

AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL CRISIS AFTER 9/11: COMPLEXITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

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Abstract

The September 11 attacks triggered the first two conflicts of the twenty-first century: the Afghan War and the Iraq War. As per US opinion, the Afghan war was a consequence of the 9/11 attacks, which left Afghanistan in a chaotic situation for more than two decades, with nearly all political and economic systems broken. Since 2001, with the creation of a new administration, the country has relied on foreign help, and it has done so for many years. In contrast, the country's lengthy war (NATO vs. Taliban) clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of the international community's Afghanistan approach. However, along with the conflict, the country has gone through political transitions and many efforts for peace negotiations between the parties to the conflict. Nevertheless, prior to the 2020 talks, all efforts had failed. The study provides a detailed examination of peace efforts made in the past and why they weren't successful. It has also analyzed the domestic barriers and other factors that played a role in diminishing previous efforts. The short, medium, and long-term measures to reshape the future of Afghanistan have also been discussed in the paper. The study has been concluded with the way forward for the better future of the country and the region.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, United States, NATO, 9/11 Attack.

Introduction

Long-lasting conflict in Afghanistan, hope for peace has been arouse with massive interest, however it is vague. The past four decades has been lethal in the history of Afghanistan where any peace plan locked in domestic contradictions, regional rivalries, ethno-linguistic complexities with linking regional countries, Geopolitical complications, Narcotics trade, weapon smuggling, haven't a good governance and socio-political development in the country. (Khitab, 2020)

Bilateral US-Taliban peace agreement couldn't reduce violence in Afghanistan as well. In

fact, the long-lasting war in the country (NATO VS Taliban) explicitly indicate the failure of the international community's strategy for Afghanistan. Notably, the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan has been dominance of the so-called military option. Establishing norms, political means are only used to enhance the military strategy, whereas both of them (US and Taliban) has been failed in it. Anyhow efforts at a negotiated settlement, the prospects of sustainable peace in the country through broad-based reconciliation has also remained indescribable due to having serious flaws in the negotiated strategy. The internal political divisions, external pressures and the conflicting interests of various external and internal players can hamper meaningful dialogue. Remarkably, The most confusing issue regarding peace negotiations has been the incapability of stakeholders in formulating a logical reconciliation strategy that addresses the key issues such as General consensus, courteous agenda, preconditions for negotiations, who will be the part and what will be discuss, the role regional country and so on. (Wazeen, Stages toward Political Solution, 2020)

Background: The Afghan Peace Process

The rising power and influence of Taliban in Afghanistan have directed the international community to support numerous initiatives over the years aimed at disheartening the spread of insurgency. Unfortunately, all these peace initiatives have done little to stabilize Afghanistan and none could pursue any meaningful engagement for sustainable peace. In 2010-2020, when the international forces had maximum combat power available against the Afghan insurgents, there was no articulated effort at initiating meaningful peace negotiations with the Taliban. It was assumed that the momentum of insurgency would be ceased by militarily conditioning Taliban field fighters while offering them monetary incentives that would consequently help in luring them away from combat. The subsequent phase envisaged talks with the senior leadership that would be weakened considerably by then and prepared to concede a great deal more at the negotiating table. (Sajjad, 2010) Formal efforts towards peace negotiations in Afghanistan gained currency in March 2009, when President Barack Obama proposed the notion of reaching out to moderate elements of the insurgency. At the end of 2009 when President Obama announced a military surge in Afghanistan, the insurgency had complete sway over the countryside, while simultaneously knocking at the door of major urban centers. (Sajjad, 2010)

Despite recognizing the necessity of peace talks, the International Conference on Afghanistan on January 28, 2010 rejected the principle of negotiating with the insurgency leaders and instead proposed co-opting field fighters to weaken the insurgency. The remaining duration of the military surge did allow the Coalition Forces (CFs) to hunt down insurgent field commanders and fighters in the countryside through special operations and militarily condition the Taliban for a negotiated settlement. This was another opportune time for a broad-based and all-encompassing reconciliation push. But, as the situation stands now after the drawdown of the CFs, the Afghan insurgency is far from defeated. Security challenges are accentuating in the region with the emergence of

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Afghan Defense Forces face serious capacity issues. In the prevailing environment, the prospects of a negotiated settlement through successful reconciliation between Afghan warring factions appear as remote as ever. The Taliban once again conceive victory, assume themselves talking from a point of strength and least prepared to concede anything worthwhile at the negotiating table. This section of research seeks to address the structural complexities involved in the Afghan peace process (Siddique, 2017).

The Complexities and Contradictions

The research try to write some basic complexities and contradictions that greatly impact the Afghan peace process that include:

Prior Reconciliation Propositions

Afghanistan government has repeatedly been efforts to reach out to the Taliban for peace talk to put an end point to the longest conflict but, unfortunately it delayed due to mistrust and division among political parties. The foregoing decade has seen various activities by the Afghan government planned for making peace with the Taliban, aimed to persuade them to leave military campaign. On the other hand, Taliban also attempting to pressurize the international forces and trying to sustain its armed campaign across the country. Anyhow, Taliban and USA both agreed to open a political office in Qatar for peace negotiation to end the ongoing skirmish in the country and arrange ways for Intra- Afghan dialogue (Giustozzi and Mangal, 2016).

Earlier, Afghan president Hamid Karzai offered twice to Taliban for bilateral harmony arrangement, however it refused by Taliban harshly. Karzai struggled much to involve them in a grand peace Jirga in 2010 and then a Loya Jirga in 2011 but he was failed. Karzai endeavored to offer a public forum for Afghans to voice their views regarding reintegration and reconciliation, and to build a wider 15 ethnic and international consensus. The reintegration plan focused on those who could be stimulated to turn down their allegiance to the rebellion; reconciliation offered amnesty and political position to the opposition group's leadership to bring them into the political mainstream. This plan of reintegration fully backed by international community with eliminating Taliban's ties with Al-Qaeda and placed them in the society (Tanzeem and Nicholson, 2018). Afghan government along with International community offered them to join government with the guarantee of dismissal their names from blacklist, but all of the above rejected by Taliban by promised to continue war against Afghan government ant International community. The purposeless and inharmonious nature of the initiatives, haven't a strong strategy, poor coordination between the Afghan government and international powers, deep ethnic divisions, and the lack of transparency in the peace process have resulted in the failure of past compromise endeavors.

Reconciliation or Reintegration

According to the US strategy of reintegration, US has been effort to minimize the insurgent

attacks on international troops and Afghan civilians whereas the UN report allows insurgents the choice to fight, flee or integrate. Despite, the US being keen to pursue reintegration energetically, but watchful regarding the question of reconciliation highly. This ambiguous point of reintegration or reconciliation arose considerable unwillingness within the US administration, NATO and Afghan government officials. The negotiations process has not only supported by them but supporting by UN as well (BBS, 2019).

The U.S. stance on the peace process, the Afghan Government, many members of the international community and non-state local actors generally view reintegration as a bottom-up approach, focusing on the rank-and-file soldiers, while reconciliation was seen as a top-down political process, which involves dialogue with senior insurgency leadership. In other words, Reconciliation has been defined as a “strategic level outreach to, and possible political accommodation with the insurgent leadership,” while the term Reintegration is referred as the efforts aimed at providing incentives to insurgent fighters to include them to abstain from fighting. The Afghan Government and international stakeholders also have varied in the relation and sequencing between reconciliation and reintegration. In the one hand, the Afghan government observe as a:

“Two-pronged initiative, involving the cooption of rank-and- file soldiers within Afghan society (reintegration), while at the same time opening dialogue between the Afghan Government and key leaders associated with the insurgency (Matan and Sherman, 2010).” In the second hand, the international community members classify reconciliation and reintegration as “Independent, rather than interrelated processes, anticipating a level of sequencing for them to be effective.”The variance points intended through talks, especially among the Afghan and U.S. colleagues, has influenced damagingly on the views of consensus strategy on the way forward (Lamb and Shawn, 2012).

Afghan Government’s Peace Offer and Taliban’s Reaction

In 28 February 2015, the second round of the Kabul peace process structured, where members of the several countries and international organizations participated with the aim to chart out a path to sustainable peace for Afghanistan under the Afghan-led initiative. However, the key rival in the dispute (the Taliban) did not take interest in it. Encouraging the Taliban movement toward the negotiating table, Afghan president Ashraf Ghani has been trying to sit with Taliban for peace talks and political recognition. He promised to share power with Taliban or even shown his desirability for reviewing the Afghan constitution which was the insistent demand of them. Peace negotiation between Afghan government and Taliban were at the lowest possible denominator but, latterly the Taliban has shown their desirability to peace dialogue with USA directly for stable and political solution to the Afghanistan’s long-lasting conflict (Theo, 2017).

Afghan government organize unconditional and inclusive confidence-building and mutually- consensus measures targeted at reconciliation with the Taliban group. But this offer was failed due to the critical ways. The first barrier has the chosen by Taliban among war and peace; the second reason behind it failure was the invitation of them without

preconditions, with no time limit for the Taliban to respond; the third roadblock for Taliban was the persistence of acceptance of the Afghan constitution. Beside of all, the peace offer was very momentous because the Taliban to be recognized as a legitimate political group for a vital contribution to building peace in the war-stricken country. And also, Ghani has been opened the entire door for the Taliban and clearly hinted that the Afghanistan constitution, including all important documents would be amended. By removing its exile status, Ghani has taken a convincing step in the direction of making the Afghan Taliban part of the political mainstream. The Taliban's highest management never ready to recognize the Afghan government publically that's why they have denied to join peace offer by them. However, some groups among them have shown interest toward peace talks but the remaining of them are silent of the recent violence in Afghanistan. However, The Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said: "We support all efforts that lead to ending the ongoing crisis in this country (Hamdam, 2018)."

Fight and Talk

Divergence views over peace negotiation with the Taliban between the Afghan government and the U.S. administration devastated the strategy to pursue a policy of "fight and talk". During the course of the Afghan conflict, American, Afghan leadership and political institutions could never be on the same page. This conspicuous divergence of views among Afghan and U.S. leaderships ultimately resulted in the embracing of a confused and out-of-focus policy on Afghan peace process. It appears that the combination of talking and fighting, an approach that never emerged as a doable course of action to achieve peace, has mainly been employed due to the conflicting views amongst them (Hamdam, 2018). The ideological side is also ignored like persuading insurgents to lay down their arms accept the constitution and integrate into the political process and so on. Objectionable fact, that the majority of field fighters had joined the insurgency not due to some ideological appeal, but for mere financial gains. The U.S. has been failed in its military footprint for militarily pressuring the Taliban to push them to the negotiation table, but also reduced its influence on the Afghan ruling hierarchy as well.

Regional players like China and Russia are now on course to assume an enhanced role. However, continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan and financial support of the Kabul regime allowed the U.S. to retain power over all Afghan conflict resolution initiatives. Another most important leaving point is the lack of all-encompassing broad-based negotiation. The impression selected reconciliation efforts give is that their primary motivation is dividing and weakening the insurgency by engaging with only a few groups. No policy parameters are suggested to deal with Taliban-affiliated organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Haqqani Network (HQN). Though the external militant outfits based in Afghanistan may not have much influence, however, they have always retained the potential to act as spoilers (Haidari, 2018; Matthews and Éigearthaigh, 2009).

Taliban's splitting

Understanding about the different factions of Taliban movement of Afghanistan is very important for future peace discussion. The Taliban group has divided into different factions internally, despite of all they maintain its ideological unity for many years. According to their activities around the country that have taken place separately, conducted their activities under different structure that leave lesson for us for much understanding regarding of their factions. The Taliban activities conducted under four main shuras around the country: Quetta Shura; Mashhad Shura; Peshawar shura; Shura of the North; and the Rasool Shura. The old leadership is based in the Quetta Shura which also called central power of Taliban that is partly in Karachi and partly in Quetta. Led by Haibatullah Akhundzada, it enjoys authority over the Miranshah Shura which is based in Miran Shah, North Waziristan, and is comprised exclusively of the Haqqani network; and Peshawar Shura, which is based in Peshawar. In 2007, the Miranshah Shura declared independence from the Quetta Shura. The Peshawar Shura, which did the same in 2009, was forced to rejoin in 2016 due to financial difficulties. However, the Haqqani Network re-joined in 2015, after Sirajuddin Haqqani was appointed deputy leader within the Quetta Shura. Shura of the North is based in Badakhshan and composed of several fronts. Accounting for less than 10 percent of the Taliban's manpower, the Mashhad Shura is based in Mashhad, Iran. The Rasool Shura is based in Farah in Afghanistan. Despite being in opposition to the Quetta Shura, RasoolShura is linked with the Obeidullah Ishaqzai faction of the Quetta Shura. As present, there are reports of a struggle for monopolizing control of the Quetta Shura between Haibatullah Akhundzada and Sirajudin Haqqani. According to Antonio Giustozzi, Haibatullah is willing to negotiate with the Kabul government but Sirajudin is bitterly opposed to reconciliation.

Due to this division among them, there is extensive regional autonomy between the several shuras of the Taliban. Competition dictates that none of the other three shuras recognize the authority of the Quetta Shura. In reality, the Rasool Shura and the Quetta Shura were tied up in a fight against each other between 2015 and 2017. According to sources, the leader of the Rasool Shura, Mullah Rasool condemned of the domination of the peace process by the Quetta Shura. He said: "Earlier we were thinking that the Afghan Government wanted peace talks with all Taliban, but when we saw that it is interested only in making peace with Mullah Mansur because of the dictates of the Pakistani Government, we decided we cannot start peace talks with the Afghan Government (Khalilzad, 2020; Khitab, 2020)." As the Taliban want to maintain a control over war in Afghanistan, they have challenged the appearance of Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) in the country since 2015. However, in order to avoid fighting for territory, recruits and revenue, a faction of the Taliban is also keen for ceasefire and coexistence with the IS-K. There are believable reports of cooperation and collaboration between the Haqqani network and both the factions of IS-K. Despite some opposition within the Haqqani network of an alliance-like relationship with the IS-K, a large number of operatives are

said to be in favor of cooperative ventures. These cooperative ventures will deteriorate the situation much if others shura of Taliban start peace negotiation with Afghan government and international community.

Furthermore, administrative structures of the diverse Shuras are run separately by the relevant shuras. Thus, if the factions insist, opening peace discussions with the government in Kabul will become more challenging. The international community is aware of this challenge because during the visit to Afghanistan, Secretary James Mattis clearly approved that getting the Taliban to reconcile “in one fell swoop” would “be a bridge too far to expect. But there are elements of the Taliban clearly interested in talking to the Afghan government.” Although, peace established with some selected factions usually tends to increase the possibility of others to act as “spoilers”, the US seems to be counting on further splitting the Taliban apart and using that as an approach to attract them to the peace table (Hamdam, 2018).

State Stance and Taliban

The Taliban have not been much compromise with Afghan government and the USA during peace negotiation. Apparently, no effort has been built to consider the Taliban demands. However, they are steady towards the withdrawal of international troops as a precondition for the opening of any serious negotiations. Besides the withdrawal of international troops, the Taliban also want recognition as legitimate stakeholders. To that end, removal of the label of „terrorist“, arrangements of power sharing mechanism and removal from the UN sanction list are some of their understandable demands (Siddique, 2017). Afghan constitution, implemented after the fall of the Taliban regime has also been an argumentative issue for the anti-Afghan government forces. The incapacity of the Taliban leadership is also largely ignored aspect while pursuing for maximalist position during peace negotiations. These issues of the leadership would never be esteemed by the rank and file of the militancy and the movement would risk the prospects of disintegration. The Taliban stance on peace negotiation become hard due to the emergence of the ISIS in Afghanistan. In a nutshell, the Taliban ambitious expectations as regard to their stance may complicate the situation enormously as well (Qassem and Shayeq, 2014).

Counter- Narratives

War in Afghanistan is not only impacting the physical environment, but it encompasses the civil population’s perceptions significantly. Thomas H Johnson, a Professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, has reported the propaganda campaigns by the Taliban against the international community for spectacular shaping narratives of the conflict through significant use of magazines, graffiti, poetry and various social media platforms. By establishing social media in particular Facebook and twitter accounts for the dissemination of their propaganda narratives through different languages create them as

Afghan pioneers and they also able to scatter their unified message. According to the peace talks, the Taliban's leading narrative like – whom to talk to and about what were seem successfully mind-catching. Taliban through such sort of narratives mostly persist by talking directly to US and international community because of believing that the Afghan government isn't able as a decision-maker for the political solution of the Afghanistan's long-lasting conflicts. Taliban has declared that we want to an independent state from “foreign domination” with the references of Sharia law, however, the stance of Taliban for the state is ambiguous after international community withdrawal.

According to the sources, the narrative campaign by Taliban fail to offer practical solutions or alternatives to the Afghanistan's current situation, other than threats of more violence and destruction. Therefore, in their fight against the Taliban, the afghan government and the US cannot do without multi-pronged counter-messaging strategy, which must also incorporate plans to “mine the same literary sources – whether religious texts such as the Quran and Hadith or secular literature such as poetry – that the Taliban uses to strengthen its arguments.” Ghani's latest invitation to the Taliban to participate in upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections creates a powerful counter-message. Although rejected by the Taliban, Ghani's allegation that if the Taliban “believe they have roots among the people in Afghanistan then elections is a chance”. The continuation of such counter-messaging would be a huge psychological increase to the peace initiative.

Key Domestic Barriers

The internal environment of the country very important to be sufficiently shaped for Afghanistan's Reconciliation improvisation. There are numerous domestic issues that impact the Reconciliation process in the country. They are (Schiavenza, 2019; Tisdall, 2018; Shaeen, 2020):

1) Afghan-Led Peace Process

Peace process in Afghanistan, has remain to end long-lasting conflict in the country by bringing the Afghan government, ISAF and Taliban combine to the negotiation table. In fact, a broad-based reconciliation process or strategy among various fragmented segments of Afghan society to ensure sustainable peace in the country has not been considered up to yet. The politico- ethnic conflict in Afghanistan has been threaten the Afghan social fabric unless addressed while pursuing a political settlement. In the long history of the country, there has not been any serious striving to promote intra-Afghan dialogue. In a nutshell, for the sustainable reconciliation process in Afghanistan required strongly wholehearted support of all Afghan ethnicities; to that end, the initiative has to be entirely Afghanis.

2) Capacity Problems in High Peace Council (HPC)

In June 2010, HPC approved by the Loya Jirga to pursue reconciliation with the Taliban. The emerging of reconciliation process one of the cornerstone of the Afghan strategy. Afghanizing the peace process was considered essential for legitimizing as well as

ensuring acceptance of the initiative among the Afghans. Unfortunately, the HPC has failed to gain step forward in the peace process with the Taliban. In a short, the HPC did not have the capacity at any phase to pursue meaningful negotiation with the Taliban or considerably contribute to a negotiated settlement of the Afghan problem because most of the its members have been the leaders of Jihadi groups who have a record of fighting against one another and a majority of them have fought the Taliban. It was, thus, unexperienced to believe that the Taliban would accept any mechanism of negotiations via an incapacitated and government-controlled HPC.

3) Ruling Elite

The ruling elites in Afghanistan, enormously profited during the endless conflict in Afghanistan since 2001, that's why they have been in fear from losing their power with a significant reconciliation, therefore, may interrupt any significant progress towards the peace process. These ruling class would be least willing for result-oriented talks although, the international community declares that its influence and links of engagement in Afghanistan and never-ending financial aid with negotiated settlement of the issue. The Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process seems to have been overtaken up till now by Afghan interest groups to protect their gains.

4) Institutional Framework

The Afghan reconciliation has been a rambling process involving numerous mechanisms and several actors undertaking matching activities without any coordination. The contradictory interests of various actors pursuing talks with the Taliban, absence of agreed incentives for the insurgents, and domestic obligations of major players like the U.S. have not allowed a consensual institutional framework to evolve. Moreover, the tendency of various interlocutors to keep things close to their heart (either to prevent premature disclosure before making some headway or for some vested interests) has also not helped the cause. Numerous parallel initiatives without any articulated offer for the insurgents has, thus, been conveying an impression of non-seriousness and has failed to attract a Taliban response.

US Involvement: Hurdles in Peace Process

The US and most of its allies strongly support ceasefire agreement between Afghan government and Taliban and called it best option for a political and peaceful solution to the endless conflict. However, the current government of the USA (trump administration) would not like to see itself as a legitimate political player in the peace negotiation with the Taliban. But in the other hand Taliban has been persisting on the peace talk directly with USA by avoiding the Afghan government. USA and international community stress that a successful dialogue can only be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned not with America. In short, the peace negotiation can only allowing the US military to return to their land peacefully and it would be certainly victory for Afghanistan as well. Simultaneously, USA needs to make it clear that it will arrange financial and military support to the Afghan government,

pressure on Pakistan's security establishment to get the Taliban to negotiate, and keep a substantial military force in Afghanistan even after a deal is negotiated. But despite some inherent difficulties, the US needs to be more flexible to the idea of talking directly to the Taliban as it speech in Qatar.

Regional Involvement: Hurdles in Peace Process

Sustainable peace process in Afghanistan depend greatly on regional framework, the acknowledgement of them so vital. The major hurdles in regional consensus developing on a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan are outlined below: the regional involvement was identified in the 2009 U.S. policy on Afghanistan appraisal; however, there has not been any serious effort at developing consensus on the way forward regionally. Regional rearrangements have been taking place to fill the vacuum in Afghanistan after the drawdown, but prospects of any broad agreement among these countries seems unconvincing at this stage. India has extremely profited since U.S. involvement in Afghanistan has raised its clout significantly in the country through financial aid and military training, and thus, expects to play a dominant role. Since India sees Taliban as Pakistan's proxy, it does not want a leading role of Taliban in future arrangements, therefore, is least supportive of reconciliation. Iran has not denounced reconciliation with Taliban, but would endeavor to preserve its own interests in Afghanistan, as well as of its Tajik and Hazara allies. Iran also wants a friendly dispensation in Afghanistan and limited Taliban influence to pursue its future economic agenda in the region. Similarly, China too, looks at Afghanistan through the prism of economic interests, but remains wary of the spillover of Islamic militancy from Afghanistan to its Xinjiang/Uygur region. China does not oppose reconciliation, but would not support a regime in Afghanistan that fuels extremism and endangers Chinese economic interests and investments. Pakistan, the most affected state due to Afghan instability, but play double role in the same time, where it has favored a broad-based reconciliation among all Afghan in the one hand, supporting Taliban in the battle failed against international community and Afghan government in the other hand. Russia is also concerned about the spillover of militancy (and narcotics) to Central Asian states, but has never viewed a Taliban- controlled Afghanistan favorably. Central Asian oligarchies view the Afghan conflict with disquiet and feel threatened due to Islamic militancy in Afghanistan (Haidari, 2018; Matthews and Éigearthaigh, 2009).

Residual Hassles in Peace process

There are many flaws in the peace offer and for the political salutation of Afghanistan's issues. The research tried to add some important of them init; first, Ghani's peace offer was good but leaves numerous details ambiguous. Despite Ghani's offer to recognize the Taliban as a legitimate political actor but he didn't manifest that who would stop fighting first? The second important thing that left by them was about the mediator among them. Second, as the afghan government is the combination of multiple political parties and ethnic groups, because of this they have been not speak with on accord regarding the peace process with Taliban. The Afghan government has been fail in making a united

front at the negotiation table? Third, regional competition (the US-Russia, Pakistan- India, Iran-Saudi Arab and the like) has disallowed the advent of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. International community should focus deeply on these repugnant matters which is the core stone for the collective solution of the Afghanistan long-lasting conflict.

Complexities & Contradiction of US Withdrawal:

On August 31, 2021, the US government marked the end of its 20-year-long war in Afghanistan. As a result, Taliban and its allies took over the country's nearly-full control. Afghanistan, ravaged by over four decades of war and instability and the situation is complex that how the country will be governed the Taliban regime without international recognitions. The Taliban announced a 33-member caretaker cabinet (on September 7, 2021), consisted of mostly Pashtun Taliban and Haqqani veterans, hardliners and loyalists; with only 2 Tajiks and 1 Uzbek, and no Hazaras, named in the setup which shows the contradiction for the due representation of the actors. Due to the economic fall-out the regional diplomatic engagement with the Taliban began, with China offering USD 31 million organizing a ministerial-level meeting (attended by Foreign Ministers of China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) on Afghanistan. The deliberations of the meeting suggested short, medium and long-term solutions to the complex socio-economic-political challenges that could be meaningful for the international community, particularly the western bloc to reach on some common grounds of the engagement.

The negotiating skills which are pre-requisite for mediating the complex issues were acquired by the Taliban through the exposure, training and the opportunity to engage in the art of political negotiation and diplomacy through political office in Doha (Qatar), established in 2013 and are politically aware and proactive thus demonstrated a 'new' side or major shift to their political ideology and media messaging. The contradiction between Taliban and US to some extent addressed to the fact that the US agreed to recognize the group in Doha peace talks also gave the Taliban the 'legitimacy' it sought and a 'position of strength'. The Taliban also reportedly used their 'position of strength' to convince the Afghan army troops to surrender and uploaded the surrender videos on their social media channels and handles to diffuse the conflicts within Afghan Governance system. As a result, both the Ghani government in Kabul and the people of Afghanistan receded to a position of weakness. Also, practicing their art of diplomacy, the Taliban recently claimed that China was its principal and "closest partner". This statement carried important undertones as the Taliban's leadership has often refrained from commenting excessively on the Uyghur Muslims from China. Uyghurs born or living in Afghanistan, with the Taliban's recent wooing of Beijing, now fear extradition to China. Also, China, for geopolitical reasons, wants to protect its investments in Afghanistan, especially those focusing on mineral extraction, and has, therefore, indicated its willingness to engage with the Taliban. Thus the art of diplomacy as well as digital diplomacy was extensively used for conflict resolution and to overcome the complexities.

The Taliban spokespersons who are fluent in multiple languages, including English. Taliban leadership's interviews with the international, especially English, media indicates their willingness to widely disseminate their messages on the global stage. Therefore, the 'Talib of 2021' (member of the Taliban), is not someone who, as widely perceived in the West, has necessarily studied and trained in a religious madrassa. They seem to be a group now beyond the madrassas that utilized modern media including social media extensively. The Taliban leaders are actively seen on national and international media; something rare during their first regime (1996-2001) in Afghanistan. This, in short, is what the Taliban of 2021 is all about: a tech-savvy, PR-heavy multi-lingual group that, in the past two decades, learnt the nuances of media messaging, propaganda, political manoeuvring and narrative manipulation for articulating and branding their message to the international community and bridging the gaps of intricacies. The Taliban's claim for the caretaker Govt is inclusive to address the contradictions regional engagement with the regime also started like; i) China's announced USD 31 million in aid, ii) EU committed to the Afghan people and is delivering 500 million euros in assistance through UN and NGOs focusing on food, health, WASH and protection, education and livelihood, iii) In February, 2022, the Norway talk shows the engagement of the Afghan delegation with special representatives and envoys from the US, the EU, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and the UK, further Qatar and Turkey are seeking a mandate to manage the Kabul airport. However the western bloc's three major concerns and point of conflicts with Afghanistan remain; a) the country not being used for terrorism against the west, b) provision of gender and basic rights and c) avoiding a major refugee crisis which will lead to more refugees heading towards Afghanistan's neighbours and Europe.

The progress on these issues can only take place if there is some 'working relationship' with the Taliban regime as one of the dilemma of negotiation is that some of the Taliban leaders who at home considered as heroes are still under UN and US sanctions and placed on the 'global wanted terrorist' lists including Sirajuddin Haqqani and AnasHaqqani etc. To diffuse these complexities and contradictions, a policy direction based on short, medium and long term approach has to be adopted by the international community to reshape Afghanistan through effective and meaningful engagements.

Short Term Measures

In context with the provision of basic human rights: Women's and media rights are currently at risk in the country, pressure on the Taliban regime can only be exerted if the western bloc has some line of communication with the Taliban. In a scenario where the international community, especially the western bloc, refuses to negotiate or deal with the Taliban, there remains a strong possibility that regional powers will jump in and can leads to some complexities. The United Nations and International community needs to work with the Taliban representatives, in some capacity, to get the Kabul airport up and running and negotiate the evacuation of foreign nationals and legitimate foreign visa holders from Afghanistan. Since the Taliban's takeover, messaging from the western bloc is more or less mixed. Where the bloc has so far refused to recognise a future Taliban government,

initial statements also indicate that some sort of a working relationship with the group may be established. Whether the bloc recognizes a Taliban regime or whether it still considers it a non-state (violent) actor, the messaging needs to be clear and precise. Mixed messaging will only create confusions, conflicts and complexities in formulating long-term policies on Afghanistan, which would negatively impact the common Afghan people.

Medium Term Measures

The Taliban have so far (smartly) disseminated their messages and propaganda on the social media. For policymakers in the western bloc, countering the Taliban's social media messaging presents a major challenge. The content of Taliban's messaging also differs when it comes to the multi-lingual online platforms. In this regard, it becomes integral that policies towards the Taliban are not formulated based on their positive and neutral messaging in the English media. Instead, to get a true picture of the situation on the ground, analysis of social media posts in Dari, Pashto and, to some extent, Urdu languages, especially from Afghan activists and media personnel in the country, also becomes important. The US has frozen Afghanistan's access to its national reserves of nearly USD10 billion which is one of the major dispute. Moving forward and if the western bloc accepts the Taliban as the governing body in Afghanistan, access to these reserves needs to be made conditional on utilizing it for stabilizing shocks to Afghanistan's economy and provision of basic human rights. Economy remains a major governance challenge for the Taliban. Afghanistan is heavily reliant on foreign aid and technical support and the Afghan economy will crumble if the international community decides to fully suspend this support. This could result in migration, food and economic crisis, with millions migrating to neighboring and western countries. This migration also poses a threat to regional security with terrorists posing as refugees moving into neighboring countries (Haidari, 2018).

Long Term Measures

Politically unstable Afghanistan is a threat to regional and global security as there is possibility that terrorist organization may use Afghanistan's soil for their purpose in the absence of the vacuum. The Taliban's desire and need for some form of international recognition can be made conditional to the government ensure no terrorist activity takes place within Afghanistan's territory. The 20-year achievements, under the US and coalition forces, in the areas of; education, healthcare and the economy need to be consolidated and protected in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the country. The World Bank has estimated the gross domestic product (GDP) of Afghanistan to be around USD 19.87 billion in 2020; compared to 4.055 billion in 2002. Annual growth averaged 9.4 per cent between 2003 and 2012, driven by a booming aid-driven services sector, and strong agricultural growth. Aid flows decreased from around 100 per cent of GDP in 2009 to 42.9 per cent of GDP in 2020. Now that the Taliban are in control of Afghanistan and the foreign aid to Afghanistan has dried up, this could cause a serious economic,

humanitarian and political crisis and can lead to uncontrolled complexities. A policy layout on aid provision, for the long-term well-being of the Afghan people, is therefore urgently required (Matthews and Éigeartaigh, 2009).

The Way Forward

The everlasting conflict in Afghanistan is a reflection of the strategic deadlock in the conflict; in addition, it also points out failure of the military option in overwhelming the Taliban. Unluckily, political solutions have first and foremost been employed during the Afghan conflict to praise the military strategy, typically pointed at separating and eventually abating the power of Taliban. As the drivers of conflict constantly intensifying in the country, grander and serious earnestness by all sponsors is overbearing for a peaceful resolution of the everlasting issue. In reality, Taliban celebrating the victory while are not in a position to have control over the whole of the country, the Afghan Security Forces also unable to reverse them. Since no side is actually winning this conflict through force, a strategy of significant gains at the negotiation table or by engaging pre-conditions is unlikely to accrue desired results.

A credible way forward in order to make a successful peace process is vocalized below: First of all there has not been any thoughtful effort to shape the environment for peace talks in the country; assertions and counter assertions policies, considering the peace process as a sign of weakness, blaming and pre-conditioning has discouragement the peace process. Successful peace process deadly needed termination of conflict, even on temporary basis. Fair peace need to eradicate the fight and talk policy, intra-Afghan dialogue, a serious, honest, meaningful, reciprocal and an all-inclusive dialogue process.

The Afghan peace process also need strongly mutual acceptable compromises and expectations from both sides. A comprehensive intra-Afghan dialogue could be encouraged through all ethnic based team because Afghan society has historically encompassed of diverse ethnic groups with varying interests. The reconciliation between the central government and several of its local representatives on the one hand and the many alienated groups in the local populations on the other is equally important as well. The foremost challenge for the peace process that should be avoided is Afghanistan's war economy holders that act as "spoilers" during the peace process for maintaining their interest.

As the conflict resolution mechanism has emerged as an „expert's domain“ in the international arena for peace, Afghanistan also require it for long-lasting peace, but not for receiving without sincerely service. The UN with OIC close cooperation, might be suitable facilitators for talks. Finally, the Afghan peace process should be prevented from regional interests and hypocrite meditators.

Conclusion

Both Taliban and US tried to gain the superior hand before agreeing to the peace talks.

Both of them struggle to achieve persuasive conditions for peace talks, but have deep rooted problems in this case. Meanwhile, both of them had their own demands for peace talk such as direct talks with the US and a complete withdrawal of foreign troops – before entering into peace negotiations, the status quo was hold. It was not easy to conduct free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections under these circumstances.

Ashraf Ghani's unconditional negotiation offer to the Taliban has received support from all key stakeholders. However, the Taliban have not responded favorably to peace talks with the Afghan government and they continue to maintain face-to-face talks with the US. Ghani's grand peace offer must find a way around these seemingly undefeatable challenges. Briefly, both sides prioritized the identification of areas where confidence-building measures can be developed. The Afghan conflict is multi-dimensional, involving Afghan, regional and global actors. Due to its inherent complexity, no single actor holds the key to resolving the crisis. Therefore, any peace process in Afghanistan is going to be long and difficult even the Taliban after the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 2021. There are plenty of room for skepticism that the process is going to falter. The fact remains that no side is going to win the war, and the only alternative to continuing bloodshed and instability is to make way for the peace process. Even we currently see an unrest situation in Afghanistan in all the socio-economic and political sectors. The Afghan peace process had moved in the crucial phase by signing agreement between Taliban and US. The negotiated settlement had no any kind of sustainable model for stable Afghanistan. The international and local political stake holders from Afghanistan destabilized the internal situation and left the country to enormous challenges.

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