s mistreatment of opposing parties, Freedom House scored Namibia as free, reporting that while there are reports of ethnic discrimination, civil liberties remain robust throughout all ethnic groups.⁸⁷

While Namibia is by no means a perfect democracy, the goals of the UN nation-building operation were a success. The determining factors in the success came down to preparation and perseverance. While the international community persuaded South Africa to agree to the UN resolution, Ahtisaari continued preparing for the mission. This continuous planning allowed for a more complete understanding of the difficulties that would be faced once UNTAG arrived in country. In order for nation-building operations to begin, the UN needed the cooperation of South Africa. By gathering the international community and using global pressure to influence South Africa, the UN was able to create an environment in which UNTAG would be able to operate relatively free of violence. This was crucial as it allowed Namibia to hold elections unimpeded by violence. The UN understood the necessary requirements for nation-building to be successful in Namibia and worked to meet them before starting operations. By avoiding premature operations, the UN was able to accomplish the goals that were laid out and Namibia was able to achieve independence and democracy.

⁸⁶ Melber, 48.

⁸⁷ “Freedom in the World 2022: Namibia,” Freedom House, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/namibia/freedom-world/2022>.

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III. NATION-BUILDING FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN

The nation-building attempt in Afghanistan emerged out the United States' desire to destroy al-Qaeda and its Taliban state supporter. Afghanistan had been a failing country for decades, but the United States and other western countries had never taken a real interest. This may have been because the country had nothing to offer from an economic standpoint. Their number one export over the decades has been opium, they have no sea ports, and while there were precious minerals, the terrain makes getting to them economically unfeasible. When Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979, the United States gave jihadist factions weapons with which to fight the Soviets and prevent the further spread of communism in central Asia. The world would not take notice of Afghanistan until two airliners crashed into the World Trade Centers in New York, killing thousands. Al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan, would claim responsibility and NATO would agree on an invasion. Over time, what started as mission to destroy al-Qaeda, turned into a nation-building project to raise Afghanistan out of its failed state status and turn it into a democracy. However, this mission would prove fraught with difficulties. Afghanistan had been at war with itself for decades, resulting in a splintered state, where tribal loyalties were the only thing that counted. The United States would attempt to create a centralized state, something that Afghanistan had not seen in over a century, in the hopes of bring stability to the nation. This would prove difficult as the Taliban fought against this change. With the support and protection of neighboring countries, the Taliban would overrun the fledgling democracy in Afghanistan.

A. PRESIDENT BUSH

Immediately following 9/11, the Bush administrations' first plan was not invasion. President George W Bush attempted to extradite al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, but the Taliban government refused to cooperate.⁸⁸ David Lake asserts that the initial invasion of Afghanistan was ordered to bring Al-Qaeda to justice for the 9/11 terrorist attacks and

⁸⁸ Rathnam Indurthy, "The Obama Administration's Strategy in Afghanistan," *International Journal on World Peace* 28, no. 3 (September 2011): 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23266718>.

ensure that Afghanistan would no longer be a breeding ground for terrorists.⁸⁹ The destruction of the Taliban became part of the U.S. objective after they refused to help in either aspect. With full UN support, “Operation Enduring Freedom” was launched. At this point, the basic plan was for United States and NATO forces to subdue the Taliban, retrieve Osama bin Laden, and dismantle al-Qaeda. Bush placed Donald Rumsfeld, his Secretary of Defense, in charge of the invasion of Afghanistan. Rumsfeld was determined to make the war in Afghanistan short, with as few troops as necessary being deployed to the country.⁹⁰ To make up for a decreased foreign troop presence, United States and NATO forces were to receive help from a local anti-Taliban group known as the Northern Alliance. While some leaders of the Northern Alliance were placed in important positions, Hamid Karzai would be chosen to be the head of the interim Afghanistan administration. This 30 member administration would be responsible for running the country “until a new constitution was drafted and approved, and until national elections could be held”.⁹¹ The document detailing these steps was named the Bonn agreement, and was signed on December 5, 2001, just two months after the initial invasion. Shortly after this document was signed, the UN approved resolution 1386. This resolution created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to “help the new Afghan government provide security and build new military and police forces.”⁹² Rumsfeld also ordered military officials to “focus on kinetic counterterrorism operations and training the newly formed Afghan National Army (ANA).”⁹³ Since the United States would be sending the majority of the troops, he was also opposed to funding the newly created Afghan government and fledging security forces. To help solidify responsibilities within Afghanistan, the United States called a G8 meeting in Tokyo to discuss the Security Sector Reform (SSR). During the meeting it was decided that the United States would be responsible for building up the

⁸⁹ David A. Lake, *The Statebuilder’s Dilemma: On the Limits of Foreign Intervention* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016), 70.

⁹⁰ David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan: Fighting Together, Fighting Alone* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90.

⁹¹ Indurthy, 8.

⁹² Indurthy, 9.

⁹³ Auerswald and Saideman, 89.

ANA, Germany would build police, Japan would handle Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) of partnered militia forces, Great Britain would handle counter-narcotics, and Italy would establish a justice system. Rumsfeld was satisfied with the results of the meeting as he wanted United States troops to focus on hunting down and eliminating al-Qaeda member and training ANA members in preparation for a U.S. withdrawal. The head of United States Central Command (CENTCOM), General Tommy Franks, agreed with Rumsfeld's plan and begin taking steps to accomplish the mission he had been handed. Two years later, with United States troops still present in Afghanistan, the United States remained focused on fighting al-Qaeda. However, Rumsfeld was becoming impatient, believing that the ANA training should be sped up, both in order to get troops out of Afghanistan and so more forces could be focused on Iraq.⁹⁴ By 2003, the leadership structure for the campaign in Afghanistan had changed. General John Abizaid was the new head of CENTCOM, and Lieutenant General David Barno was placed as the overall United States commander in Afghanistan. The main thing Rumsfeld demanded from the new the leadership was an expedited timeline for training the ANA and getting United States troops out of Afghanistan. However, different changes to the Afghanistan strategy would be made after Barno took command and began his review of the United States policy in Afghanistan. Feeling that the current strategy was lacking, he instituted what he called the "Five Pillars: (1) Defeat Terrorism and Deny Sanctuary, (2) Enable Afghan security structure, (3) Sustain area ownership, (4) Enable reconstruction and good governance, (5) Engage regional states."⁹⁵ This strategy differed greatly from the guidelines Rumsfeld and Abizaid had put forth since it "required significant nation-building activities over an extended time frame" and focused more on helping Afghans than killing terrorists.⁹⁶ This change in strategy was not immediately noticed by higher command, nor was it immediately relayed to them that changes had been made. Barno did not believe he was subject to oversight from Rumsfeld or CENTCOM and only made

⁹⁴ Auerswald and Saideman, 89.

⁹⁵ David W. Barno, "Fighting 'The Other War': Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003-2005," *Military Review*, September 2007, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20071031_art006.pdf.

⁹⁶ Auerswald and Saideman, 91.

updates to Abizaid sporadically, and very casually at that.⁹⁷ Since Barno had not asked for permission from the Pentagon to change the mission, most Washington based officials learned of the changes through news outlets. Rumsfeld, furious that the mission parameters had been changed with his notification or permission, began to have weekly teleconferences with Barno. These discussions covered what Rumsfeld had originally told Barno was the priority: troop drawdown in Afghanistan, timeline for replacement of United States troops by ANA troops, and a timeline for the ISAF to take over United States troop responsibility.⁹⁸ Due to Barno's actions, Rumsfeld lost trust in him and CENTCOM and began demanding to be briefed on any changes, no matter how minute.⁹⁹

In October of 2004, ISAF took operational control of Northern Afghanistan. The plan was that over the next one to two years, the ISAF would take further control over Afghanistan. With ISAF and United States troops working together, the ANA training process would hopefully be accelerated as Rumsfeld desired. In order to keep operations as smooth as possible between the two groups, it was decided that the commander of both parties should be a United States general. In May of 2005, Barno was replaced as OEF commander by Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry. Rumsfeld believed that Eikenberry would be able to deliver the results he desired in Afghanistan, in part due to Eikenberry's presence in Afghanistan in 2002 training the ANA.¹⁰⁰ With Eikenberry at the helm for the OEF, the five principles that Barno had put in place disappeared and the mission once again became focused on training the ANA and pursuing terrorist through special operations. Rumsfeld gave Eikenberry more freedom to maneuver than Barno, and this translated in Eikenberry being able to receive more funding to train ANA members. Soon after Eikenberry took over, the United States troop presence decreased as the ISAF began to take over operations in South Afghanistan. This decision was made in part to allow further United States resources to be redirected to the campaign in Iraq.¹⁰¹ Eikenberry was

⁹⁷ Auerswald and Saideman, 92.

⁹⁸ Auerswald and Saideman, 92.

⁹⁹ Auerswald and Saideman, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Auerswald and Saideman, 94.

¹⁰¹ Auerswald and Saideman, 95.

expected to continue the mission in Afghanistan using the remaining resources he possessed and assistance from ISAF forces. Eikenberry would receive some help in using ISAF forces as General Dan McNeill was placed as commander of ISAF forces in October of 2006. Once again, this was a placement that Rumsfeld approved due to McNeill's presence in Afghanistan in 2002 training ANA troops. Rumsfeld believed that McNeill would stay true to the goal of counterterrorism and ANA training, instead of the peacekeeping or nation-building role some NATO countries believed was the goal.¹⁰² With McNeill's appointment, Rumsfeld's time as Secretary of Defense would come to an end. President Bush had placed Rumsfeld in charge of the United States strategy for Afghanistan for the first five years. During those five years Rumsfeld focused United States strategy on pursuing terrorist in the country and training ANA troops as quickly as possible so United States forces could exit the country.

Robert Gates was chosen to replace Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense in December of 2006. Upon Gates entering office, the Bush administration did a complete overhaul of the strategy for Afghanistan. Bush declared that "helping rebuild this society after years of tyranny" was in the best interest of the American people and also a moral obligation.¹⁰³ This was just one example of drastic shifts the White House began to make when it came to strategy in Afghanistan. Where Rumsfeld had felt all the focus should be on killing terrorist and training ANA troops, Gates advised for goals more associated with COIN.¹⁰⁴ The goal in Afghanistan was still to rid the country of terrorist and find those responsible for 9/11, but at the same time the United States decided to improve the Afghan economy, build up infrastructure, and try to rid the country of the corruption that they felt permeated every level of society. Auerswald remarks that another major difference between Gates and his predecessor was in who he chose to lead. Rumsfeld chose individuals based on what results he believed would be delivered.¹⁰⁵ That was also how he decided whether someone

¹⁰² Auerswald and Saideman, 95.

¹⁰³ Auerswald and Saideman, 99.

¹⁰⁴ Auerswald and Saideman, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Auerswald and Saideman, 98.

stayed in command. If Rumsfeld's desired results were being achieved, the individual was allowed to stay in command. Gates changed that by holding leaders accountable for not just the end result, but also all the actions along the way. Scandals that would have been overlooked by Rumsfeld and chalked up to being part of the job were fireable offenses to Gates. More than once, this led to individuals being relieved before the end of their tour.

While Gates and the Bush administration had changed plans to pursue a more counterinsurgency (COIN) based strategy, the actions on the ground were still reminiscent of what Rumsfeld had desired. McNeill had been appointed as commander of ISAF because Rumsfeld knew he believed in the decision to focus on terrorist elimination. It would take time for the forces on the ground to accept that Washington had decided to head in a direction, and then maneuver to achieve the new objectives. Whether by coincidence or due to the change in strategy, the situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate starting in 2007. ISAF had been given control over Southern Afghanistan but were unable to control the area with the forces they had at their disposal. This, in part, was due to a change in tactics by al-Qaeda and Taliban forces. There began to be an uptick or suicide bombing, roadside bombings and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).¹⁰⁶ These attacks had no regard for collateral damage, as civilians and foreign military alike began to be killed. Bush was forced to send an additional 3,200 Marines in support of the ISAF forces in the area.¹⁰⁷ Gates believed that McNeill, as the commander of ISAF forces in the area, was to blame for the setbacks and had him relieved of command after less than a year on the job. To replace McNeill, White House officials picked General David McKiernan. Auerswald explains that this choice represented another change in strategic thought as McKiernan would become head of both ISAF and OEF forces in Afghanistan. The belief was that by having one person in charge of both forces, communication, coordination and planning would become seamless.¹⁰⁸ In line with the new strategy put forth by Gates, McKiernan attempted to change the way in which ground forces engaged Afghans. He ordered no more

¹⁰⁶ Indurthy, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Auerswald and Saideman, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Auerswald and Saideman, 99.

storming of private residences or indiscriminate air strikes in an attempt to reduce civilian casualties and allow foreign forces to be painted in a positive light.

B. PRESIDENT OBAMA

During October of 2008, the commander of CENTCOM became General Petraeus. Petraeus was respected for the successful COIN operations he had commanded in Iraq. Upon taking command of CENTCOM he conducted a review and came to the same conclusion as Gates and other White House staff, COIN needed to be implemented in Afghanistan. He also argued that more resources needed to be devoted to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ Soon after Petraeus assumed command of CENTCOM, President Barack Obama was voted into office. When Obama took office, there was not a drastic change in strategy when it came to Afghanistan. While Obama had been vocal that the war in Iraq was uncalled for, he fully supported the war in Afghanistan. Upon entering office, Obama was told that the war in Afghanistan was not going well by both his defense and intelligence officials. The Taliban resurgence in 2005 had continued, with the Taliban expanding their presence into almost every province in the country.¹¹⁰ Both Petraeus and McKiernan advised the President to send more troops to Afghanistan, at first recommending 30,000 before settling for 17,000.¹¹¹ Their argument was that they needed an influx of troops in order to conduct productive COIN operations. In March of 2009, Obama sent an additional 4,000 troops to Afghanistan in order to “stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan”.¹¹² While McKiernan would get the additional troops he had asked for, he would not remain in charge of them for much longer. Gates noted that the situation in Afghanistan had continued to decline with McKiernan in command and decided that his command should be cut short by almost six months. Many White House officials supported Gates on his decision to remove McKiernan, believing that McKiernan moved too slow to properly conduct COIN operations.

¹⁰⁹ Auerswald and Saideman, 100.

¹¹⁰ Indurthy, 10.

¹¹¹ Auerswald and Saideman, 101.

¹¹² Auerswald and Saideman, 101.

In May of 2009, General Stanley McChrystal was appointed the new ISAF and OEF commander. Similar to Petraeus, McChrystal seemed a good choice because of his years of experience conducting COIN operations. Upon assuming the position, McChrystal stressed that the main goal of the United States should be to protect the Afghan people and to help the new Afghan government gain the trust of its people. Finding and neutralizing Taliban insurgents should come after protecting the people.¹¹³ He also voiced that “ISAF should focus on where the population was threatened” while OEF forces focused on helping the population.¹¹⁴ All of these steps were part of what McChrystal believed was necessary change when it came to United States and NATO strategy in Afghanistan. President Obama agreed with McChrystal’s strategy and sent another 21,000 troops into the country to assist.¹¹⁵ While troops were being sent to assist in Afghanistan, elections for the next president of Afghanistan were in their final stages. A runoff had been deemed necessary by the UN Elections Complaints Commission (ECC) due to widespread voter fraud.¹¹⁶ The runoff would become uncalled for when Karzai’s opponent suddenly dropped out the race. Karzai was declared the duty-elected President even though large swathes of the voting population felt that the election was corrupt and invalid. United States and UN officials ignored complaints about the election and recognized Karzai as the new President of Afghanistan.

In a speech he gave during the West Point graduation ceremony on December 1, 2009, President Obama explained that goal in Afghanistan was “to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and prevent its capacity to threaten America and its Allies in the future”.¹¹⁷ He furthered explained that the strategy that would be used to achieve this goal would have multiple parts: to “deny Al Qaeda a safe haven;...reverse

¹¹³ Indurthy, 15.

¹¹⁴ Auerswald and Saideman, 102.

¹¹⁵ Indurthy, 15.

¹¹⁶ Indurthy, 16.

¹¹⁷ Mark Schrecker, “U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: Flaws Assumptions Will Lead to Ultimate Failure,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2010): 76, <https://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/u-s-strategy-afghanistan-flawed-assumptions-will/docview/762424691/se-2?accountid=12702>.

the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to over the government [of Afghanistan] and strengthen the Afghan government and its security forces, so that they can take lead responsibility for its future."¹¹⁸ The key aspects needed for this strategy to work were for the Afghan people to trust foreign troops enough to help them root out al Qaeda and Taliban members, and for Pakistan to agree to no longer provide safe harbor for members of either group attempting to escape Afghanistan. The only real difference between Obama and Bush when it came to strategy in Afghanistan is that Obama attempted to make Pakistan a crucial part of the solution. The rest of the Obama administration's plans were in line with what Bush had turned to before shortly leaving office. Obama and his military leadership believed that through counterinsurgency operations aimed at "winning the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people, they could accomplish the first key aspect of denying al-Qaeda a safe haven in Afghanistan.¹¹⁹ Obama planned to placate Pakistan and get them to cease harboring and supplying al Qaeda and Taliban member by offering security and economic support. With these goals and strategy in mind, Obama also declared that official troop withdrawal from Afghanistan would begin July of 2011.

NATO, in an effort to achieve the same goals the Obama administration had put forward, sent an additional 39,000 troops as part of the NATO Training Mission (ANTM). Their job would be to help train additional Afghan soldiers and police in order to achieve the desired strength of 300,000.¹²⁰ Obama's new strategy and leadership were put to the test on February 13, 2010, during "Operation Mosstareak." The goal of the operation was to break the Taliban's hold on the city of Marjah. The plan was to forewarn the city that an attack was imminent in order to try and reduce civilian casualties. Unfortunately, many Taliban members took this opportunity to flee to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where United States forces could not pursue.¹²¹ The remaining Taliban forces used the warning as an opportunity to dig in and solidify their positions. While the city was taken with relatively few casualties, problems soon arose. The man chosen to lead

¹¹⁸ Indurthy, 16.

¹¹⁹ Indurthy, 17.

¹²⁰ Indurthy, 17.

¹²¹ Indurthy, 18.

Marjah after its capture was Abdul Zahir Aryan, who the United States believed was a decent choice despite the fact that while in exile in Germany, he was jailed for the attempted murder of his son.¹²² This was not the first nor the last time that questionable leadership positions were assigned. Another problem forces ran into after taking the town were terrorist attacks. While the majority of the Taliban was thought to have been removed from the city, many had not been visually identified when they left. This enabled them to return back at a time of their choosing to commit acts of terror to demonstrate Taliban resistance. The fact that the Taliban was still working in Marjah was all the more apparent when looking at the farmers crops. The farmers still grew opium, a substance they then sold to the Taliban who then sold it again as a means of income for the organization. United States and NATO officials could not get the farmers to grow different crops because 1) nothing they were advised to grow brought more income than opium, and 2) Taliban members routinely checked on the farmers to ensure the drug was still being grown. The failure to secure the city from Taliban threats and attacks would discourage future operations in other areas of Southern Afghanistan.¹²³

As the mission in Afghanistan continued to fracture, so did the leadership. Obama fired McChrystal after he was recorded making disparaging comments about the president, his advisors, and the mission in Afghanistan.¹²⁴ On June 23, 2010 General David Petraeus took over as McChrystal's replacement. Like many of his predecessors Petraeus was considered a COIN expert who had demonstrated his abilities in Iraq. Unlike previous change of commands, Petraeus's entrance did not incorporate any changes in strategy. This did not mean a change in strategy was not needed. Violence was still on the uptick with an increase of 70 percent from 2009 in "suicide bombings, assassinations, roadside bombings and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)".¹²⁵ While the overwhelming majority of deaths in Southern Afghanistan were Taliban members, there were also numerous civilian casualties. The large number of children dying from attacks hit the civilian population

¹²² Indurthy, 18.

¹²³ Indurthy, 18.

¹²⁴ Indurthy, 19.

¹²⁵ Indurthy, 19.

especially hard. While the Taliban were responsible for these deaths, Taliban propaganda led many Afghans to believe United States forces were the ones responsible. When Petraeus stepped into his position of leadership, the Obama administration made it clear that the expectation was still for the United States forces to withdraw from Afghanistan by July 2011. This goal would be difficult to achieve as 33 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan were combatting the insurgency.¹²⁶ Petraeus planned to try and accomplish this goal by turning Afghanistan over to the ANA and Afghan National Police (ANP) gradually, starting with pacified areas. At that point in August 2010, the ANA and ANP strength were 134,000 and 115,000, respectively.¹²⁷ Petraeus intended for training and buildup to continue for both groups during transition. United States troop strength had been increased to 100,000 with an additional 50,000 in NATO forces.¹²⁸ Petraeus decided to use the increased force size to strike a major blow to the Taliban by taking Kandahar, the province that was considered their spiritual center and stronghold.

By mid-October, United States and Afghan forces had begun to rout many of the Taliban forces in Kandahar. However, they were facing the same problems as in Marjah, with Taliban members were fleeing to the safety of Pakistan. While preventing Taliban members from escaping to Pakistan proved difficult, the operation in Kandahar did produce some positive results. The Taliban chain of command in the area had reportedly been reduced to shambles to the point that suicide bombers had stopped showing up to participate in attacks and higher officials were disobeying orders. Also, because the operations in Kandahar were done with Afghan support, the public mood was drifting more toward approval of Americans. Unfortunately, all this good was outweighed by reports that Taliban control was being exerted once again in Northern Afghanistan, where they had been reported decimated in the earlier part of the campaign. This combined with the knowledge that segments of the population were turning against Karzai's government due to the Taliban painting them as United States puppets reinforced the need for a change in

¹²⁶ Indurthy, 20.

¹²⁷ Indurthy, 20.

¹²⁸ Indurthy, 20.

strategy.¹²⁹ News of Taliban resurgence in Northern Afghanistan convinced the Obama administration and NATO leadership that defeating the Taliban in a military conflict was not the solution to winning in Afghanistan. Karzai and the Afghan government agreed, dictating that should the Taliban “eschew violence, accept the Afghan constitution, and commit itself to protection of human rights” there would be room to allow their continued existence in Afghanistan.¹³⁰ With this in mind, the Obama administration began to decouple the Taliban and al-Qaeda, marking the Taliban as a national, indigenous movement as opposed to a terrorist organization. Though peace talks began, the progress was slow.

The first physical sign of results from the peace talks was the “opening of a Taliban office in Doha,” sanctioned by the United States and Karzai.¹³¹ However, this success was short lived as the office was closed down within 24 hours of its opening. While officials continued to try and convince Taliban leaders that peace was the answer, President Obama argued for troop reduction on the grounds that most of al-Qaeda had fled the country. Afghanistan would remain important, but not important enough to warrant such a large troop presence. Karzai had no qualms with a decrease in troop presence but desired guarantees that aid would continue after the troops had left. The Obama administration and other NATO countries agreed to continue supplying aid, fearing that if Afghanistan collapsed and it would be seen as a victory for al-Qaeda. If al-Qaeda claimed victory in Afghanistan, whether true or not, there was concern that this would embolden and encourage other transnational militants around the world. While troop withdrawal would begin, the fear of Afghanistan collapsing would provide justification for a limited number of troops to remain in Afghanistan to continue counterterrorism and training.¹³² The fear of Afghanistan backsliding was not only felt by Western powers. In September of 2014, Ashraf Ghani assumed the position as Afghanistan’s second president. Ashraf was

¹²⁹ Anthony Teitler, “Obama and Afghanistan: A Constructivist Approach to Shifting Policy Narrative and Practices,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2018): 210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1497009>

¹³⁰ Indurthy, 22.

¹³¹ Teitler, 211.

¹³² Teitler, 213.

determined to find peaceful terms with the Taliban and reopened the Doha Taliban office in order to have a more permanent channel of communication. One of his first actions as president was to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). The BSA had been three years in the making but had never gotten any traction due to Karzai refusing to sign it. The meat of the BSA was an agreement between the United States, NATO and Afghanistan that allowed approximately 9,800 U.S. forces to join another 2,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan to continue train and assist missions.¹³³ There were also additional provisions that allowed for special forces operation and the maintaining of several United States bases. Ashraf readily agreed to the BSA because it cemented US-Afghan relations for the foreseeable future. While the BSA achieved the desired result of less troops in Afghanistan, the Obama administration believed that there was still risk of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist safe haven once again. To supplement the decreased number of troops on the ground, the military strategy began to shift from a focus on COIN to one focusing more on special forces operations and drones. The belief was that this shift would allow the United States to continue the fight against al-Qaeda without the financial drain that 100,000 boots on the ground had produced.¹³⁴ The Obama administration would continue this tactic throughout the rest of the term, using limited forces in Afghanistan to target al-Qaeda when possible while training Afghan forces with the belief that they would eventually operate without American support.

C. PRESIDENT TRUMP

President Trump entered office making promises similar to those made by President Obama. Trump assured the public that he would get United States troops out of Afghanistan and focus United States money and resources at home. However, upon entering office his plan to immediately pull out of Afghanistan was changed in large part due to three men: Secretary of Defense James Mattis; National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster; and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly. These men convinced Trump that the war in Afghanistan

¹³³ John R. Evans, "Bilateral Security Agreement: A New Era of Afghan-U.S. Cooperation," *Brookings*, September 30, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/09/30/bilateral-security-agreement-a-new-era-of-afghan-u-s-cooperation/>.

¹³⁴ Teitler, 215.

could and should still be fought. Trump relented due to newfound concern that if the United States pulled out of Afghanistan too soon, it would create a power vacuum that ISIS or al-Qaeda would fill. Once this happened, all the ground that had been gained would be lost and Afghanistan would once again turn into a training ground for terrorist.¹³⁵ Convinced that he should work against his original instinct of pulling out of Afghanistan, President Trump decided to pursue a strategy that he touted as different from Obama's because there would be no focus on nation-building. In reality, the strategy remained much the same as the one Obama had pursued. Trump deployed an additional 3,900 troops to the area and started trying to make inroads to achieve a peace agreement with the Taliban.¹³⁶ While there had been some headway made during the Obama administration, the Taliban were still fighting against United States and allied troops throughout the country. The one area in which Trump pursued a vastly different course of action was in communicating with Pakistan. The Obama administration tried to convince Pakistan to cooperate through economic aid while never overtly accusing them of harboring Taliban or al-Qaeda members. Trump abandoned this tactic, accusing Pakistan of harboring terrorist and threatening to pull United States funding if they did not adjust course. NATO Afghanistan commanding officer, General Nicholson, agreed with Trump's new aggressive attitude toward Pakistan and suggested drone strikes in Pakistani territory to flush out terrorist.¹³⁷

President Ashraf believed Trump's new Afghanistan policy was exactly what Afghanistan needed. Ashraf supposed that an increase in United States troops would equate to more training for Afghan personnel. This was sorely needed as Afghan forces, with the exception of special forces, had proven incapable of combating the Taliban. A larger United States presence would help put the Taliban on the backfoot and possibly encourage them to come to the negotiating table as both the United States and Afghan government wished. However, this change in policy and troop increase did not deter the Taliban who

¹³⁵ Johnathan Stevenson, "The Trump Administration's Afghanistan Policy," *Strategic Comments* 23 (September 2017): i–iii. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2017.1388018>

¹³⁶ Stevenson, 3.

¹³⁷ Bawa Singh, Balinder Singh and Sandeep Singh, "Trump's Strategy in South Asia: Afghanistan's Gordian Knot," *Global Affairs* 7, no. 3 (October 2021): 381, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2021.1983729>.

released a statement reiterating “their intent of fighting until gaining victory and establishing an Islamic caliphate.”¹³⁸ The Taliban were not the only force undeterred by sudden change in policy implemented by the Trump administration. In response to the public criticism being directed at them by Trump, the Pakistani government voiced that the United States should focus on Taliban forces operation in Afghanistan. More importantly, in August of 2017 Pakistan also began to restrict supply shipments to United States forces in Afghanistan while “upgrading its diplomatic contacts with China, Russia and Turkey.”¹³⁹ While Pakistan did not want to lose the economic assistance it gained from the United States, they knew the United States did not want to lose an important partner in South Asia with China growing in power. The impasse between the United States and Pakistan would continue until “Trump wrote Khan a letter in the fall of 2018 requesting aid in the Afghan peace process.”¹⁴⁰ While Pakistan had agreed to help with peace in Afghanistan, there seemed little they could provide in terms of effort as the Taliban had continued to show no desire for peace. Throughout 2018, Ghani attempted to bring Taliban leadership to the table to discuss peace and cooperation. Each attempt met with failure as the Taliban continued to launch offensives throughout Afghanistan, forcing United States military response. Singh remarks that by this point it had become apparent that Trump’s strategy of intimidating the Taliban into peace talks had failed.

Convinced that a peace agreement could be reached, the Trump administration decided on a slight change in tactics. In the prior few years in which peace talks had been attempted, United States officials had stressed the importance of the Taliban only negotiating with the Afghan government. This was done in order to give the Afghan government legitimacy, ownership, and responsibility. This changed in October 2018 when President Trump named Zalmay Khalilzad as a special advisor on Afghanistan in the U.S. State Department. With the United States now inserting themselves into the peace talks, the Taliban begin to show a willingness for cooperation. However, while peace talks would begin, they were often held while circumventing the Afghan government. Trump had

¹³⁸ Singh, 382.

¹³⁹ Singh, 382.

¹⁴⁰ Singh, 383.

changed tactics from an Afghan owned peace settlement, to a United States owned peace settlement. Singh explains that this change meant the Afghan government would simply have to accept the terms the United States negotiated, without any input themselves. While this change may have brought the Taliban to the table, it also advanced the Taliban goal of delegitimizing the Afghan government. With the upgrade in status granted by conversing directly with the United States, the Taliban demanded that ISAF forces withdraw from Afghanistan and that the United States leave Afghan politics to Afghans. The United States did not agree to these terms but continued to have meeting with the Taliban and neighboring governments with the hope of reaching peace. Finally, in March of 2019 the United States and Taliban agreed on a draft agreement “of counterterrorism assurances and troops withdrawal.”¹⁴¹ The draft agreement included a withdrawal of 5,000 United States troops, a ceasefire, and an agreement that the Taliban would renounce al-Qaeda.¹⁴² Further negotiation following the draft was temporarily interrupted when Taliban forces killed civilians and soldiers in Kabul in September 2019. While it appeared that Afghanistan was moving closer toward peace, critics of the Trump administration were quick to reel back expectations. Perhaps the biggest reason for criticism of the peace agreement with the Taliban was that the success of it came down to the Taliban keeping adhering to their part of the bargain, something they had proved incapable of in the past. United States officials at the time argued that the Taliban had publicly stated they would settle for nothing less than a country governed under Islamic Law, a demand that ran counter to the Afghan constitution. There was also that fact that though the Taliban had agreed to split from al-Qaeda, they still accommodated to each other.¹⁴³ While Taliban leadership denied breaking any agreement, Afghan security forces continued to find al-Qaeda leadership in Taliban controlled territory. Despite these noticeable shortcomings, Khan and Trump continued to endorse the US-Taliban conversations.

On 1 February 2020, Khalilzad finally brought Khan into the fold and detailed the progress that had been made during US-Taliban peace conversations. This debrief was

¹⁴¹ Singh, 384.

¹⁴² Singh, 384.

¹⁴³ Singh, 385.

necessary because once again, Afghan officials had been completely left out of the conversation. The product of the conversations had been a new agreement that United States and Taliban officials signed on 29 February. It did not require Afghan approval or signature. The general terms of the document stated that all United States and allied troops would begin a phased withdrawal to be completed within 14 months of signing on the condition that “the Taliban vowed to prevent any individual or group from using Afghan soil to harm the United States and its allies.”¹⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, Taliban forces continued to fight with Afghan forces as they were not officially considered United States allies. Due to pressure from the United States government, Afghan officials continued to pursue peace talks with the Taliban while the violence continued. Afghan officials convinced Taliban leadership to come to the table by agreeing to release the remaining Taliban prisoners. While no agreement was ever reached between the two parties, in March of 2021 Ghani expressed consideration in new elections and formation of democratic government incorporating Taliban leadership.¹⁴⁵

D. PRESIDENT BIDEN

When the Biden administration took over from the Trump administration, they decided to continue upon the course that had already been laid out for them. Biden stuck to the final troop withdrawal in September but made no promises about the state of Afghanistan once United States troops were gone. This was mostly due to the fact that while the Taliban had signed a treaty agreeing to stop fighting, they were still engaged in battles against Afghan forces. The Biden administration sold the continued withdrawal by arguing that the original objective of invading Afghanistan had already been accomplished when “Osama bin Laden was killed...and al-Qaeda’s capabilities in Afghanistan were substantially degraded.”¹⁴⁶ As the withdrawal continued, there were two incidents that further cast the mission in Afghanistan as a failure. One was the tragic death of 13 marines

¹⁴⁴ Singh, 385.

¹⁴⁵ Singh, 385.

¹⁴⁶ Laurel Miller, “Biden’s Afghanistan Withdrawal: A Verdict on the Limits of American Power,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 63, no. 3 (June 2021): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2021.1930404>.

and 180 Afghans due to a terrorist attack at the airport the withdrawal was based out of.¹⁴⁷ The second incident was when President Ghani fled the country as Taliban troops continued to overwhelm Afghan forces.¹⁴⁸ These two incidents prevented the Biden administration from announcing the end of the Afghanistan campaign as anything other than a failure. Biden reassured United States officials, worried that Taliban leadership would allow al-Qaeda back into Afghanistan, that counter terrorism operations would continue through other means.¹⁴⁹ He also argued that the blame for the Taliban's return to power could not be placed at the feet of the United States, stating that Afghans had been given training and resources, they simply lacked the will to fight. No matter the actual reason, after 20 years of struggling to remove or reduce Taliban authority in Afghanistan, the last United States soldier left while the Taliban regained leadership.

When the Bush administration entered Afghanistan in 2001, the United States was not concerned with nation-building. This was evident by the tactics used to combat al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, after years of fighting, the United States decided that transforming Afghanistan into a stable, democratic nation would prevent it from becoming a terrorist state once again. Unfortunately, many of the requirements for successful nation-building were never achieved before this attempt was made. The actions of al-Qaeda and the Taliban eroded the belief that the United States could protect those who cooperated. Neighboring countries did little help with the operation, instead allowing enemy operatives to enter the safety of their borders. While there were some good Afghan leaders, many proved to be corrupt, while others refused to fully commit to the United States just in case the Taliban emerged victorious. The United States failed to halt the movement of enemy forces and thus failed to halt the violence. This combined with disparate internal will prevented Afghanistan from ever solidifying its government. While each president tried a different tactic to accomplish the goal of stability and democracy, all would eventually fail.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor, "Last Troops Exit Afghanistan, Ending America's Longest War." AP News August 30, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-islamic-state-group-e10e038baea732dae879c11234507f81>

¹⁴⁸ Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, "The Collapse of Afghanistan," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 1 (January 2022): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0003>.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, 40.

After two decades, trillions of dollars, and over 2000 troops killed in action, the United States gave up on turning Afghanistan in an example of democracy for all of the Middle East.

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IV. CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF NATION-BUILDING

While Namibia is a great example of nation-building done right, it should not be copied directly for other nations. While there were some similarities, Afghanistan was a very different challenge when it came to nation-building. Understanding the differences between past successes and failures is an important step in future nation-building planning. This understanding allows planners to pull ideas from previous strategies and adjust them to match the new objective. Maybe more important than understanding the difference between past successes and failures is understanding why past nation-building strategies failed in the first place. If the United States is able to take a clear and unbiased look at Afghanistan and understand what went wrong, they can avoid similar mistakes in the future.

A. NAMIBIA VS. AFGHANISTAN

While Namibia and Afghanistan are both examples of international nation-building, there is very little in common with the two countries. Namibia and Afghanistan were both countries that had been engaged in a civil war for over a decade. They were also similar in the fact that foreign nations attempted to stop the violence. Aside from a civil war and foreign intervention, Namibia and Afghanistan before and during nation-building were very different countries. The mission that the UN pursued inside Namibia was very different from the one pursued by NATO and the United States inside Afghanistan. This is due to the fact that when the UN enters the country, the violence between the two parties has already been paused. Also, the reason why the UN got involved in Namibia was different from why the United States interfered in Afghanistan. The final difference between the two countries is where the desire for change came from. While the UN led the nation-building efforts in Namibia, SWAPO had been fighting for change long before the UN stepped in. The changes that were implemented into Afghanistan were brought by Western cultures trying to impress their norms on the Afghan people.

The civil war in Namibia began when SWAPO gained traction throughout the nation and began demanding independence from South Africa. With the creation of the

PLAN, SWAPO gained a way to fight against South African forces in the country. The violence did not become a true civil war until South Africa conscripted Namibian citizens into the SWATF. After this, Namibians fought Namibians for decades until a ceasefire was agreed upon and independence was granted to Namibia. Afghanistan's civil war had a less clear beginning. The Taliban rose to prominence during the turbulent times following the Soviets' failed invasion of the country. They overthrew Kabul and began working to take over the entire country. Several warlords, later known as the Northern Alliance, combined forces to challenge them. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, the civil war is still raging with the Taliban pushing the Northern Alliance back. While both countries experienced violent and long civil wars, only Namibia was able to eventually settle their differences with non-violent means.

While Namibia was able to settle their differences, this was not done without foreign help. The UN had long demanded that South Africa give up their hold on Namibia. While it was not willing or able to interfere in the civil war, it did use its members to pressure South Africa to cooperate. This eventually resulted in a ceasefire and the UN used this opportunity to put its plan for Namibian independence in motion. For Afghanistan, foreign intervention happened quite differently. While the United States is often the main focus of the war in Afghanistan, it was actually a NATO effort until much later in the war. Instead of using its members to pressure Afghanistan into conceding to its demands, NATO opted to invade and use force. This caused them to get directly involved in the civil war that had been plaguing the country. While both nation-building efforts involved coalitions, the actions of the coalition were drastically different.

NATO's decision to invade while Afghanistan was still at war is the crucial difference between the strategies pursued by the UN and NATO. For Namibia, the UN waits for South Africa to cease their military campaign because the UN's main goal is to oversee a fair election. If UNTAG had entered Namibia while they were still at war, they could not have accomplished this goal as efficiently, or most likely not at all. Opposing parties may have been tempted to use violence to further their cause by threatening civilians or even attacking UNTAG members themselves. UNTAG would have been unable to maintain the peace because many fighters did not wear a uniform. The PLAN would have

been especially difficult to track because once they put down their weapon, their fighters blended seamlessly into general public. Attempting voting training in a hostile environment with no sure way to separate hostile from friendly would have been impossible for UNTAG. These scenarios were avoided because by the time UNTAG had entered the country, both parties had agreed to turn over their weapons and keep their fighter contained unless UNTAG officials granted them permission to leave their abode. NATO decided to invade Afghanistan because their main mission was violence. When the Taliban refused to turn over al-Qaeda, the United States and other nations refused to negotiate and simply decided to use force to get what they wanted. Nation-building was an afterthought. When it was finally attempted the Taliban were presented with easy targets to further their cause. This situation was made worse because of the tactics that were absorbed by the Taliban from al-Qaeda. The Taliban were not a terrorist organization, but quickly adapted terrorist strategies when faced with the military superiority of the United States. Essentially, the United States found themselves in a nation-builders' worst nightmare. They could not reliably differentiate between hostiles and friendlies, making every aspect of nation-building twice as hard. It also made locals less likely to assist or support operations. If the United States forces could not tell who was hostile or friendly, how could they protect those who helped them. The crucial decision to wait until hostilities had ceased before attempting nation-building was a crucial reason why Namibia succeeded where Afghanistan failed.

One main difference between the two nation-building operations is why a foreign entity got involved. The UNTAG mission in Namibia did nothing for the UN directly. When South Africa refused to give up Namibia and SWAPO turned to more violent means of persuasion, there was no international concern that the battle would cause harm to UN members. The UN continued to pursue the matter because of the morality of the situation. The new moral understanding was that the colonization and exploitation of countries was wrong. This is completely different from NATO in Afghanistan. The only reason the invasion of Afghanistan happened is because al-Qaeda planned and perpetrated terror attacks in Western countries. As people around the world demanded retribution for the crimes, the answer that was arrived at by many countries was to simply destroy the problem

at the source. The invasion of Afghanistan destroyed al-Qaeda's training camps and caused their leaders to scatter. Simply put, NATO invaded Afghanistan because the terrorist living there had become detrimental to the safety and stability of other countries.

The final and most important difference between the nation-building operation in Namibia as opposed to Afghanistan is where the movement for change came from. SWAPO and other organizations were already fighting for change before the UN stepped in and demanded Namibia become an independent country. The UN did not arrive in Namibia to convince them that democracy was the way, rather they came to ensure that the election following independence was free of South African meddling. Also, UNTAG did not overtly support one political party over another. This meant that when the election votes were counted, SWAPO won not because a foreign entity wanted them to, but because the people voted to make it so. In Afghanistan, the Taliban were winning the war against the Northern Alliance before the United States arrived. Neither side asked for United States intervention or for democracy. This was something the United States decided would be best for the country based off a belief that democracy innately brings stability and success. Continuing along the course of making decisions for others, the United States chose to install Karzai as the temporary president of Afghanistan. He was not voted in by the people. He was simply the leader who seemed most suitable to further U.S. goals. Even when elections were held to establish an actual president, the elections were ridden with fraud and corruption. In essence, Namibia started a movement from within and that attitude remained even with foreign intervention, while the United States started a movement and tried to force the native people to fall in line.

While Namibia and Afghanistan were similar in that they were both involved in a civil war before foreign interference, they were different in almost every other area. When it came to nation-building in Namibia, the UN waited for the violence to halt before entering the country and entered to accomplish goals that were supported by the majority of the Namibian people. The United States and NATO invaded Afghanistan and began nation-building operations during war. Also, the goals that were important to the United States were not important to all, or arguably even a majority of Afghans. While this is not an argument about whether or not the goals were right, there remains that fact that there

was less internal support in Afghanistan than in Namibia. These differences show that while a different strategy is needed for different countries, there is also a base level of requirements needed before nation-building can successfully commence.

B. WHY DID AFGHANISTAN FAIL

The blame for the nation-building failure belongs to the United States and the countries surrounding Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself receives no blame because it was given little to no time to actually succeed. The war was started and ended with little to no input from the Afghan people, and the government was never in a position of power when it came to making demands. While a portion of the blame does belong with the U.S. government for pursuing conflicting operations in the country and installing a democratic government lacking all legitimacy, these are not the only reasons for failure. The countries neighboring Afghanistan and their relationship with the United States and the Taliban caused difficulties throughout the war. The final portion of blame lies with American people. The United States pulled out of Afghanistan because the government lost the popular support needed to continue operations in the country. These reasons are not the only reasons why Afghanistan ended in failure, but they are the largest contributors to the continuation of violence that plagued the country.

The strategy pursued by the United States at the beginning of the Afghanistan invasion directly conflicted with the strategy pursued at the end. Malejacq explains that the United States initially used Afghanistan's weak central power to their advantage, supplying old warlords with the means to exert power in the region once again with the understanding they would work against the Taliban. However, the United States made the mistake of assuming that these warlords would cede over their newly regained power to a central government created by the United States. As the United States built up a central government, the warlords developed ways to remain "indispensable in the eyes of the central state."¹⁵⁰ One of the main ways warlords were able to accomplish this was by providing votes in their favor. However, this also put the central state at the mercy of the warlord.

¹⁵⁰ Romain Malejacq, "Warlords, Intervention, and State Consolidation: A Typology of Political Orders in Weak and Failed States," *Security Studies* 25 (2016): 105, 10.1080/09636412.2016.1134191.

Malejacq argues that the warlords the United States supplied in the beginning of the war never truly handed power and authority back to the central state. They simply transformed military might into more subtle forms of control.¹⁵¹ This meant that the central government still needed to make concessions for each region in order to keep the regional powers loyal to the new government. The situation was further complicated when the United States began pursuing peace agreements with the Taliban. Without the support of the United States or regional powers, the central government could not stand up to the Taliban. Regional powers performed as they had in the past and chose survival over destruction. The United States chose to withdraw from the country, believing enough blood and money had been spent. This left the fledgling central government with no real support to combat the growing wave of Taliban forces. All in all, the United States pursued a strategy of destabilizing the central government before attempting to prop up a central government of its own. Unsurprisingly, the effects from the destabilizing strategy remained and the central government was unable to support itself against an armed invasion.

The location of Afghanistan combined with anti-American feelings played a part in the United States's failure. Two countries that share a vast border with Afghanistan caused major problems for the United States. At the very least, Pakistan allowed Taliban members to flee into their country with no punishment. At the worst, Pakistan continued to supply them as they had done before the United States intervened in the country. While Iran had plenty of reasons to dislike the United States, they initially worked with the United States in the interest of establishing stability for their neighbor. However, other United States policies caused this relationship to sour, and Iran also began to allegedly work against United States interest in the area by supplying the Taliban. This created a situation in which the United States could neither guarantee enemy movements or logistics had been stopped. The border of either country was too big to patrol and even if enemy forces were spotted, the United States could not pursue across borders. A safe haven allowed the Taliban to continue the fight against the United States and Afghan troops, eventually wearing both parties down. If Iran and Pakistan had cooperated with the United States, it is likely that

¹⁵¹ Malejacq, 105.

the United States would have been able to corner the Taliban and create an opportunity for the Afghan government to govern unopposed.

Part of the reason that nation-building failed in Afghanistan had to do with the government that was put in place. The first issue when it came to the new Afghan government had to do with legitimacy, more specifically the lack of it. Lake remarks that the legitimacy of the government is derived from the people.¹⁵² Karzai was chosen by the United States to be the temporary president for Afghanistan. This decision granted Karzai legitimacy with the United States, but not with the people he was in charge of governing. Whether he was the best choice or not does not matter, what matters is that the people of Afghanistan saw a decision being made for them. This decision was reinforced when Karzai was voted into office, following an election that was fraudulent by most accounts. This problem of legitimacy would only increase as the Afghan government struggled to exert power in parts of the country that were not under their control. This issue of legitimacy is directly connected with the desire for stability and democracy. Christoph Zürcher argues that the end state of democracy that the United States and other nations wanted to see in Afghanistan clashed with the area. He notes that domestic elites main concern was balancing their relationship between “power-brokers and their ethnic networks.”¹⁵³ However, the United States pursued democracy because of the belief that “democracy brings stability and elects leaders who can ensure peace.”¹⁵⁴ The United States either did not recognize or did not care that democracy worked against the interest of domestic elites. With them working against the system or exploiting the weaknesses of a fledging government, democracy became ill suited for the area. This is not to say that democracy would never have worked in the area, but there is a chance that a different form of government may have produced better results. By refusing to consider other forms of government, the United States left little flexibility for Afghanistan. If the United States had

¹⁵² Lake, 30.

¹⁵³ Christoph Zürcher, “A Theory of Democratisation Through Peace-Building,” *Conflict, Security and Development* 18, no. 4 (2018): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2018.14835559>.

¹⁵⁴ Severine Autesserre, “International Peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness,” *International Studies Review* 19 (2017): 119, [10.1093/isr/viw054](https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw054).

pursued a different form of government, one that allowed tribal and regional leaders to maintain their importance, perhaps the stability that was so badly desired could have been achieved.

Perhaps the greatest reason to why Afghanistan ended in failure is because the United States government lost the will of the American people. By the end of President Obama's time in office, the United States had decided to call it quits in Afghanistan. Both President Trump's and President Biden's political promises included ending the war in Afghanistan. After over a decade of violence in the country, the U.S. people had lost hope that democratic Afghanistan they had been promised would ever truly exist. The U.S. government knew that the Afghan government could not defend itself from the Taliban and attempted to wrangle promises of peaceful coexistence from the Taliban. Even when these promises and agreements were broken time and time again, the United States continued its withdrawal. This was because it was politically unviable to promote continued operations in the country. The war in Afghanistan had quickly devolved into a counterinsurgency, and like all counterinsurgencies it would take time and dedication to win. When the U.S. public decreed that they had enough of either, the nation-building effort in Afghanistan had already been lost.

C. THE FUTURE OF UNITED STATES NATION-BUILDING

While Afghanistan ended in failure, the crucial question is whether or not this was the last attempt at nation-building by the United States. The short answer is no. By any account, the nation-building attempt in Afghanistan was about as difficult as one could be. The country was in a state of war before the United States invaded and remained in one after the United States left. However, just like after the United States exited Vietnam, it will be careful to avoid conflict that directly involves United States lives until a situation arises that is believed to threaten its security. This situation is inevitable in an interconnected world that only becomes more interconnected as time goes on. There are two things the United States can do before it decides to embark on its next nation-building mission. One is to avoid civil wars and the other is to limit itself to situations that can be handled in one term.

The United States does not have to avoid civil wars completely, they just do not need to send troops to fight for either side. The United States should specifically avoid civil wars because deciding which side to support is often a matter of opinion. Also, in a civil war, the losing side does not leave the territory. There is a good chance the animosity from defeat will remain and bubble pack to the surface when the winning side shows weakness. Wars between states normally involve borders, making it easier to distinguish which party is at fault and allowing for simpler solutions. For states involved in a civil war, the United States should use its global power to try and find a peaceful resolution to the dispute, instead of providing military support. Séverine Autesserre argues that nation-building can only really take off “when hostile parties at the local, national, and regional levels agree to stop using violence to resolve their differences.”¹⁵⁵ In Afghanistan, the Taliban never came to a peaceful agreement with opposing forces. This meant that any nation-building that occurred was attempted on an active battlefield. Any new infrastructure that was created in Afghanistan simply became a target by those who wanted the United States to leave. When the UN arrived in Namibia, they were not there to make peace, but rather to maintain the peace that had already been established. In future nation-building attempts, the United States should strive to find a middle ground opposing parties can agree to. If this is not possible, the United States should abandon the attempt until the situation changes. Some might argue that this method results in the death of innocents while the United States does nothing, but a valuable lesson that has been learned the hard way again and again is that using violence to enforce peace only works if the peacekeepers never leave.

The issue of time is the second thing the United States must take into consideration when attempting nation-building. Any future nation-building attempts should be preceded by a in depth study on how long it would take to accomplish. Part of what made Afghanistan so draining on the American public was that they were told over and over again that the mission was almost over. As state above, the main driver for the United Stated invading Afghanistan was revenge. The American public demanded retribution for the 9/11 attacks. They were also afraid that if nothing was done, the tragedy would be

¹⁵⁵ Autesserre, 115.

repeated. Future nation-building will most likely not be attempted out of fear or revenge, without these powerful motivators, the American public will have less patience and any halfhearted attempts will end in failure. To help ensure that this outcome is avoided, the United States should ensure that it is met with as few surprises as possible when it enters the country. This requires an in-depth study of the customs and cultures of the target country, as well as developing a thorough plan that meets the specified goal. Once this is done, the United States must make certain that once this nation-building mission is started, it will not be ended prematurely. The main concern when it comes to this is politics. If the nation-building mission is a political issue that will be squashed by the next president, it should not be started at the end of a term. Rushed planning, superficial understanding, and improper implementation are all played a part in Afghanistan. If any lesson should be learned from Namibia, it is patience. The UN waited a decade for the right time to proceed and during that time officials continued to collect information and plan. This more than anything allowed Namibia to end in success.

The United States failure in Afghanistan does not mean future nation-building operations will not be attempted. While Afghanistan resulted in failure, it was not a failure devoid of victory. The United States failed from a nation-building perspective because they did not enter the country in a nation-building mindset. The goals the United States made when they invaded were met. Those responsible for 9/11 were crushed. The haphazard attempt at creating an Afghan government was difficult from inception with the presence of the Taliban, a locally based armed group directly opposed to the government. If not for their continued aggression, there is a chance that the democracy the United States created in Afghanistan would still be present. Afghanistan was not the first time the United States experienced failure, nor will it be the last. But as long as the United States remains a world power, it will attempt to export the freedom and possibilities that dwell within it.

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