

Issue: Foreign interventions/ The US invasion of Afghanistan

Actor: IGOs/ the UN

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With the recent withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, there has been an arising discourse on US interventions and questioning how efficient and justifiable these interventions are, given the current state of Afghanistan. US interventions in the middle east have had mitigated results in realistically achieving peace and order within that area. Some even argue that US interventions have made the area even more unstable. In this essay, we will be looking at the foreign interventions in the middle east, with a specific focus on the US invasion of Afghanistan. We will first take a look at these interventions and understand why they represent a relevant problem in contemporary world politics. Following that, we will focus on Intergovernmental organizations, mainly the UN, and critically analyze the role of IGOs in this issue. Our focus will be on the power dynamics existing within IGOs and how power disproportionality allows states to have more control over the status quo than others.

The US intervention in Afghanistan is the longest armed conflict in US history. According to researchers at Brown, the United States has spent a total of 2.3 trillion on the Afghanistan intervention (Shesgreen, 2021), with more than 750 000 US troops deployed since 2001 (Lamote, 2019). This is to gauge how colossal this intervention was. The reason why the US has intervened in Afghanistan was a direct reaction to the 9/11 attacks. This started the war against terror as the initial goal was to put an end to AlQaeda. Yet, the war has

lasted a total of 20 years even after Osama Bin Laden was killed in 2011. The intervention's objectives ranged from counter-terrorism to reconstruction to women's rights.

Since the beginning of the war in 2001, the US has led a total of 13000 airstrikes on Afghan soil (Beaumont, 2021). The Afghan air force has also conducted airstrikes, many of which were funded by the US. These airstrikes have resulted in the death of hundreds of Afghan civilians and children. A lot of these attacks were not only US-led but NATO-backed as well. In total, 48 000 Afghan civilians have died as a direct result of the war (Beaumont, 2021). On the other hand, only 2000 US troops have died throughout the war. This is to put into perspective the dynamics of this war and how it raged with direct effects on the Afghan population. Scholars have had mitigated opinions concerning the US intervention in Afghanistan as some have judged it to be unnecessary and an infringe on Afghanistan's sovereignty and ability to self-sustain.

This is an issue in contemporary world politics because it is a clear example of extreme foreign intervention in a state's internal affairs which violates a state's sovereignty and legitimacy. The US has created in the last 20 years a circle of military and economic dependence for Afghanistan which has left the country in the hands of the Taliban immediately after US withdrawal. Not only is the Taliban constituting a threat to human rights in the region, but Afghanistan has been heavily reliant on western aid as it constitutes around 40 percent of its national GDP. If the West exercises pressure indiscriminately, it will pull Afghanistan's last remaining support at the same time it's abandoning the country. The Taliban may threaten Afghan freedom and rights, but it is the abrupt end to funding from the West that jeopardizes their material survival (Tooze, 2021). The same narrative has happened not only in Afghanistan but in other fragile regimes around the Middle East (Syria, Iraq) and

Africa (Mali). The reason why this constitutes an issue in world politics is that, in an attempt to achieve peace, foreign powers only further exacerbate the problem because the interventions lack a comprehensive understanding of the root cause of the issue, as well as a lack of consideration for the local population and culture. Once these foreign powers withdraw from these countries, these fragile regimes are left to deal with the consequences of these interventions. And in a lot of cases, these interventions fail to reconstruct a proper regime in the host countries after the threat has been eliminated which leaves the state having to do that on their own. In contemporary world politics, the problem lies in the disability of these fragile states to rebuild their regime but also in the lack of proper accountability from foreign powers.

This essay will be looking at IGOs and the role they play in mitigating this world issue. IGOs are organizations created by nation-states with delegated authority by constituent member states. IGOs make decisions for binding effect as a result of international cooperation (Li, 2021). They can cooperate to achieve mutual gains in areas of common interest through negotiation and compromise. In the case of the United Nations, its main goal as shown in the 1st article of the 1st charter is to maintain international peace and the promotion of the well-being of people around the world. In this process, IGOs can run into some challenges as the process of negotiation is not only based on common interests and mutual gains but on other geopolitical factors which can shape a state's vote or negotiation strategy. This can range from IGO membership conditionality, the conditionality of trade on military alliances, and other geopolitical variables. The latter can hamper the negotiation process and allow states to have more power within these IGOs than others. This unequal power distribution can result in biased negotiations and compromises that can negatively

affect other member states. Most importantly, it hinders the IGO's ability to effectively tackle the issue at hand.

To understand the role of IGOs in this issue, we first need to set a theoretical framework to properly analyze it. The main theory we will be using is institutional theory. This theory suggests that institutions have norms, a set of laws, rules of governance, policies that can subsequently shape the actions and behavior of a said institution (Henrich, 2015). This means that the institutional structure can heavily influence the decision-making within the institution and thereby affect other stakeholders. The functionalist theory of the demand of IGOs even argues that the creation of IGOs is inherently based on powerful countries. Hegemony stability theory held that the hegemonies create regimes and organizations to facilitate leadership. In this model, hegemonies like the US created a supply of IGO that smaller states would subscribe to, and in this way, hegemonies could make their rule more efficient (Pevehouse, 2016). These theories are quite relevant because they emphasize the already existing power structures in the UN. These power structures take shape in direct and indirect forms. Direct forms are in the unequal distribution of power in the decision-making process. While all countries present in the UN all share one vote each, five other countries including the US hold veto power which can cancel out a lot of potential policies. This offers an unfair advantage to powerful states as they can single-handedly challenge the status quo by using their veto power and pressure states to subscribe to their agenda.

In the case of the US intervention in Afghanistan, the UN should have had more checks and balances on the use of US armed forces in Afghanistan. The US has signed the UN charter which states that countries can only use armed forces in self-defense or if approved by the security council. Neither of these conditions was met before the US invaded

Afghanistan (Cohn, 2003). Yet, the UN did not directly oppose the US intervention in Afghanistan regardless of the disputed legality of the invasion under international law. The US has also vetoed many negotiations that happened within the security council which slowed down the negotiation process and hampered the UN's ability to effectively prosecute these actions. These same actions resulted in the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians under the hands of US armed forces. The Bush administration claimed the right to initiate military actions unilaterally and to wage preventive wars, thereby undermining the multilateral regulation model of international conflicts and reorienting international law upon the paradigm of imperial rule (Piret, 2008).

The UN has also not been able to keep the US and its allies accountable for their human rights violations during the Afghanistan invasion. While the UN did send in many peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan since 2001, it has not been able to condemn the US and other western allies for their violations on Afghan soil. Not only was the US invasion not in line with international law, but it has also violated other UN conventions notably the UN convention against torture with the Bagram torture and prisoner abuse. Former Bagram prison inmates have repeatedly spoken up about a pattern of abuse and brutal treatment at American detention centers (Wilczewska, 2021) which have not resulted in firm accountability from the UN or other major IGOs. The UN lacks the legitimacy and power to hold its member states accountable to its laws as a lot of them are voluntary as well. For instance, under the Trump administration, the US has left the UN Human Rights Council which makes it even more difficult to keep the US accountable. This is a commentary on how much power IGOs such as the UN hold in comparison with powerful states such as the US.

Going back to institutional theory, we can notice a pattern in which the US uses its institutional and geopolitical power to leverage other member states within the UN to fit its agenda, even if that means going against the laws set by the international community. In the case of the US invasion of Afghanistan, the US has taken advantage of its veto power and its close ties with other powerful allies to shape the narrative surrounding the US invasion and receive international support and avoid any form of instigation or prosecution, at the cost of thousands of Afghan lives.

In conclusion, the example of the US invasion of Afghanistan is one of many that reflect a much bigger problem in contemporary world politics. In an attempt to fight potential terrorist threats, foreign powers do not respect the sovereignty and legitimacy of the states in which these operations happen. They carry out strikes and set policies that infringe on the state's internal sovereignty and ability to self-sustain. This results in a fragile regime that has to mitigate the results of such interventions. Moreover, foreign powers that engage in this kind of anti-terrorist operations hardly take any accountability for the destruction of civilian welfare, and for the human rights violations carried out during these operations. IGOs such as the UN have set goals of protecting people all over the world and maintaining international peace. Yet, the power dynamics existing within these IGOs hinder their ability to keep powerful states accountable because these states hold so much geopolitical and institutional power that allows them to challenge the status quo and leverage other member states. Unfortunately, in the case of the Afghanistan war, the UN did not have the necessary legitimacy to bind the US to its laws. This is one of many examples in contemporary world politics in which powerful states tend to use their power to reinforce their agenda and avoid accountability from intergovernmental organizations.

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