

U.S. Involvement in Afghanistan: An Analysis Using Realism and Liberalism

Introduction

The United States deployed its military forces in Afghanistan from 2001 until 2021 to conduct what became a lengthy and intricate modern war campaign. The United States started its invasion of Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, with the essential objective to eliminate al-Qaeda and eliminate the Taliban's control. The mission transformed from its initial targets into a multi-faceted mission that included Afghanistan stabilization together with institution revamping and democratic governance promotion. The United States military spent almost 20 years in Afghanistan before pulling out in 2021 which resulted in the quick Taliban takeover of power. International relations theories serve as tools to explain United States behavior throughout its long Afghan conflict. This paper examines Realism and Liberalism to understand why the United States launched its invasion then maintained presence before exiting Afghanistan.

Background: U.S. Involvement in Afghanistan

Operation Enduring Freedom which brought the United States to Afghanistan in 2001 initiated following al-Qaeda terrorist attacks from their base in the Taliban-controlled region of Afghanistan. Despite removing the Taliban through its first military operation the country degenerated into instability which allowed insurgents to step forward as the new Taliban. During the successive two decades the United States worked to stabilize Afghanistan through governmental backing and military training of Afghan troops along with economic development projects. The insurgency activities of the Taliban persisted despite major financial support to both military operations and civilian political programs. The United States pulled its forces from

Afghanistan in 2021 which led to an immediate downfall of the Afghan government resulting in the Taliban reclaiming control over the country. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Realism: The Pursuit of Security and Power

For realists states operate within an uncontrolled international environment to achieve power and security which ensures their survival (Mearsheimer, 2001). National security and strategic interests became the foundation for the United States to launch its invasion and maintain a continued presence in Afghanistan until a withdrawal took place. After the September 11 attacks America considered the Taliban to be an urgent danger because of its backing for al-Qaeda. In accordance with realist beliefs strong nations should destroy all direct dangers to their fundamental national interests. The invasion occurred because it targeted national security threats and targeted terrorist operations. The United States continued occupying Afghanistan during the long period to secure its strategic leadership position within a vital area containing bordering nations of Iran, Pakistan and China. American military forces enabled the country to prevent Chinese and Russian expansion in Central Asia (Walt, 2018). Government withdrawal is explained through the principles of realism as they apply to foreign policy. The U.S. conducts policy evaluations through cost-benefit assessments thus forcing a review of its objectives in Afghanistan because of rising budget costs and minimal progress toward forming a stable government during 2021. The U.S. decided to depart Afghanistan because it sought to defend national objectives while cutting down unsustainable conflict expenses (Zakaria, 2021).

Liberalism: The Role of Democracy, Institutions, and Cooperation

The approach of liberalism differs from realism since it depends on cooperative international structures alongside democratic principles that create worldwide peace. In their

liberal view the United States had security as one primary objective while also targeting the development of democratic systems and human rights protection in Afghanistan. The United States devoted substantial funds to prepare Afghan security forces while creating democratic systems and extending civil rights especially for women. The U.S. endorsed Afghan democratic government development because according to liberal principles democratic nations avoid warfare with each other while preserving peace (Keohane & Nye, 2012). The U.S. pursued stability in Afghanistan with NATO alliance members as well as UN organizations while applying liberal theory principles of multilateral cooperation. The alliance of NATO troops delivered security protection and the United Nations added support through humanitarian and political missions that demonstrated their institutional belief systems (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2021). Liberalism gives a comprehensive understanding of how the United States made its choice to pull out its forces from Afghanistan. Democratic societies use public sentiments regarding elected officials to determine their international policy direction. The Biden administration decided to end the conflict based on democratic values and national voter opinions about the war. President Biden announced that sustaining the war did not benefit the American population (Biden, 2021).

Conclusion

The political decisions regarding U.S. operations in Afghanistan receive foundation from Realist analysis and Liberal principles. The United States dedicated its resources to protect national security and seize dominance from the Realist approach and devoted its efforts to societal reconstruction and democratic progress alongside international alliances from the Liberal perspective. These two theories create a clear understanding of the U.S. conflict involvement in Afghanistan starting from the invasion through continued operations until final disengagement.

The examination of foreign policy by applying Realist and Liberal perspectives creates a more profound understanding of security intervention goals and peace maintenance challenges in regions exposed to conflict.

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