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Thesis of Batur Abdul Ghafar Adina Mohammad – “The Role of the International Organizations in the Afghan Conflict Settlement in XXIst Century” – Ph.D Thesis in Political Science 23.00.04 – “Political Issues of International Relations, Global and Regional Development” – Report by David M. DeBartolo

The thesis by Batur Abdul Ghafar Adina Mohammad on the role of international organizations in the conflict in Afghanistan in the 21st century provides an insightful and thoughtful comparative analysis of international organizations' efforts in and effect on the conflict in Afghanistan. Drawing on a notably wide range of the relevant academic literature as well as primary sources from the international organizations themselves, the thesis offers not only an illuminating study of the Afghanistan case but also offers broader lessons for international organizations' conflict-resolution efforts.

The thesis begins by surveying the role of international organizations in conflict settlement generally. It appropriately places particular emphasis on the development of peacekeeping by international organizations, which is one of the most complex and contentious topics within this field in light of questions and disagreements about the legal basis for peacekeeping operations by the United Nations (UN), the situations in which peacekeepers may use force, the relationship between an international organization's peacekeeping operation and the host government and the contributing states, and the important issue of accountability for peacekeepers. The thesis defines peacekeeping as “an activity by IGOs or separate states, as well as other actors of world politics targeted at aversion and settlement of conflicts both by peaceful means and use of military force upon the UN approval” (pp. 25-26). The thesis thoughtfully discusses how conceptions of peacekeeping have changed in recent decades, it and identifies nine challenges that peacekeeping faces: the need for theoretical reconceptualization, conceptual challenges, lengthy and uncertain durations, difficulty of providing humanitarian assistance, ulterior motives, poor coordination, partiality of peacekeepers, insufficient funding and staffing, and neglect of early stages of a conflict (pp. 31-36). The thesis links some examples of these challenges to the conflict in Afghanistan, which provide particularly apt analogies.

The thesis then provides historical and political background and context for the conflict in Afghanistan. This chapter's references to initiatives of international organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, preceding the current conflict, provides a useful perspective on how international organizations' efforts in this region have changed and how they have remained consistent. The section on military operations provides a useful overview of one aspect of international organizations' involvement in the conflict, and the heavy emphasis on the role of Afghanistan's neighbors and in its crisis provides an important baseline to guide the later assessment of international organizations' efforts.

The heart of the thesis comes in the next chapter, on benchmarking the efforts of various international organizations to solve the conflict in Afghanistan. This chapter provides a vivid comparative study of the similarities and differences of the efforts of the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE),

the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Focusing first on the UN's role, the thesis identifies a number of problems that have hindered UN peacekeeping operations generally, before proceeding to apply these lessons to the UN's role in the conflict in Afghanistan. The thesis describes the many and varied ways in which the UN has been involved, from the relevant Security Council resolutions to the mandate for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to development assistance to the work of the specialized agencies. The thesis notes that while the UN has attained certain successes, it has more often deferred to others.

Moving on to NATO, the thesis focuses on how the organization has continued to facilitate multilateral engagement and military burden-sharing, in contrast to the situation in Iraq in and following 2003. The thesis perceptively "pieces the veil" of the organization to examine the interests of its member states and their effect on the organization's activities. The thesis also employs a sophisticated multi-level analysis by which it examines not only the organization's activities on the international plane and its operations on the ground, but also tensions between both poles and the intermediate personnel caught in the middle.

Transitioning then to the OSCE, the thesis focuses on how the organization can play a unique role for dialogue and coordination between key stakeholders. The thesis vividly and extensively describes how the OSCE, being more nimble than the UN but big enough to include the key regional and global players, has played a positive role so far and could expand in the future into additional areas. This exploration is a useful counterpoint to analyses that focus more centrally on military approaches to the conflict.

The thesis ends this section by describing the efforts of the SCO and the CSTO. The heavy emphasis on the interests of neighboring and regional states in Afghanistan highlights the role of these groups, and the thesis also appropriately identifies the tensions and disagreements between these and other international organizations that hinder substantive cooperation. One wonders, in light of these tensions and obstacles, whether an increased role for the SCO and CSTO is likely to help or hinder the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

The last chapter, on perspectives for peace-building in Afghanistan, seeks to draw lessons from Afghanistan's current situation that can be used to guide the international organizations' efforts. The creative idea of focusing on the idea of neutrality provides an intriguing area for further exploration.

The thesis' conclusions encapsulate key points that highlight the prospects and promise for productive engagement by international organizations, as well as the attendant risks. The first two conclusions contrast the key role of international organizations on the international plane with weaknesses within the UN. The next two conclusions are likewise linked, emphasizing the complex nature of the political conflict within Afghanistan and therefore the importance of a multiethnic political coalition to stabilize the country. The fifth conclusion recaps the key points comparing and contrasting the various international organizations, while the sixth highlights the various global, regional and local levels at which other actors are engaged.

Overall, the thesis makes several important contributions. First, its emphasis on regional organizations and their role in the conflict in Afghanistan is a thoughtful counterpoint to the literature focusing more exclusively on global or universal international organizations. The author convincingly argues that the internal and regional dimensions of the conflict mean that a substantive role for the corresponding organizations could provide unique opportunities and benefits.

Second, the thesis provides a sophisticated analysis and assessment of the complicated relationship between international organizations, traditional state actors, and non-state actors. By identifying not only how these groups interact, but also how they exert their influence through and on each other (for example, how member states exert influence on international organizations), the author provides a nuanced and critical multi-level case study of how this interplay affects a serious and longstanding conflict. It is commonplace to see analysis of each of these factors, and it is not rare to see analysis of the three of them together, but the author's careful and perceptive treatment of them – not as independent variables but rather as impacting each other – is commendable.

Third, in several places the thesis suggests the UN has acted and could continue to act as an aegis for efforts by other organizations and actors. The thesis provides several examples of the UN acting as a focal point and facilitator in this way, which are valuable. One area for further exploration might be the prospects and the limits of the UN acting in this manner. For example, what leverage can the UN exert when acting in this manner, and how can it hold others – other international organizations, states, and non-governmental actors – accountable for their activities and their commitments? Does the UN put its reputation at risk if it acts as a convener or facilitator in this way, but benefits fail to materialize due to insufficient efforts by others?

Lastly, the thesis also provides a valuable perspective on how the organizations' efforts are viewed by various sectors of Afghanistan's political leadership and society. The academic literature on international organizations has historically been rather abstract, with a formalistic focus solely on the organizations themselves and on their member states. More recently a new trend has been to focus narrowly on international organizations' impact on certain people and categories of people, such as with the literature examining sexual misconduct by peacekeepers and the Haiti cholera case. This thesis, by examining how international organizations' activities have affected various groups and constituencies not only within Afghanistan's government but also within its society, helps to fill a sweet and relatively neglected spot between those two poles.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the thesis entitled "The Role of the International Organizations in the Afghan Conflict Settlement in XXIst Century" by Batur Abdul Ghafar Adina Mohammad deserves to be awarded with the degree of Ph.D in Political Science.



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