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**THE ROLE OF UNITED NATIONS' PEACE OPERATIONS IN  
AFGHANISTAN'S CONFLICT DYNAMICS**

Bachelor's thesis

Programme of International Relations

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is 7287 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The United Nations has been involved in Afghanistan's conflicts since the 1980s. It has been aiming at providing for some substantial mediation aid of communication between the warring parties and supporting the state building process. Since the conditions in Afghanistan are remaining to be insecure and vulnerable, the discussion on how to efficiently reach peace should not be forgotten or silenced. This thesis aims to contribute to the debate by identifying the UN's strategies in different phases of the wars and evaluate their consequences in the context of the state building. Explicitly, the objective is to denote the reasons why the UN has been rather ineffective in delivering methods for enduring peace in the country through normative discourse analysis. According to the study results, the UN has floundered in recognising the overall circumstances in the country throughout the different phases. Moreover, it appears that the organisation has neglected the importance of preventive diplomacy towards the insurgency. However, taking into consideration the complexity of the conflicts, one cannot argue that these are the only reasons for the prolonged operations in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, United Nations, Conflict, Peace operation, State building

## INTRODUCTION

In December 1979, the troops of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR or Soviet Union) invaded Afghanistan in order to support the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government against the Jihadist military group called 'Mujahideen' (Roberts 2003, 208). Opposing that, the United States of America (the USA) declared to give their support to the insurgents, which directed the path of the conflict towards a battle between the superpowers. The United Nations (UN) initiated their peace-making process on 14 January 1980 when the first resolution of 'Situation in Afghanistan' was agreed upon (Resolution ES-6/2 1980, 1). Even though the UN, other international organisations and the national governments have actively cooperated in order to halt the conflict, build stability and reach cohesion in the country, the Afghans have endured wars in inhumane conditions for four decades already.

The current UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reported in February 2019 that the peace negotiations between the USA and the Taliban insurgents were moving forward since December 2018 (2019, 1). Likewise, he recognised positive progress in the Afghan government's intentions for establishing an intra-Afghan peace dialogue (*ibid.*). However, another report concurrently published by the United Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announced that in 2018 the number of civilians killed reached its peak of the years that the records have been conducted ('Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict' 2019, 1). This notice raises concerns on how the cooperation should deepen among international actors to efficiently deliver the humanitarian, military and mediation aid that is fiercely needed in Afghanistan. Since the UN has been involved in the battlefield of Afghanistan for nearly four decades, the holistic role of the organisation's peace operations in Afghanistan should be examined.

Therefore, the thesis concentrates on the UN's political history involvements in Afghanistan since 1980. It indicates the influence of the UN's operations in different waves of the conflicts in Afghanistan. Based on the research, the paper aims to claim that the **UN's shortcomings in approaching Afghanistan related issues can be explained by disconnections of their activities in different political history phases.**

The discussion is designed to be built based on the following two research questions. Firstly, the precondition is to examine a question **(1) 'How has the UN been involved in different waves of conflicts in Afghanistan?'**. Once the reactions have been presented, the paper proceeds to seek a response to the second research question of **(2) 'What have been the consequences of the UN's involvement in Afghanistan's state building?'**.

The methodology used to seek answers for the above-mentioned research questions is qualitative in its nature. Namely, the paper is based on a narrative literature review. To draw a precise image of the UN's peace-making methods used, the resolutions, statements and academic articles are overviewed. In order to deliver valid and objective analysis throughout the thesis, the data is collected from multiple different sources. To support the decision of using the method of literature review, Baumeister and Leary identify this method to be effective when the purpose is to identify problems, weaknesses, contradictions or controversies (1997, 132). That is to say, the aim of the thesis is to indicate the potential shortcomings and their roots of the UN's operations in Afghanistan.

The paper aims to build a base for two research variables which arise from the research questions and then succeed to merge these questions together in the discussion part. Therefore, the first chapter presents the definitions of the UN's main peace operations activities and the historical framework of the UN's involvement. The chapter presents the main aspects of the conflict history of Afghanistan while introducing the UN's reactions to the different phases of the wars, and hence responding to the first research question. The thesis then proceeds on to the second research questions by analysing the influence of these operations in chapter two. When the operations of the UN and their impacts have been introduced, the discussion part takes place in chapter three. It aims to indicate that the roots of the deficiency in the UN's actions are originated from the disconnections of operations in the history of Afghanistan's conflicts. The main results of the analysis will then be briefly summarised in the conclusive remarks.