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## The role of America in the modernization of Afghanistan (2001-2021)

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### Abstract

The theory of modernization emerged after World War II, shaped by three significant events: the rise of the United States as a global superpower in the 1950s, the expansion of global communism, and the collapse of European empires in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, leading to the creation of numerous new nation-states in the Third World. In this context, American political elites called upon social scientists to study Third World countries to prevent them from falling into the communist bloc by promoting economic development. Thus, the primary concern of modernization scholars was to identify the causes of underdevelopment and the means to overcome it in these countries.

Modernization theorists viewed the roots of underdevelopment in undeveloped nations as being embedded in the prevailing cultures and traditions of these societ-

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ies. They argued that one of the major reasons for underdevelopment was the beliefs, customs, and practices in these communities. The theorists proposed that for these countries to develop, they must abandon their cultural values and adopt Western, particularly American, models. They believed that the only path to development was to set aside traditional values and embrace modern Western principles.

Although economic development was considered the driving force behind progress in other areas, modernization theories largely focused on values, beliefs, and emulating the West. Some of these theories also advocated for receiving foreign aid to spur development. Overall, the central focus of this school of thought was on the relationship between undeveloped nations and Western countries, emphasizing distancing from indigenous values and relying on Western knowledge and support. The dominant view was that the only way to achieve development was by following the path of developed nations and leveraging their knowledge and experience.

In Afghanistan, the extensive presence of developed nations, particularly the United States, in the early 21st century (2001-2021) provided the necessary conditions for modernization based on these theories. This included unparalleled financial aid, the influx of advisors and specialists, modern technologies, and efforts to promote Western values. However, evidence suggests that these efforts failed to create significant development in Afghanistan and even had negative consequences. The country continues to struggle with widespread poverty, hunger, unemployment, and some of the lowest global development indicators. Therefore, this study examines the role of the United States in the modernization of Afghanistan within the framework of modernization theory.

This research is conducted within the framework of the critical paradigm, classified as fundamental in its objectives and documentary in terms of sources. The study adopts an explanatory-analytical approach to address the issue. The target population of this research includes modernization theories, studies related to the presence and support of First World countries in undeveloped nations, and their impact on modernization, as well as documents and studies on the role of the United States in Afghanistan. Sampling was conducted through content analysis, keyword identification, and consultation with experts. Data collection was carried out using note-taking methods, and data analysis involved categorizing key concepts, identifying categories, and ultimately determining the core themes of the study.

Despite the extensive presence of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the main objectives of ensuring security and combating terrorism were not

achieved. The Taliban retained control over vast parts of the country and even exerted influence in government-controlled areas. Consequently, insecurity and rising crime rates in urban areas persisted, and efforts at social reconstruction and modernization failed.

#### Poverty Levels

Poverty in Afghanistan increased significantly despite years of U.S. and allied presence. In 2016, more than 54% of the population lived below the poverty line, and by 2020, this number had risen to 90%. U.S. reconstruction efforts did not produce any meaningful improvement in the lives of the Afghan people.

#### Drug Addiction Levels

Drug addiction, especially among the youth in Afghanistan, has escalated drastically. Approximately 3.5 million people in the country are addicted to drugs, a situation exacerbated by poverty, unemployment, and unfavorable social conditions.

#### Literacy Rates

Despite international aid, Afghanistan still has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. About 80% of women and over 60% of men cannot read or write. This reflects the failure of foreign education programs in Afghanistan.

#### Administrative Corruption

Widespread administrative corruption remains one of Afghanistan's most significant challenges. According to annual reports, Afghanistan is consistently ranked among the most corrupt countries globally. Efforts to combat corruption have had no meaningful results (Wardak, 2019).

#### Political Participation

Political participation in Afghanistan has declined over time. This drop is linked to the growing corruption within the government and its inability to gain public trust. The gap between the government and the people has widened, posing serious challenges to the realization of democracy.

#### Access to Energy

Despite Afghanistan's favorable conditions for generating electricity through dam construction, little progress was made in energy production after two decades of foreign-backed governance. Only 31% of the population has access to electricity, with 70% of the energy being imported from neighboring countries. The lack of an effective governance structure in the energy sector has restricted access to electricity, hindering both economic and environmental development.

#### Access to Clean Drinking Water

Access to clean drinking water remains a major challenge in Afghanistan. In many cities, especially Kabul, there is no organized water supply system, and

groundwater is contaminated with feces and chemicals. Reports indicate that around 70% of Kabul's groundwater is unusable, and 60% of the country's water is contaminated with feces. Despite international aid, access to clean water has not been realized.

#### Access to Healthcare Services

Access to quality healthcare in Afghanistan was limited throughout the U.S. and allied presence. Public hospitals struggled to provide basic services to citizens, with most treatments requiring personal expenditure. Even in major cities, the construction of standard hospitals was limited, and the healthcare insurance system was underdeveloped.

Modernization is a key development paradigm with both supporters and critics. While it promises progress for underdeveloped societies, its ability to address the realities and crises of different countries is questioned. In Afghanistan, modernization efforts have revealed that theorists focus too narrowly on cultural factors, overlooking the complex interplay of multiple elements required for development. Critics of modernization theory argue that the imposition of foreign models under the guise of modernization has not only failed to help underdeveloped societies but has also led to new forms of violence and challenges. Although the positive impacts of these models in areas such as technology access and public awareness cannot be overlooked, these benefits seem minor compared to the damages inflicted on societies. In Afghanistan, the introduction of external strategies has similarly resulted in greater challenges. Ultimately, Afghanistan's history of dependence on foreign powers—whether Britain, the Soviet Union, or the U.S.—demonstrates that external interventions and the imposition of modernization models have not brought development but instead fostered corruption, poverty, and numerous other problems. The extensive foreign military presence and massive financial expenditures failed to provide security, basic services, or public welfare for the Afghan people, rendering the modernization paradigm ineffective in this context.

**Key words:** school of modernization, development. America, Afghanistan.