

New Paths and Policies Towards Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan: External-domestic perspective

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Abstract

The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has persisted for several decades, presenting substantial challenges to peace and stability in the region. In order to resolve conflict and find a political solution between the Taliban and opposition groups, new approaches must be applied to solving contentious issues and improving peacebuilding. This study examines the contribution of domestic and international interactions to Afghan conflict resolution and how these approaches can contribute to mitigating conflict in the country. The research paper uses the analytical framework of peacebuilding to analyze the potential effectiveness of new paths and policies on conflict resolution. This study assesses the potential of political transition and power-sharing perspective toward conflict resolution in Afghanistan. A literature review of previous studies and a critical examination of prior policies and strategies shows that considering political transition and power sharing between conflicting parties is necessary for there to be more possibility toward conflict resolution in Afghanistan. In addition, this study makes a substantial contribution to the existing literature on consociationalism as a theoretical framework for conflict resolution and offers insights into its practical implementation in Afghanistan. Additionally, policymakers, academics, and practitioners can benefit from this study in their efforts to resolve conflicts in Afghanistan and other divided societies. Examine how new approaches and policies may be able to resolve Afghanistan's conflicts as part of this study, to gain crucial insights and recommendations on how to address future conflicts there more effectively.

Keywords: *New paths and policies, Conflict Resolution, Afghanistan conflict, consociationalism, External-domestic interaction, Perspective*

Introduction

The conflict in Afghanistan has evolved into one of the most protracted conflicts globally. Commencing with the 1973 coup, the country has experienced a tumultuous five decades characterized by political instability, regime changes, foreign invasions, civil wars, and various forms of political oppression, resulting in profound human suffering. Afghanistan has witnessed a multitude of conflicts and corresponding efforts at resolving them. Paradoxically, there has been a cycle of conflict and conflict resolution that perpetuates the war. The 2001 Bonn process sought to address Afghanistan's three decades of conflict by establishing a constitutional polity with the international community's support. However, the February 2020 "Peace Agreement" between the Taliban and the United States, brokered by Pakistan and held in Qatar, effectively supplanted the Bonn process with the "Doha Process." Nonetheless, the new approach exacerbates the chronic afflictions in Afghanistan. The country's tragedy lies in the type and magnitude of its ailments and in the prescriptions offered by numerous self-appointed local and foreign physicians, which have compounded its agony. Given these circumstances, this study seeks to understand the diverse views and analysis on Afghanistan to explore the prospect and approaches toward a compelling, legitimate, and durable conflict resolution.

The post-Taliban era of Afghanistan in 2001 ushered in a new era for the Afghan populace, evoking a sense of optimism and renewed aspirations for a better future. Regrettably, the strategies and plans implemented during this period proved inadequate in ushering in societal modernization and liberalization. A gradual escalation of human casualties was accompanied by the elevation of conflict between the government and the Taliban, ignoring terrorist safe havens outside of Afghanistan and reinforcing terrorism supporters within the country.¹

¹ Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. "Inclusive Political System: The Way Forward" (*Herat Security Dialogue-X*, (November, 2022)

Additionally, the weak governance structures and rampant corruption further exacerbated the problems of the Afghan state. Despite the presence of international forces and the allocation of significant financial resources towards development efforts, progress remained stymied by factors such as institutional weaknesses and inadequate security arrangements. Moreover, the prolonged conflict and lack of substantial improvements in people's lives have led to a decline in public confidence and disillusionment. Consequently, the country continues to face multifaceted challenges in achieving stability and development, with a significant proportion of the population still living in poverty and deprived of necessities. In light of these circumstances, there is an urgent need for comprehensive and sustained efforts to address the underlying issues that have hindered Afghanistan's progress. This would require formulating robust policies and strategies to improve governance, enhance security, and promote socio-economic development, among other measures. Ultimately, the success of such efforts will depend on the leadership's political will, the international community's commitment, and the Afghanistan people's active participation.

Certain scholars and academic analyses have underscored that a cohort of traditional elites, who had spent a significant amount of time in the Western world and garnered support from their Western counterparts, neglected to espouse a comprehensive democratic ethos in Afghanistan. Instead, they engaged in corrupt practices and espoused regressive notions of race and ethnocentrism. Furthermore, these elites were implicated in electoral fraud, leading to disillusionment among the Afghan populace and skepticism towards the democratic process and its underlying principles. Consequently, a shortage of public faith in democracy has taken root within Afghan society.²

However, in the post-2001 era, despite many challenges outlined earlier, Afghanistan was a land of opportunities to bring more positive change and prosperity under the previous republic government's leadership. Nevertheless, in the last 20 years, the country has made good progress. On the one hand, there was a possibility to stabilize the country and build a modern society. On the other hand, the country faced unresolved disputes, mainly between the previous government and the Taliban group. However, during NATO's military presence in Afghanistan, the United States and other western countries built the Afghan national army and police to reduce violence and improve peacebuilding.

Despite some positive development, the conflict did not stop, and the liberal peace-building approach failed to achieve a positive outcome. After all, since 2021, the pace of negotiations between the previous government of Afghanistan and the Taliban started in Doha (Qatar), a possibility to resolve disputes and find a political settlement between conflicting parties was present. However, U.S. unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan's Collapsed Peace talks and the Taliban group return to power constituted a major setback. In fact, the failure of the peace process and the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban shows that the military approach does not necessarily work to achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Therefore, resolving conflict and improving peacebuilding requires applying a new approach, a combination of domestic, regional and international approaches to finding a political solution between conflicting parties in Afghanistan- a concept we will develop later in this paper. The regional countries and global powers will play a remarkable role in peacebuilding. With the above backdrop, the most relevant question is why the previous policies and strategies failed to address the resolution of conflict in Afghanistan post-2001, and what were their limitations? Moreover, how can new approaches be developed and implemented to mitigate and manage the conflict in Afghanistan?

The current study analyses the previous literature on the country's conflict resolution to identify new paths and policies toward conflict resolution in Afghanistan. By examining the limitations and failures of previous policies and approaches for terminating war and conflict, the study seeks to provide new policy choices and approaches for achieving durable peace and mitigating conflict in Afghanistan.

Keeping the above objective in mind, the current study consists of three parts: the first part includes a critical literature review of existing studies. In contrast, the second part seeks to outline the historical narrative from global and internal perspectives on approaches to conflict resolution. Finally, part three discusses the novel approaches and policy choices for mitigating and resolving the conflict in Afghanistan.

² Ibid.,10.

Literature Review

Over the years, the Afghan conflict has been the subject of numerous perplexing and enigmatic studies and analyses. This literature review delves into some of the most critical works that have attempted to make sense of the causes and prospects for conflict resolution in the country. Ahmed Rashid's "Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia" was one of the first and most influential books on the Afghan conflict. This book offers a detailed examination of the Taliban's rise and the factors contributing to its success. Rashid claims that a complex mix of elements, including the failure of previous governments, ethnic and regional tensions, and external support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, paved the way for the Taliban's rise. The book provides an invaluable historical perspective on the conflict and is a must-read for understanding the origins of the current situation.

Barnett Rubin's "The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System" is another important work on the Afghan conflict. The book examines Afghanistan's political and social dynamics in the years preceding the Soviet invasion. According to Rubin, the collapse of the Afghan state was caused by a complex interaction of internal and external factors, such as regional and global power struggles, ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the influence of Islam. The book is invaluable for understanding the difficulties of establishing a state in a country as diverse and complex as Afghanistan. Several recent studies have focused on the international community's role in Afghanistan's conflict. One such work is Sarah Chayes' "Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security." The book posits that corruption is one of the crucial drivers of the conflict in Afghanistan and that it has been perpetuated by the international community's failure to address the issue. Chayes contends that corruption has undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government and fuelled support for the insurgency. The book offers a thought-provoking analysis of the role of corruption in the conflict and the need for a more nuanced approach to addressing the issue.

Concerning conflict resolution, several studies have focused on the prospects for negotiations with the Taliban. One such work is Michael Semple's "Negotiating with the Taliban: Toward a Solution for the Afghan Conflict." The book provides an in-depth analysis of the Taliban and their objectives and argues that negotiations with the group are necessary for achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. Semple contends that the Taliban are not a monolithic group and that factions within the group are open to dialogue. The book provides a valuable contribution to the debate on the role of negotiations in conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Tariq Farhadi's "Peace Talks in Afghanistan: A Paradigm Shift" is another work on conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The book provides an analysis of the various peace initiatives that have been proposed for Afghanistan and argues that a paradigm shift is necessary for achieving lasting peace. Farhadi contends that traditional approaches to conflict resolution, such as power-sharing and ceasefire agreements, are unlikely to be successful in Afghanistan. Instead, he proposes a new approach that focuses on the root causes of the conflict and the need for a more inclusive and participatory peace process.

Overall, the literature on the conflict in Afghanistan is bursting with an array of themes and insights into the conflict's historical, political, and social dynamics. While there is no panacea for the conflict, the studies reviewed suggest that a more comprehensive and nuanced approach is necessary for achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. By considering the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders and addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, it may be possible to find a path toward conflict resolution and stability in Afghanistan. Finally, another key theme from the literature is the importance of regional and international cooperation in resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. Given the country's strategic location and the potential for the conflict to spill over into neighbouring countries, many studies emphasise the need for regional actors to play a constructive role in the peace process. This may include encouraging negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, supporting economic development initiatives, and providing humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the international community must also play a role in supporting the peace process through diplomatic efforts and financial and technical assistance.

Furthermore, Henry Kissinger, in his article for *The Economist*, "Why America failed in Afghanistan," argues that America's failure in Afghanistan was due to a lack of a clear objective and strategy. Kissinger contends that the US was driven by the desire to defeat the Taliban and promote democracy without a clear understanding of the country's history and culture. Kissinger notes that while the US successfully removed the Taliban from power, it failed to establish a stable government and security forces and thus could not maintain its gains. He suggests that the US should have pursued a reconciliation strategy with the Taliban rather than attempting to defeat them militarily. Furthermore, Kissinger criticizes the lack of coordination between the military and civilian agencies involved in the mission and the short-term thinking that guided US policy in Afghanistan. He argues that a more long-term approach, considering the interests of neighbouring countries and the wider region, would have been more effective. Overall, Kissinger's analysis outlines how the US failed in Afghanistan due to a lack of strategic vision and a failure to understand the situation's complexity. He concludes by noting that the US must learn from its mistakes and be more thoughtful and realistic in its future foreign policy approach.³

Jason Fritz's article, "U.S. peacebuilding in Afghanistan," explains Afghanistan's situation after 9/11 in this way. Following the collapse of the Taliban group in 2001 and the establishment of an interim government backed by the US and members of the international community, Afghanistan moved from a destructive experience to a constructive experience. At the beginning of this interim authority, headed by former president Hamid Karzai, peacebuilding efforts were led by the US in Afghanistan and based on an agreement between Afghanistan and the international community in Germany, commonly known as the Bonn agreement, United Nations and other world power such as the US, Canada, Germany, and France supported a new government of Afghanistan to make sustainable progress in different areas. "The agreement was signed by security council resolution (UNSCR) 1386 on December 20/ 2001, which provided the framework for the international community within sovereign Afghanistan. This document quickly drafted and passed placed the onus of security and rebuilding the country"⁴(Fritz,2011, p.1). Based on this agreement, the U.S. supported the government of Afghanistan to re-establish permanent institutions and practice peacebuilding to bring more stability to Afghanistan. In his paper, Fritz describes three aspects of US efforts on peacebuilding in Afghanistan, such as "the development of the Afghan National Police (ANP) to protect the Afghan population and the development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) from defending from external threats to the Afghan government. The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of armed non-state groups inside Afghanistan to provide the Afghan government with a monopoly on the organized use of violence." He reveals that the United States' philosophy on peacebuilding in Afghanistan mainly concentrated on developing the national army and national police of Afghanistan as well as the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of armed non-state groups inside Afghanistan to provide the Afghan government with a monopoly on the organized use of violence.

He also mentioned that the method of cooperation between the international community and the government of Afghanistan, led by the U.S. to improve peace peacebuilding, proved problematic for several reasons: "The Afghan leadership was inexperienced in national governance, donor nations allowed the interim inexperience authority to drive the agenda and the Kabul- focused nature of set the condition for a resurgent Taliban to challenging government control in the outlying areas of the country."⁵ From the author's perspective, the US and international community underestimated the Taliban group's ability to fight an insurgent war against the government of Afghanistan and the international security assistance force ISAF. Thus, the United States was not interested, until recently, in talking with the Taliban group to find a political solution before practicing liberal peace-building in the country.

³ *The Economist*, "Henry Kissinger on why America failed in Afghanistan". *The Economist*. (August, 2021)

⁴ Jason Fritz, "U.S. Peacebuilding in Afghanistan" *U.S.-Japan Peacebuilding Cooperation*(April, 2011):69.

⁵ *Ibid.*,68.

The U.S. mainly concentrated on establishing security and defeating the Taliban militarily. In another part of his article, Fritz said the Americans overestimated combat's value and underestimated the time needed to train Afghan forces. Nonetheless, the US peacebuilding efforts positively resulted in liberal peace policy, such as "building the Afghan National Police, building the Afghan National Army, and disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating the Taliban"⁶. However, the United States and the Government of Afghanistan did not consider a local and regional approach to peace talks to end the conflict with the Taliban group and find a political solution. In this context, the author correctly described the limited US policy in peacebuilding at the time as insufficient to stop the Afghanistan conflict.

One of the reasons that the US peace policy did not initially fully succeed was due to a liberal peace strategy. Also, another reason for the failure of the American strategy was not fully consulting with the Afghan people. Peacebuilding is a creative process that needs divergent efforts and practices rather than just military strength for long-lasting peace in society. Peacebuilding requires a new way of thinking for durable peace in society. Furthermore, culture comes into play in the peacebuilding process when considering how a group may deal with peace and express themselves. Although American peace efforts include many areas, such as supporting economic development, freedom of thought, freedom of media, and promotion of democracy in Afghan society, it is evident that by only focusing on the security approach, there is little possibility of bringing sustainable peace and making progress. In another paper, "Afghanistan, the reality of peacebuilding in a failed state," Derek Fraser examines the reason why US peacebuilding in Afghanistan did not work. He writes, "It is an axiom of peacebuilding that you cannot succeed in accomplishment any of the steps that are required to build a viable state, such as restoring the basic conditions necessary for human well-being, promoting economic growth, building the infrastructure, reforming the system of governance unless you can first establish physical security."⁷ The general purpose of Fraser's paper is that peacebuilding in post-conflict societies demands nation-building exercises to bring positive change. Otherwise, there is little possibility of ending the conflict and finding a political solution without practicing nation-building and state-building. Fraser also argues "that Afghanistan can be stable and secure only if it is well integrated into its region economically and politically."⁸ Achieving this goal will require applying a regional approach to peacebuilding to bring stability to Afghanistan.

Methodology

Each conflict is unique and needs a unique set of approaches to solve it. Generic solutions will only solve some conflicts. Resolving the conflict in Afghanistan requires external-domestic interaction to peacebuilding. This study aims to present the new paths and policies toward conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Therefore, this research paper emphasizes that cooperation between internal, regional, and international players is essential to resolve disputes in Afghanistan. Explaining how external-domestic-interaction works to resolve conflict and improve peacebuilding in Afghanistan requires the analytical framework of peacebuilding. "The analytical framework of peacebuilding interactions proposes a set of categories that seem relevant to describing and analyzing external-domestic interactions"⁹. The approach contributes to our understanding of how and under which conditions external-domestic interaction at the local level improve peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the analytical framework categories include (1) international ad hoc interaction tactics, (2) a set of domestic responses to counter international demands, (3) the domestic environment of interaction, and (4) a set of possible peacebuilding outcomes."¹⁰ Therefore, applying this framework is essential to understand the process of external-domestic interaction towards peacebuilding. In other words, "the framework allows the

⁶ Ibid.,77.

⁷ Derek Fraser, "Afghanistan The Realities of Peace-Building in a Failed State" *University of Victoria*. (September,2006):4

⁸ Ibid.,18.

⁹ Lisa Gross, "Peacebuilding and Post-War Transitions: Assessing The Impact of External-Domestic Interactions" (Routledge,2017),20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

tracing of interaction processes over time, permits the identification of interaction patterns, and enables a systematic comparison of several cases of external–domestic interactions.”¹¹

This research paper will also focus mainly on the local ownership theory and the global approach to peacebuilding. The rationale for propagating local ownership is greater efficiency and sustainability in peacebuilding activities.¹² With local ownership, peacebuilding activities are expected to encounter minimal resistance by the local actors; solutions from within are also considered more appropriate for application to sovereignty. It is said to be an activity controlled by outsiders and imposed on post-conflict nations.¹³ With its moral notion of respecting self-determination, thus comes very much to the rescue from this accusation. After all, the research aims to discover new paths and policies for peacebuilding. It would serve as an all-encompassing omnibus focusing on all the belts and bolts of the subject matter and such additional elements complementary to the success of external-domestic interaction as a new method of conflict resolution mechanisms, local, regional and international powers' approaches to peace negotiations, conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict reconciliation, peace agreements in historical context, as well as political transition. Overall, achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan requires active collaboration amongst local, regional, and global strategies for peacebuilding.

Historical Overview of the Conflict in Afghanistan

A group of Afghans contested the occupation by Soviet forces in 1979-1989, collectively called the Mujahideen. With weapons and financial backing support coming from the US and other allies, the Mujahideen eventually made the Soviet occupation too costly in lives and material for them to bear. Consequently, they withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989.

The American non-profit think tank, the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), reported, a volatile power vacuum was created in the aftermath of the post-Soviet withdrawal where the mujahideen, who had joined in a common cause against the Soviet forces, jockeyed for power and spoils. This resulted in the collapse of the then-government led by the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1992. Civil war engulfed the country, leaving appalling carnage but no clear victor¹⁴ In the face of a seriously weakened central government, the Taliban decided to make its move to invade Afghanistan. It emerged after the civil war in 1994 to become a militant group in Kandahar province), Afghan's second-largest city. They planned to move quickly to other Pashtun areas and eventually to non-Pashtun areas and Kabul. In 1994, the hard-line Islamic movement established an Islamic state in Kabul (the capital of Afghanistan). From 1994 to 2001, the Taliban movement controlled some 80 percent of the territory as they tried to expand their influence across the country. The resistance fighter group, however, was led by a well-known charismatic leader (Ahmad Shah Massoud), who exercised authority over 20 percent of the area in Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan under the Taliban government was divided into two parts. During the Taliban era, the people of Afghanistan suffered an onslaught of dangerous conflicts for over five years. Each party espoused its philosophy as to the purpose of the battle. The resistance group was headed by Massoud, who had fought the invading Soviet Union troops in 1979. When the Soviet army left, Massoud, in filling the void, struggled to bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan. The protracted conflict, however, did not allow him to achieve his goal. He believed in democracy and tried to establish a democratic government in Afghanistan. Unfortunately for him and his leader, former President Rabbani, their tenure lasted only a short time. At this juncture, the hard-line Taliban movement emerged, which proved a menace to modern society as it did not subscribe to democratic principles. Two days before the events of 9-11 in the United States, the leader of the resistance group in Afghanistan was assassinated by two terrorists. This was followed by former American President George W. Bush's decision to send U.S. troops to

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Timothy Donais, “Peacebuilding and Local Ownership Post-Conflict Consensus-Building” Routledge. (November, 2013)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ahmed Rashid, “The Taliban,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations), accessed February 20, 2023,, 3.

Afghanistan to eradicate the Taliban movement and its mentor Osama bin Laden, suspected of having masterminded the tragic attack in New York. In time, contingent upon the continued presence of the U.S. troops and the international coalition, the Afghans were looking forward to a better outcome for their country.

However, after Biden's Chaotic Withdrawal from Afghanistan, the peace process collapsed, and the Taliban returned to power. Since the Taliban announced an interim cabinet on 7 September 2021, they have been deliberately indoctrinated into a very radical and strict form of Islamic Sharia law. Examples of this strict, conservative Islamic code were as follows: public executions for those convicted of murder and severing a hand for theft. Women were forbidden to educate themselves, wear only the all-covering burqa, and be in public only in the company of a male. Its military arm banned television, music, and cinema throughout the country.

After all, Afghanistan is a country that has experienced decades of conflict and violence, from Soviet occupation to civil war to the US-led war on terror. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country has been fragile, with ongoing insurgency and political instability. Despite years of international intervention, the conflict in Afghanistan remains unresolved, and the country's future remains uncertain.

Political Transition and Prospects of Peacebuilding

Shortly after the U.S. peace deal with the Taliban, the previous Afghan government met with the Taliban political leadership in Qatar (Doha) to discuss ways to end the conflict and find a political solution. During the last two years of negotiations, until the country fell to the Taliban, the international powers, particularly the U.S., attempted to build trust between the conflicting parties and improve the peace process. However, despite the United States supporting peace negotiations, the previous Afghan government and the Taliban did not develop a trusting relationship with each other. Therefore, both sides could not improve talks to find a political solution. At this point, the United States and its allies chose to leave the country. After all, "On 15 August, the Taliban capped their drive for power in Afghanistan by taking Kabul, the country's capital, for the first time since they ruled most of the country from 1996 to 2001. With the previous government's collapse, the group is now the de facto power throughout the country and is forming a new government and revamped state system."¹⁵ There are many reasons the Doha process and the U.S. approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan have failed to achieve a positive outcome. The Americans had misjudged the strength of the Taliban and overestimated the Afghan Army and politicians'; willingness to fight. Over the last twenty years, before the U.S. and the Taliban group signed a peace agreement, the previous government of Afghanistan and its alliance with the U.S. practised military peace-building to reduce violence and bring stability to Afghanistan. The United States, being the dominant partner, insisted on the military approach as the best way to defeat the Taliban and stop the violence. Therefore, the U.S. did not have a transparent and productive strategy for Afghanistan peacebuilding to talk directly with the Taliban and find a political settlement. For this reason, when the United States applied for peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government, it committed to withdrawing its troops. Thus, the U.S. lost its leverage and opportunity to convince the Taliban to negotiate and find a political settlement with the previous government. It was very late when the U.S. government changed its policy toward the Taliban group and started negotiations to end Afghanistan's war. Furthermore, the Afghan conflict has many domestic and external stakeholders, such as Pakistan, Russia, Iran, India, and China. To stop the war and improve stability in Afghanistan, it needs to create a consensus between the U.S. approach and regional powers' strategies towards peace-building. Otherwise, there is little possibility of making progress on peacebuilding in the country. Since the U.S. appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as a special representative for Afghan reconciliation to end the conflict and find a political solution between the previous government and the Taliban group based on the Doha process, he could not work with the regional powers because they were already committed to the Taliban. Therefore, U.S. efforts on peacebuilding without regional powers' cooperation were bound to fail. Beyond the role of external powers, the former government under President Ghani also couldn't build a general agreement for peace negotiations; among his senior

¹⁵ Samina, Ahmed. "With the Taliban Back in Kabul, Regional Powers Watch and Wait" *International Crisis Group*. (August, 2021)1

Ministers, he had a widespread internal dispute with his political partner Dr. Abdullah, former Chairman of Afghanistan High Council for National Reconciliation. In addition, “over the past decade, as the United States gradually withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and the job of running the country increasingly fell to the Afghan government, the ruling class in Kabul chose not to fix the military or improve governance. Instead, political leaders focused on acquiring power and money for themselves and patronage for their cliques. They constantly sought to generate political crises or administrative paralysis to extract more patronage and rents from the central government.¹⁶ For a while, the peace process has been valued by the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan, and the problem is that they both have radically different perceptions of peace. However, the lack of coordination and cooperation between internal stakeholders and international players with regional actors regarding the peace process was the main reason the U.S. approach to the Doha peace process did not work to bring peace to Afghanistan.

Since the Taliban takeover of the country, they could not form an inclusive government and compromise with opposition groups to bring sustainable peace to Afghanistan. Despite the internal challenges the Taliban administration faces, regional countries and international powers did not recognize them as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. In order to solve the problems and find a comprehensive solution, it is essential to move forward and reorganize the Doha peace process to reach a political settlement between the Taliban and other political parties. The goal is to proactively work and contribute toward the realization of peace in Afghanistan by fully implementing the Doha agreement. Therefore, it requires discovering a new framework that focuses on collaboration between local, regional, and global strategies in peace-building.

Conflict Resolution perspective

1) Present internal peace solution

The manifestation of conflict occurs through adversarial social action, which involves two or more actors expressing their differences, often accompanied by intense hostilities. Most notably, protracted conflict arises from the failure to manage antagonistic relationships. In Afghanistan, economic difficulties, cultural diversity, and a lack of an effective and inclusive governance system have been the main cause of enduring conflicts, eventually leading to inter-ethnic rivalries and contestation over power. Thus, the path to resolving such deep-rooted conflict lies in developing various types of institutions that can renegotiate opposing economic and political interests democratically, achievable by the active involvement of regional and global actors.¹⁷

Furthermore, the conflict in Afghanistan has been ongoing for decades, and various stakeholders have sought to establish their influence and power in the region. In recent years, the conflict has experienced significant developments, including the withdrawal of US troops and the return of the Taliban to power. In this regard, new perspectives on the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan have emerged. Some key trends and approaches are as follows:

Inclusive governance: One of the most widely discussed approaches to resolving the conflict in Afghanistan is establishing a more inclusive government. This would involve bringing different stakeholders to the table, including the Taliban, and creating a power-sharing arrangement representative of the country's diverse ethnic and political landscape.

Regional diplomacy: Another approach that has gained traction is the use of regional diplomacy to help resolve the conflict. This would involve bringing neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Iran, and India, prominent regional actors, and stakeholders to the negotiating table to find a mutually acceptable and sustainable solution to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

¹⁶ Vanda Felbab Brown, “Why The Taliban Won And What Washington Can Do About It Now” *Foreign Affairs Journal*. (August, 2021)

¹⁷ Ho-Won Jeong. (2010). *Conflict management and resolution: an introduction*. Routledge.

Economic development: Some experts argue that addressing the root causes of the conflict, such as poverty and unemployment, is critical to resolving the conflict in the long term. This would involve investing in economic development, such as infrastructure and job creation programs, to address the underlying issues that have inflamed the conflict.

Humanitarian aid: The ongoing conflict has taken a significant toll on the Afghan people, with many facing displacement, food insecurity, and other humanitarian crises. Providing humanitarian aid is a critical component of any conflict resolution strategy, as it can help alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people and create a more stable environment for peace negotiations.

Women's rights: Women's rights have been a significant concern in Afghanistan, with many fearing that the gains made in recent years will be rolled back under Taliban rule. Some experts argue that protecting women's rights should be a central component of any conflict resolution strategy, as it can help create a more stable and inclusive society. Overall, the conflict in Afghanistan is complex and multifaceted; resolving it will require a range of approaches and strategies. The new perspectives on conflict resolution in Afghanistan discussed above represent some prominent insights and approaches to re-evaluate and reframe the prospects for conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, to improve peacebuilding and prevent conflict in Afghanistan, it needs to apply internal and external approaches to achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan. External-domestic interactions play a significant role in peacebuilding outcomes. Therefore, it requires strong communication and cooperation between external and domestic players to improve peacebuilding. Otherwise, if peace-builders had applied high international support and intervention, they would not have achieved a positive outcome. Experience shows that high-capacity intervention and military options towards peace-building “have failed to complete the transition to liberal democracy”¹⁸ and peaceful political transition. Examining the U.S. peace strategy in Afghanistan shows that over the last 20 years, the U.S. in Afghanistan mostly applied a military strategy to defeat the Taliban group and promote peace, which was also unsuccessful. In contrast, low global engagement facilitates the journey to peace and democracy. For example, common international interventions towards peace building in “El Salvador and Namibia have successfully transitioned into liberal democracies.”¹⁹ Understanding and applying a better strategy for post-war conditions to lead transactions to peace successfully requires active cooperation between the domestic, regional, and international powers to address the problem and bring political solutions to Afghanistan. Therefore “the logic of external–domestic interactions allowed for the identification of non-strategic elements in the interaction process that impact post-war transitions to peace and democracy in peacebuilding contexts.”²⁰

Power sharing and political stability

2)Present suggestions for a peaceful solution

On September 11, 2020, the previous Afghan government negotiators and the Taliban launched peace talks aiming to resolve the dispute and find a political solution. Most Afghan people had expected both sides would improve trust building and end the decades of war through a political settlement before the US left Afghanistan. However, despite several meetings between the previous government negotiators and Taliban political leaders, both sides failed to achieve a positive outcome. The Taliban promised to continue negotiations with various political parties to resolve power disputes peacefully under the terms of the US-Taliban peace agreement. However, instead of adopting a peaceful political transition, the Taliban forcefully seized power and declared a "caretaker government" to rule Afghanistan.

Since the Taliban took power through military force 17 months ago, they have faced internal and external legitimacy crises. The international community has refused to recognize their government as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. As a result, international powers and regional countries do

¹⁸ Gross, “Peacebuilding and Post-War Transitions”²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

not have a positive relationship with the Taliban regime. Because of this, the economic situation under the Taliban leadership is deteriorating, and most Afghans are in poverty and unable to provide for themselves. Therefore, international powers and regional actors should collaborate for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan in order to reach a political resolution between the Taliban and opposition groups. Otherwise, ISIS and al-Qaeda may expand their networks nationwide and provide a safe haven for international terrorists. To move forward and bring about constructive changes in Afghanistan, the Taliban and other political parties must share power in order to address the issues and improve political stability. Research shows that “nearly all the peace accords signed in the last two decades have included power-sharing in one form or another.”²¹ In the case of Afghanistan, the best way to prevent more conflict is to resolve a power struggle between the Taliban and the opposition parties. In the absence of power-sharing, it can be challenging to achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan. In other words, power-sharing governance is key to achieving political peace and stability in Afghanistan. Indeed, multi-ethnic societies like Afghanistan must adopt power sharing to improve peace and democracy. According to McCulloch, “consociationalism and centripetalism” are designed for power sharing in resolving disputes in conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan. He explains that “Consociationalists” seek widely inclusive institutions that facilitate the representation of all relevant groups in government and other critical political institutions.” However, “Centripetalists” seek a process of cross-group vote-pooling meant to enhance the rewards moderation.²² Examining both systems shows that consociationalism is the best approach to sharing power between the Taliban and other political parties. Under this model, if the position of the presidency is granted to the Pashtun ethnicity, Tajik would hold the position of prime minister, a Shia Muslim, such as Hazara, would fill the position of president of the parliament and a member of the Uzbek community would serve as deputy speaker. One model of consociationalism, in which the highest offices are proportionately reserved for representatives from certain religious communities, can be found in Lebanon. In that country, the President has to be a Maronite Christian; the Speaker of the Parliament, a Shi'a Muslim; and the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim.

This approach is designed to establish a widely inclusive government that allows the representation of all ethnicities to contribute positively to the state and other organizations. Without this power sharing between the Taliban leaders and other political parties, there is little possibility of resolving disputes and improving political stability in Afghanistan

Conclusion

The United States’ approach to peace-building failed in Afghanistan as the Taliban took over the country. However, the power struggles between the Taliban and other political parties have yet to be resolved. To bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, the Taliban administration needs to continue negotiations with their rivals and apply reconciliation and inclusiveness to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country. Failure to do this, the Taliban administration will not bring about peace and govern the country independently. All parties must be at the table and have a share in governing the country. International powers and regional actors still have leverage on the Taliban administration to convince them to talk with other political parties to improve reconciliation, and it is essential that this be achieved

Peace-building can address the root causes and effects of the country’s instability, bring about reconciliation between the various parties, establish the normalization of relationships, and build enduring institutions to reduce conflict and violence for the benefit of all the Afghan people. Ignoring the constructive aspects of peaceful reconstruction explains one reason why a robust U.S. military peace-building program failed to bring peace to Afghanistan. Its approach ignored the role of local issues and regional needs in peace-building. To end the conflict and practise sustainable peace-building in potential post-conflict countries like Afghanistan, one needs to consider the problems of the primary actors (Afghanistan and the Taliban) and the needs of the local, regional actors, and perhaps some

²¹ Allison McCulloch, “Power-Sharing and Political Stability in Deeply Divided Societies” Routledge. (April, 2014),.1.

²² Ibid..44

international actors. There is also a good possibility of developing lasting peace by considering a new policy on peace negotiations involving regional countries such as Russia, Pakistan, India, China, and Iran. However, viewing only regional actors, peacebuilding is not enough to improve a long-standing peace. The situation also demands emerging partnerships between the international powers and local and regional actors to bring sustainable peace to Afghanistan. This is achievable, but it means all parties must come to the table in good faith and have peace as their number one priority.

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