Examining the United States and European Union's Approaches to the State-Building Process in Afghanistan After 2001

Alireza Ansary Kargar[1*]; Mirza Hossian Fazeli[1]; Sayed Ahmad Shafi Sadat[1]

[1]*Department of diplomacy and Administration, Faculty of Law and Political science, Jami University, Afghanistan*

[1]*Corresponding Email: alirezaansary@yahoo.com, Phone Number: +93781325298 - 0796259051*

Abstract

Afghanistan is a country that has consistently failed in the process of state-building. Although rulers have governed under the name of the state over the past century, the absence of accountable governments has led the country to remain mired in chronic conflict and violence. State-building efforts were renewed in 2001 with the direct and indirect support of the United States and the European Union. The primary question is: what role did the U.S. and the EU play in the state-building process in Afghanistan? While the U.S. and the EU did not fundamentally disagree on the principles and definitions of state-building, they diverged on the methods and approaches to achieving these goals. This research employs an analytical-descriptive methodology and utilizes library resources, articles, and journals for data collection. The findings indicate that the U.S. and the EU were aligned on issues such as supporting democracy, revitalizing and strengthening security forces, reconstruction and development, and legal reforms. Furthermore, differences in implementing these objectives and their perspectives, particularly the political versus military approach, unilateralism, and asymmetrical actions, prevented the U.S. and the EU from establishing a strong government, leaving the state-building project incomplete.

Keywords: State-Building, Unilateralism, reconstruction and development, democracy

Introduction

The September 11 attacks were one of the significant crises of the 21st century, defined as a situation that disrupts the order of the main system or parts of it, thereby destabilizing it (Vaezi, 2011). In response to this crisis, the United States, having been the victim, intervened in Afghanistan to restore its prestige, establish order, and redefine its role in the world. As the sole remaining superpower from the bipolar system, the U.S. seized the opportunity(Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012) and, in collaboration with the European Union, aimed to advance the state-building process in Afghanistan to avert threats to their interests and objectives (Ansary Kargar & Hasin, 2024). Thus, there was a need to establish an efficient and

accountable government to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hub of threats. Afghanistan's history can be characterized by the absence of fundamental states and structures (Ansary kargar, 2024). In 2001, Western countries encountered a failed and bankrupt state, which could negatively impact the state-nation-building process. Recognizing this, the U.S. and the EU, through their support and aid, initiated a series of political, security, and economic decisions at the Bonn Conference in 2001. These decisions laid the groundwork for the establishment of political, economic, and social institutions.

Although the history of Afghanistan has shown that the inability to comprehend the nature of life in this geographic expanse(Dehshiar, 2012) it has led to the failure of externally defined and implemented projects, the U.S. and its allies endeavored to ensure security while also undertaking various activities and programs. These included holding elections, disarmament, and developing communications, all of which were integral to state-building based on modern values (Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012).

During the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, Western powers, led by the United States, endeavored to orchestrate state-building and even democratization projects in Third World countries (Sardarnia & Hooseini, 2014). After 2001, the U.S. and the European Union emerged as two major actors in Afghanistan's affairs, striving to structure the country within the framework of liberal democracy. Throughout history, many nations have formed with varying characteristics—some, leveraging their desirable traits, have guided future generations and shaped subsequent societies, while others, lacking collective wisdom and strong organization due to poor management and misjudgment, have perished and faded into history (Dehshiar, 2012). The endurance of nations is fundamentally tied to the formation and existence of a committed and representative state (Taheri Attar, 2014). In defining and classifying the state in Afghanistan, historical experiences suggest that Afghanistan can be characterized as a weak state with a weak nation (Hadian, 2009). This weak state is marked by the absence of central authority, with its most significant structural weakness being the lack of control over the country's territorial integrity. Similarly, a weak nation is defined by a lack of national cohesion, where ethnic loyalty supersedes national loyalty (javadAghajari & Karimi, 2015).

According to the liberalist perspective, particularly Kant's democratic peace theory, which posits that structural changes lead to peace (Moshirzadeh, 2014), state-nation building should be based on liberal values. Given the substantial involvement of the U.S. and the EU in Afghan affairs post-2001, their convergence and divergence in the state-building process were pivotal and noteworthy. This is because the interactions and shared values of international community members significantly

influence the objectives and practices of other members (Ansary Kargar, 2023). Historically, Afghanistan has rarely experienced meaningful and cohesive state-building. Consequently, countries that have attempted to steer Afghanistan onto the right path have designed its political structure based on a series of modern values, yet these efforts have ultimately remained incomplete.

Afghanistan is known as the land of ethnic minorities (Sattari et al., 2018), housing diverse ethnic groups, religions, and languages. Understanding the nature of this territory is impossible without comprehending its political culture. Furthermore, due to the lack of democratic and stable governments, nation-building and state-building have been scarcely experienced. A stable political unit is considered to maintain its overall institutional structure over time (Sanders, 2011), a rarity in Afghanistan.

The significance and necessity of this research lie in understanding the positions and actions of the EU and the U.S. due to their crucial and influential roles in Afghanistan's post-Bonn affairs. These peripheral and semi-peripheral actors (javadAghajari & Karimi, 2015) played significant roles in Afghanistan's state-building process. Given the EU and the U.S.'s involvement in Afghanistan, particularly in the war-torn and fragmented state-building process, this study aims to analyse their roles concerning their convergence and divergence, assessing how their aligned and conflicting views impacted state-building in Afghanistan.

Given the importance of this topic, the main research question is, what role did the U.S. and the EU play in the state-building process in Afghanistan after 2001? The authors believe that while the EU and the U.S. did not differ in the fundamental principles and definitions of state-building in Afghanistan, they disagreed on the methods and approaches to achieving these goals. These differences negatively impacted the state-building project. This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, using library resources, articles, journals, and online sources for data collection.

About Literature Review of this article, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on state-building in Afghanistan, particularly in the past two decades. However, there has been limited investigation into the convergence and divergence of U.S. and EU perspectives on the state-building process in Afghanistan. This gap highlights the innovative aspect of the current study.

Aminian and Karimi Ghahroudy (2012) in their article *American Strategy "State-Nation Building" U.S. State-Nation Building in Afghanistan* found that the primary aim of the U.S. in the state-nation building process was to alter the identity of the Afghan people in line with its interests. They argue that the U.S.'s failure to combat opposition effectively increased its motivation for state-building and nation-

building in Afghanistan. However, the current reality contradicts these findings, showing that the U.S. prioritized security and combating its adversaries over state-building as a strategic priority.

Shafiee and Noorian (2014), in their article *Analysis of the European Union Policy in Afghanistan based on Liberal Peace Theory*, noted that the EU's successes in peace and convergence over recent decades have led some to view it as a model for achieving peace and security in conflict-affected regions. However, they found that the EU made no substantial progress in establishing peace, security, and development in Afghanistan, with the roots of conflict remaining unaddressed.

Asadullah Saadati (2019), in his book *Transition to Democracy in Afghanistan and the Role of the European Union*, examined the EU's policies and aid in Afghanistan and its role in the democratization project. Saadati focused on the vast amount of international Aid, particularly from the EU, over the past seventeen years, concluding that, according to global democracy metrics, Afghanistan still does not meet the criteria of a democratic state and remains at the lower end of the scale.

Seyed Mostafa Abtahi and Seyed Ali Asghar Torabi (2015) conducted a study titled *The United States ' Role in Nation- -State Building in New Afganistan and Iraq*. They identified major obstacles to state-nation building in Afghanistan, including ethnic and social issues, political problems due to weak governance, economic difficulties, educational, cultural, and health challenges, ongoing insurgencies, instability, and interference from neighboring countries and external actors in internal affairs. The study characterized U.S. state-building efforts in Afghanistan as a failure but did not compare the roles of the EU and the U.S.

Hadian (2009), in his article *The Structural Weakness of State-Nation Building in Afghanistan*, concluded that the structural weakness of state-nation building is influenced by geographic factors, considering Afghanistan's ethnic geographic crisis as an independent variable. Although this research was conducted in 2009, the state-nation-building project continued until the end of 2021, showing some relative success compared to the past.

Abdul Qaioom Sajjadi (2012), in his book *Political Sociology of Afghanistan*, sociologically analyzed why Afghanistan has not yet formed a nation, national identity, or national state. He attributed this failure more to internal factors than external ones. The sociological approach of the book considered political culture and societal mentality as key reasons for the unsuccessful state-nation building in Afghanistan.

These studies collectively highlight the complex and multifaceted challenges in Afghanistan's state-building process, indicating the need for further exploration of

the roles played by the U.S. and the EU, particularly in terms of their collaborative and conflicting approaches.

Material and Method

This article is a type of qualitative review article. Review articles are generally qualitative, and for qualitative research, a descriptive-analytical approach is typically employed. Library resources are used as the primary data collection tool including books, scientific journals, and documents.

In this article, variables such as state-building and the roles of the United States and the European Union have been analyzed.

Conceptual Framework

State-nation building is an achievement of modern humanity. Stability, security, order, welfare, justice, and the establishment and enforcement of laws are all functions of governments. If a country has not adequately undergone the state-nation-building process, its government will not only fail to meet the needs of its society but may also contribute to instability and disorder (Abtahi & Torabi, 2017). Given the nature of this study, the conceptual framework of state-nation building is employed.

The relationship between the state and the nation is always mutually formative and constitutive. For a state to stabilize and persist, it requires the existence and cohesion of a nation. Conversely, a nation needs a strong state to better consolidate and institutionalize power and to preserve its distinct and independent identity. Essentially, the relationship between the state and the nation is one of mutual dependence, where each is essential to the other. In the context of state-nation, both the state and the nation exist in a dialectical interdependence.

Regarding the precedence of state-building versus nation-building, there are two models: The European and the American. In the European model, the nation is formed first, followed by the establishment of the state. This model operates from the bottom up. In contrast, the American model prioritizes the existence of the state before the nation. In this second model, an external actor attempts to guide the state-nation-building process in another country through planning and supportive policies (Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012). The state-building approach in Afghanistan was modeled after this latter approach. To achieve their defined goals, the U.S. and the EU needed comprehensive cooperation, which led them toward both convergence and divergence.

Convergence is understood as a process where political units voluntarily relinquish their absolute authority to achieve common goals, following a supranational authority (Ghavam, 2011) Divergence, on the other hand, refers to the reluctance of political units to cooperate and collaborate in international politics, which creates distance between them and sets the stage for crises and wars. Divergence includes various factors such as human and psychological, social, and political units of the international system, and international social variables (Alibabai, 2006).

For a better understanding of state-building and nation-building, it is essential to define these concepts: State-building, refers to the creation and strengthening of institutions necessary to support long-term political, economic, and social development. These institutions include the legislature, the judiciary, and executive agencies such as education and transportation systems (Ghavam & Zargar, 2009) Nation-Building, In political development literature, nation-building involves several stages: establishing state power within defined territorial boundaries, cultural homogenization through educational systems, promoting public participation in politics, and strengthening national solidarity and identity through welfare distribution policies. Nation-building thus comprises expanding the public authority of the state and extending civil rights to citizens (Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012).

This framework provides a basis for examining the roles of the U.S. and the EU in Afghanistan's state-nation-building process, focusing on their cooperative and conflicting approaches and their impacts on the overall success of these efforts.
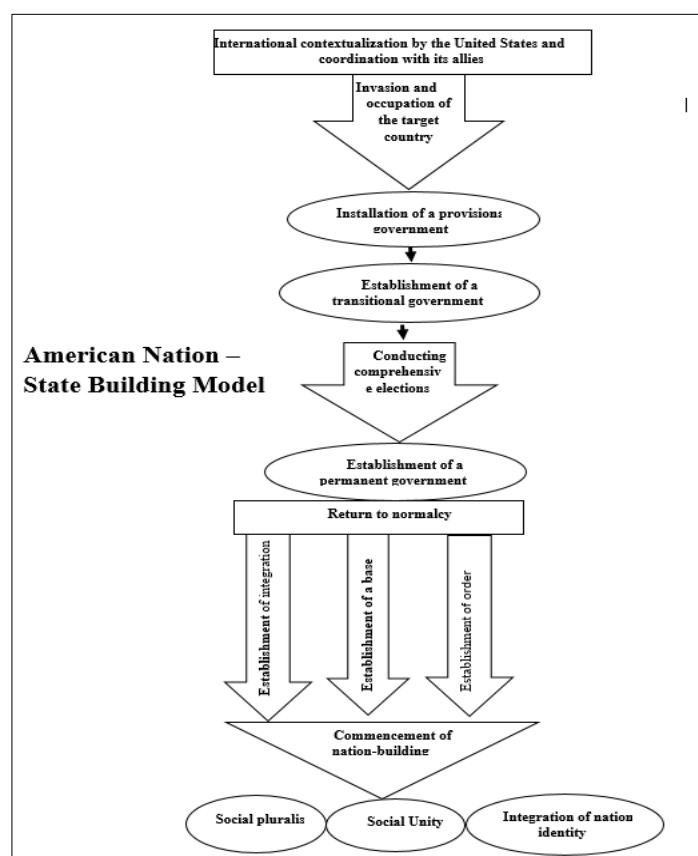
Fig. 1: American Nation-State Building Model (Abtahi & Torabi, 2015, p. 60) Creating an aligned state was among the most crucial political objectives for the countries involved in the Afghan crisis, particularly the United States (Sajjadi, 2012). Consequently, state-building in Afghanistan was designed following the top-down model supported by the U.S. This approach entailed initially establishing a strong, centralized political structure with external support in 2001, followed by the gradual dissemination of nation-building elements through soft policies. State-building in 2001 was designed based on the American model, and the United States played a significant role in the formation of a modern state based on the values of liberal democracy.

1, The Context of Convergent U.S. and European Influence on State-Building in Afghanistan

1.1, Expansion and Support the Democracy

The United States and the European Union have paid particular attention to the values of democracy, considering it as an effective step for countries that have emerged from conflict. The principles of democratic peace advocate that increasing democratic processes in countries leads to peacebuilding and reduces conflict (Ghorabani Sheikhneshin & Bahoush Fardaghi, 2015). Democracy, in essence, is a

system that focuses more on citizen satisfaction, which became significant for countries supportive of liberalism after 2001. Afghanistan's political structure and constitution were established based on the values of liberal democracy, such as separation of powers, national sovereignty, governmental accountability, freedom of expression and the press, and support for human rights. The belief in respecting democracy echoed the idea that democratic governments are better able to maintain mutual relations between the government and the people, and as long as citizens have oversight over their government's behavior, governments become more accountable for political, economic, and security matters.

1.2, Revival, support, and Strengthening of Afghan Security Forces

One of the areas of alignment between the United States and the European Union in Afghanistan was the revival and strengthening of Afghan security forces. With the sudden fall of the Taliban regime in December 2001, the United States and the European Union, through close cooperation and support, embarked on reviving, supporting, and strengthening Afghan security forces. This was because the process of nation-building initially aims to establish a centralized government and institution through the use of hard power (military) in the first place, in order to control social institutions (Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012). For this purpose, they assisted in the establishment and training of armed forces for the Afghan government, which later in 2002, at the G8 summit, the responsibility for the National Army was initially entrusted to the United States, the National Police to Germany, and later this responsibility was transferred to the European Union.

1.3, Reconstruction and Development of Afghanistan

Afghanistan has suffered significant damage as a result of continuous internal wars, to the extent that in the past century, warlords ruled under the guise of government, yet the absence of accountable governments has left the country trapped in chronic conflict and violence (Ansary kargar, 2024). One of the areas of alignment and agreement between the European Union and the United States for nation-building in Afghanistan was the creation and assistance in civil infrastructure and developmental projects, such as transportation infrastructure, which is considered one of the main pillars of a dynamic economy. Initiatives such as the construction of dams, power plants, and other infrastructure projects were implemented by the United States and the European Union in Afghanistan (Abtahi & Torabi, 2017). Providing civil infrastructure is considered part of the responsibility of a stable government. Therefore, by placing and directing international aid at the disposal of

the government, the United States facilitated the groundwork for nation-building in the targeted country and increased its popularity among various segments of the population.

In the early stages, international actors, especially the United States and the European Union, concluded that peace and stability in Afghanistan are dependent on the economic development of the country. According to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) as of January 30, 2020, the United States spent $29,299.06 million from 2002 to 2019 on the reconstruction of Afghanistan's civil infrastructure.
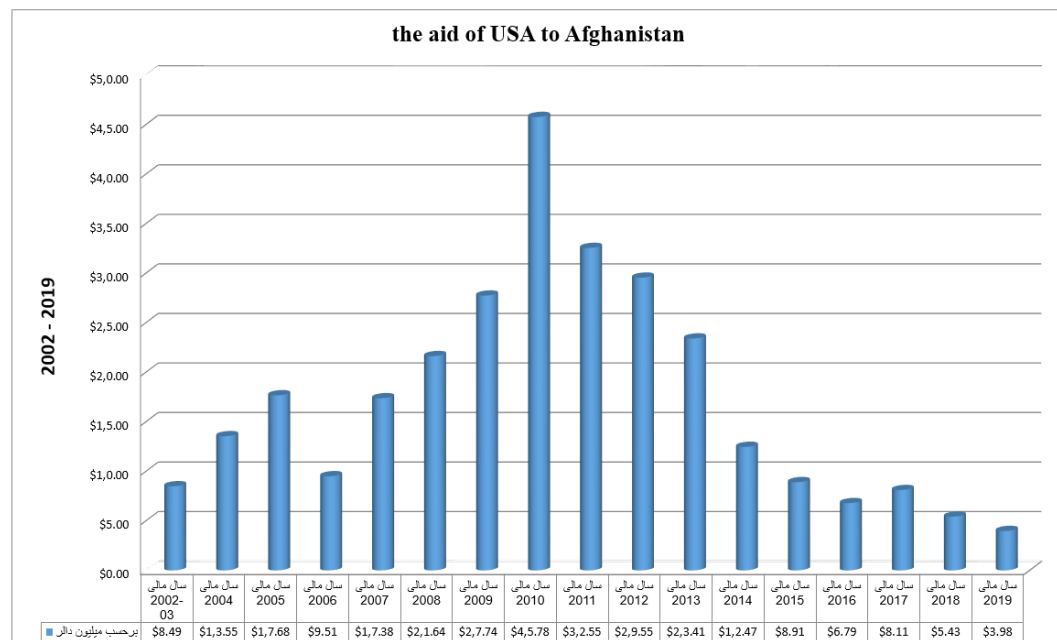

Fig. 2: the aid of the US for infrastructure

Table 1: European Union, for infrastructure

Sector	Amount (in million)	Unit	Year
Local Governance	17	Euro	2002 – 2017
Reconstruction Team	10	Euro	2001 – 2010
State-Building	40	Euro	2011 – 2017
Agriculture	321	Euro	2002 – 2017
Rural Development	224.33	Euro	2002 – 2017
Health	421	Euro	2002 – 2015
Trade and Regional Cooperation	More than 100	Euro	2002 – 2017
Elections	140	Dollar	2002 – 2021

Source from: (Saadati, 2019, pp. 254–241)

1.4, Reforming and Rebuilding Afghanistan's Legal System

State-building without legal legitimacy is unattainable; Afghanistan, due to its tumultuous history, is considered a weak state in terms of social cohesion, implying that weak states lack social-political cohesion (Buzan, 2010). Even if the state possesses instruments of power. The alignment between the European Union and the United States can be regarded as assistance in reforms of the judicial sector, which was spearheaded by Italy. These reforms were implemented in various project frameworks by different administrations. Key institutions working towards judicial reform included the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice, and the Country's Law Office. Countries primarily contributing to this sector included Italy, the United States, Canada, Norway, Germany, and Britain. Several United Nations offices also collaborated on judicial and legal reforms, including UNAMA, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNIFEM. Activities aimed at judicial reforms had both top-down and bottom-up approaches, encompassing the following:

1) Rehabilitation and reconstruction of judicial infrastructures and capacity-building for personnel in this sector.

2) Renewal of legal and judicial education curricula at the university level.

3) Drafting legislation.

4) Expansion of legal services delivery and public awareness campaigns.

5) Improvement of local judicial mechanisms (courts and local councils) to align with national legal norms and international human rights standards.

6) Coordination with other government priorities such as combating drug trafficking, fighting administrative corruption, and land reforms (Ghorabani Sheikhneshin & Bahoush Fardaghi, 2015).

The existence of a robust legal system is contingent upon laws based on which domestic and foreign policies are formulated. Based on this premise, the United States and its allies, after organizing the political structure with the cooperation of the global community, provided financial and technical assistance to the Afghan government in developing the judicial and legal sectors and promoting the rule of law.

1.5, Collaboration on Humanitarian Efforts and Support Women's Rights

Attention to women constituted another aspect of the collaboration between the United States and the European Union in the state-building process in Afghanistan. The inclusion of women in the political process of Afghanistan (Aminian & Karimi Ghahroudy, 2012) enabled a significant portion of Afghan society to participate in

the state-building process. Humanitarian support, especially for Afghanistan's supporters, has been crucial; gender issues, particularly regarding education and political participation of women and girls, have always been sensitive (Baiza, 2013) and require attention.

Alongside support for women's rights, the United States and the European Union also emphasized humanitarian support (support for civil society, migration, education, and healthcare) in Afghanistan, considering it essential for stability. For instance, education and healthcare could empower the Afghan youth and contribute to the country's long-term development, as education and healthcare are vital components of nurturing future generations and active citizens, which will have a significant impact on the country's development and stability in the long run. Therefore, attention to education, higher education institutions, and educational institutions was crucial in the state-building process(Abtahi & Torabi, 2017). Including topics such as human rights, women's rights, and combating corruption and crimes in the text of the cooperation and development agreement between the European Union and the Afghan government was essentially designed to promote European norms. Supporting non-governmental civil activists and human rights defenders constituted part of the European Union's foreign policy. This institution supported 21 human rights activists in 2015 and 2016 and allocated a total of $578 million from 2003 to 2017 to support civil activists. Moreover, 53% of the European Union's programs in Afghanistan pursued gender equality as a major goal (Saadati, 2019), and during the years 2002 to 2012, nearly 2.7 billion euros were committed by the European Union to assist Afghanistan in various sectors, of which approximately 500 million euros were allocated to humanitarian aid(Shafiee & Noorian, 2014).

2, Different Approaches of the United States and the European Union in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has long faced fragile governments and a war-torn, tumultuous society (Tonzai, 1401). Since 2001, the country has fundamentally required sustained political, economic, and security cooperation from the international community to regain stability. Continuous violent conflicts have shattered political institutions and devastated economic infrastructure. The divergent perspectives of the United States and the European Union on the state-building process in Afghanistan have had negative impacts. The EU and the U.S., as two significant actors in international relations, not only have different historical backgrounds but also diverse experiences in political and economic arenas.

For instance, state-building from the American viewpoint is defined top-down, meaning that the existence of a state precedes government formation in the

American model (Abtahi & Torabi, 2015), whereas, in Germany, it is approached bottom-up. Americans prioritized economic gaps over political ones, while the European Union emphasized not only economic issues but also cultural and educational affairs. In other words, Americans tended to adopt a more military-oriented approach, whereas Europeans preferred to institutionalize democratic values within the framework of cultural development. Unlike political gaps, economic disparities have consistently been the focus of analysis and action by the United States in post-conflict countries.

2.1, Divergent Approaches to Value-Driven Policies

The European Union and the United States share common goals in promoting demoracy and human rights and in combating terrorism. However, despite this alignment in values, the two entities have significant differences in their policy implementation methods and tactics for achieving strategic objectives. The EU is legally defined as a unit composed of independent states. It functions as a supranational union of national governments rather than as a single sovereign state, reflecting its inherently fluid nature(Sazmand, 2011). In contrast, the United States is an independent entity and currently stands as the world's central power and sole superpower.

The international standing of the European Union depends on trade, economic strength, democracy, and political stability, whereas the role of the United States is cemented by its structural position as the global police force. Given their different positions in the international system, the EU and the U.S. adopt divergent stances on global developments and international crises. During the Cold War, the EU relied on the U.S. security umbrella, and after the Cold War, the mutual dependency waned as America's need to support Europe and Europe's need for U.S. protection diminished. Consequently, the U.S. perceives its value-driven approaches differently and often views the EU as a secondary actor. This perspective underscores America's distinct strategic vision and its perception of Europe as a lesser player on the global stage.

One of the critical issues in implementing the peace-building plan in Afghanistan was the absence of necessary conditions for the proper and complete application of state-building efforts(Shafiee & Noorian, 2014). This challenge reflects the internal perceptions of powerful actors. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that perceptions significantly influence approaches to various issues. The U.S. perceives itself as the global enforcer, a role that undoubtedly impacts the activities of other domestic and international institutions.

2.2, Unilateralism vs. Multilateralism

As previously mentioned, the perception the United States has of its role in global affairs paves the way for unilateralism. In international relations, multilateralism refers to the coalition of several countries to pursue a common goal, whereas unilateralism supports actions taken independently by a single nation(Ashtari et al., 2020). This unilateralism in the context of Afghanistan largely reflects the power and capabilities of the U.S., particularly because the U.S., unlike the European Union, was directly attacked on its own soil in 2001. Moreover, the U.S. was instrumental in defeating the Soviet Union, thus naturally shaping its unilateral approach in Afghanistan.

The divergence between the European Union and the U.S. largely stems from unilateralism versus multilateralism. The EU argues that the U.S., by monopolizing power and unilaterally using force, essentially undermines international laws. In contrast, the EU emphasizes the superior role of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations in global affairs, relying on political and economic leverage within the framework of international law rather than the use of force. One key point of contention was the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan, reflecting broader differences between the EU and the U.S. on the global stage. According to liberalist theories, international institutions should play a crucial role in global and regional developments (Moshirzadeh, 2014).

While the EU agreed with the U.S. on the need to combat terrorism, it differed significantly in its approach. The EU opposed immediate military action, advocating instead for addressing the root causes of terrorism first. Europeans viewed terrorism as a political phenomenon(Brzezinski, 2017) and believed that combating it required international support, particularly from the United Nations.

Americans, on the other hand, emphasized U.S. sovereignty and independence from the United Nations. This divergence was evident in Afghanistan, where the EU sought to enhance the UN's role and urged others to follow UN objectives. In contrast, the U.S., bearing most of the costs in Afghanistan, expected others to support and follow its goals.

The EU believed that unilateralism hindered cooperation, asserting that Afghanistan would achieve political and economic stability more effectively through joint efforts by regional and international organizations. The EU advocated for a multipolar system with the UN playing a key role, promoting balanced power distribution among influential countries. Conversely, the U.S. favored a unipolar system centered on Washington's unilateralism to establish a hegemonic order(Khalaji, 2003).From the EU's perspective, the roles of Afghanistan's neighboring countries

were crucial for building trust, whereas the U.S. focused more on hard power, disregarding the roles of these neighbors. This approach led to mistrust among Afghanistan's neighbors, resulting in their opposition to the continued presence of U.S. military bases in Afghanistan.

2.3, Political vs. Military Perspectives

One of the profound differences between the United States and the European Union regarding Afghanistan revolves around their political and military approaches to state-building. The EU, with its normative stance, favored a political approach to state-building. Alongside other international actors, the EU aimed to guide Afghanistan towards peace by leveraging liberal principles and providing various forms of financial, military, and technical assistance after the fall of the Taliban regime(Shafiee & Noorian, 2014).

From the EU's perspective, Afghanistan's problem was primarily political, and employing military solutions to address a political issue was deemed inappropriate. In other words, a military approach could not resolve Afghanistan's challenges, whereas a political approach held the potential for success. The EU believed that the U.S.'s reliance on military means complicated the situation in Afghanistan. The U.S. prioritized tactical and military considerations, such as establishing military bases, to shape its actions and presence in Afghanistan(Dehshiar, 2012). Influenced by this viewpoint, the EU maintained that genuine security in Afghanistan required the rule of law, justice, and a responsive government, rather than purely military solutions. In contrast, the U.S. placed a higher priority on military tools to address issues.

The European Union, while being a principal partner of the U.S. in the Afghanistan crisis, prioritized defense as a secondary concern, whereas for the U.S., defense was primary. Americans viewed their role as a global mission, interpreting the spread of the American order worldwide as a moral duty(Khalaji, 2003). This difference in perspective can be attributed to the U.S.'s realist approach versus the EU's liberalist stance. Realists prioritize state power, whereas liberalists emphasize intergovernmental cooperation. The EU believed that achieving stability in Afghanistan required integrating opposition elements into the political process, a notion initially overlooked by the U.S. American leaders saw the events of September 11 as an opportunity to advance unilateralism, avoid multilateralism, and establish American hegemony globally(Ghorabani Sheikhneshin & Bahoush Fardaghi, 2015).

In essence, the EU advocated for a "strategic balance" in Afghanistan, whereas the U.S. aimed for hegemonic stability.

Table 2: Convergence and Divergence of the U.S. and EU on State-Building in Afghanistan

Convergences	(1) Expansion and Support of Democracy
	(2) Revival, support, and Strengthening of Afghan Security Forces
	(3) Reconstruction and Development of Afghanistan
	(4) Reforming and Rebuilding Afghanistan's Legal System
	(5) Collaboration on Humanitarian Efforts to Support Women's Rights
Divergences	(1) Divergent Approaches to Value-Driven Policies
	(2) Unilateralism vs. Multilateralism
	(3) Political vs. Military Perspectives

Discussion

The United States and the European Union, as two major actors in Afghanistan over the past two decades, have been directly and indirectly involved in all internal and external affairs of the country. Although the majority of responsibility was placed on the U.S. after 2001, the EU also played a key role in Afghanistan's internal matters. Research on state-building efforts in Afghanistan by major powers has consistently highlighted the positive contributions of these actors. However, despite the significant roles played by the U.S. and the EU, the state-building and nation-building projects have ultimately failed over time.

The U.S., as a major influential player, focused more on maintaining its hegemonic presence in the region rather than prioritizing the state-building process. On the other hand, the EU, with its normative approach, aimed to institutionalize modern values. The lack of coherence between these two perspectives led to the failure of state-building efforts in Afghanistan after twenty years.

The convergence of the U.S. and the EU in supporting democracy, infrastructure projects, human rights, the rule of law, and training security forces initially fostered optimism about Afghanistan's future in the early 21st century. However, all these efforts were contingent upon having a strong and responsive government. Significant attempts were made to enable Afghanistan to function as a responsive state towards its citizens. Nevertheless, a lack of precise understanding of Afghanistan's cultural, social, economic, and psychological context meant that even substantial aid from the international community could not sustain the government for more than two decades.

The U.S., as one of the world's most powerful countries, was never willing to cede its dominance, hegemony, and leadership to the EU, reflecting a unilateral approach toward Afghanistan. Bearing the brunt of financial expenditures, the U.S. primarily viewed many issues through a security lens, while the EU focused more on cultural and political values. The U.S. approach to Afghanistan was short-term and militaristic, whereas the EU emphasized the institutionalization of democracy and

the dissemination of democratic values, such as education, elections, infrastructure development, and empowerment of security forces. The U.S., however, displayed relative indifference to these foundational issues. The lack of a unified approach toward implementing state-building strategies resulted in an incomplete state-building process, ultimately leading to the collapse of the republican system after twenty years.

Conclusion

The United States, as the global hegemon, sought to establish a government in Afghanistan with a unilateral, security, and military-oriented approach, while the European Union pursued this goal through a normative and political approach. The differences between the United States and the European Union led to the failure of the state-building process in Afghanistan. Although both actors agreed on the necessity of a strong government, their divergent perspectives on how the state should be formed in Afghanistan resulted in an incomplete state-building process, despite the political, economic, and security support provided.

Acknowledgment

Data Availability Statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest:

References

Abtahi, S. M., & Torabi, S. A. A. (2015). The Uneited State Role in Nation- State Building in New Afganistan and Iraq. *Political Science Quarterly*, *12*(37), 53–81.

Abtahi, S. M., & Torabi, S. A. A. (2017). Government in Islamic word and the Contemporary World Policy of the US. *Quarterly Journal of Political Research in Islamic World*, *7*(3), 27–53.

Alibabai, G. (2006). *Culture of International Relations*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Aminian, B., & Karimi Ghahroudy, M. (2012). American Strategy "State—Nation Building" in Afghanistan. *Bi-Quarterly Political Knowledge*, *8*(1), 69–97. https://doi.org/10.30497/pk.2012.779

Ansary Kargar, A. (2023). Explaining the Reference of the International Community and Global Society for Protests in the International System. *Ghalib scientific-research quarterly*, *12*(3), 165–181. https://doi.org/10.58342/ghalibqj.V.12.I.3.11

Ansary kargar, A. (2024). Convergence and Divergence of the United States and the European Union on the Process of State-Building in Afghanistan over the Years (2001 – 2022). *Baharstan Scientific Research Quarterly Journal*, *1*(1), 26–44. https://doi.org/10.61438/bsrqj.v1i1.40

Ansary Kargar, A., & Hasin, B. A. (2024). The Impact of Ethnicity on the Political Structure of Afghanistan with the Approach of Political Liberalism by John Rawls (2001 – 2022). *Baharstan Scientific Research Quarterly Journal*, *1*(2), 33–54. https://doi.org/10.61438/bsrqj.v1i2.66

Ashtari, M., Pourghassab Amiri, A., & Abouieh, F. (2020). The opposition of multilateralism and unilateralism in the world community. *Political Sociology of Iran*, *3*(1), 2367–2380. https://doi.org/10.30510/psi.2022.346572.3565

Baiza, Y. (2013). *Education in Afghanistan: Developments, influences and legacies since 1901*. Routledge.

Brzezinski, Z. K. (2017). *The chaice: Global dominaton or Global Leadership* (A. H. Norouzi, Trans.). Nashreney.

Buzan, B. (2010). *People, State and Fear* (Institute of Strategic Studies, Trans.). Institute of Strategic Studies.

Dehshiar, H. (2012). America's Paradox in Afghanistan: Multiple Identities and Divisible Sovereignty. *Foreign Relations*, *4*(3). https://frqjournal.csr.ir/article_123593_en.html

Ghavam, S. A. (2011). *Principles of Foreign Policy and International Politics*. SAMT.

Ghavam, S. A., & Zargar, A. (2009). *State-building, Nation-building, and International Relations Theory: An Analytical Framework for Understanding and Studying the World of Nation-States*. Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch.

Ghorabani Sheikhneshin, A., & Bahoush Fardaghi, M. (2015). Study the policies of presidents of the United States of America in the post-September era in peace-building in Afghanistan, relying on the doctrine of liberal-democracy. *International Relations Researches*, *5*(16), 13–42.

Hadian, H. (2009). Structural Weakness of Nation-State Building in Afghanistan. *Strategy*, *17*(2). https://rahbord.csr.ir/article_124341_en.html

javadAghajari, M., & Karimi, M. (2015). The Role of Regional Actors in the Process of Afghanistan State-building during Taliban and post-Taliban. *Research Letter of International Relations*, *2*(30), 57.

Khalaji, A. (2003). The US Foreign Policy Approach to Terrorism. *Defense Policy*, *11*(44). https://dpj.ihu.ac.ir/article_202923_en.html

Moshirzadeh, H. (2014). *Development in International Relations Theories*. SAMT.

Saadati, A. (2019). *Transition to Democracy in Afghanistan and the Role of the European Union*. Ibn Sina Publications.

Sajjadi, A. Q. (2012). *Political Sociology of Afghanistan*. Farhang Publications.

Sardarnia, K., & Hooseini, S. M. (2014). Social Challenges of Modern State-Building in Afghanistan. *World Politics*, *3*(3), 37–63.

Sattari, A., Ghasemi, M., & Falah, M. (2018). The Impact of Ethnic and Religious Gap on Political Instability in Afghanistan. *Middle East Studies*, *25*(1), 116–146.

Sazmand, B. (2011). *Foreign Policies of Great Powers*. Tehran International Studies& Research Institute.

Shafiee, N., & Noorian, S. M. A. (2014). An Analysis of the European Union Policy in Afghanistan Based on Liberal Peace Theory. *Central Asia and The Caucasus Journal*, *20*(87), 61–91.

Tonzai, M. T. (1401). Solutions to increase the trust between the system and the nation in Afghanistan. *Ghalib scientific-research quarterly*, *11*(4), 23–39. https://doi.org/10.58342/ghalibqj.V39.I4.4

Vaezi, M. (2011). *International Crises Theoretical Analysis and Case study*. Institutefor Political and International Studies.