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# Afghan Peace Process And The Uncertain Future Of Afghanistan

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## Abstract

The present war in Afghanistan is known as the most deadliest war in the region and it is predicated that still there is no solution seems of the conflict which is very dangerous for Afghanistan as well as for the entire region. The main aim of this article is to forecast the uncertain future of Afghanistan, the peace process, challenges, Taliban and American role in the war on terror with regard the future of Afghanistan. In addition the attempts which were made by the different external and internal players whose efforts have not yet provided a fruitful and positive solution for the innocent people of Afghanistan. Whereas the present conflicts focus on the origin, adjoining, dimensions and challenges of the current conflict in Kabul. The people of the war weary country looking for those who have settle down the issues of weak governance, rampant corruption, security issues, Talibanization, foreigners interference, neighbors, western vested interests and to find out the solution of the presence challenges, peace process and future strategies towards peace and prosperity to the country, however skeptic say that peace has never been closer in Afghanistan since the talks amongst the Taliban and US began.

**Key Words:** Afghan Taliban, Uncertainty, Peace Process, Poverty, Power, American Role, Pakistan peace driver, Challenges

## Preface

The United States invaded in 2001 in Afghanistan with aim to eradicate the Taliban and their allies from the power in Kabul. After trying to removing the Taliban from Afghan ground since from 2001 the western forces failed to do so, and some 18 years later, the American government is eventually ready to negotiate with Taliban and bring peace in the country. So for that reason U.S is started peace deal with the Afghan Taliban. In 18 Jan 2019 US began peace talks with the Taliban to discuss a peace deal and to withdraw their troops from Kabul, in the initial stage the people of Afghanistan have been left in the dark about both the process and the details of those dealings but later on the talks is displayed on

social media and eventually on 29 Feb 2020 after more than one year of official discussion amongst Taliban and U.S. representative, the two sides concluded peace accord and laying the ground for the withdrawal of United States military forces from Kabul, and for peace talks amid Afghan government and the Taliban.

The peoples of Afghanistan has very uncertain about their future and had little choice because this latest chapter of peace talks taking place in confidentiality and uncertainty, is suggestive of the entire process so far, spreading fear and angst in the country. The United States peace representative Mr Zalmay Khalilzad has spoken at the length about the negotiations in many interviews has insisted that he “feel very good’ about the peace talks and that ‘substantive progress” has been made, but has exposed little about the matter of the discussions taking place behind closed doors. Pressed on why it considers that Taliban will hold up their end of the negotiate, which must includes assurances regarding counter terrorism and an inclusive truce, the Donald Trump government has responded to this issue because Afghans living through the daily murder and domination of war , mostly committed by the various anarchic groups of Taliban and war lords.

Approximately 6000 civilian were killed in first quarter 2020 in Afghanistan<sup>1</sup> and mostly were claimed by the Taliban, although it is noted that Afghan security forces and their U.S allies mostly killed a larger number of civilians. In one side the American’s and Afghan security forces busy to killed the innocent civilians and the other side the Taliban has increased attacks on the peoples, so the civilians sandwiches amongst these two groups. As a result when the peace talks were announced, civilians across the country mobilized and expressed their anxiety about the chaotic nature of the negotiations, in particular around the exclusion of the Afghan unity government, women and minority group’s representatives who were banned at the Taliban’s insistence.

A large of civil activists have argued that agreeing to the demands of the terror factions would legitimize its position and encourage it to use the lives of Afghan civilians as influence in the talks, but these voices have been excluded from the peace talks and silenced by the many coercion, the Taliban has made against anyone who dares to speak against them. The U.S peace envoy’s wife Cheryl Benard, wrote an opinion piece in which she criticized Afghan women for speaking out with their concerns in U.S media, she wrote “Emancipation and quality are not the product of pity or guilty, and [Afghan Women] are not owed them by someone else’s army” she arguing that women needed to work for themselves and demand a seat at the table.<sup>2</sup> Actually the peace accord is not a guarantee of peace in the Kabul but it is a hope for peace in between the conflicting parties.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Jazeera dated October 27, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Mosadiq, Horia & Halamimzai, Sahar, the Afghan Peace deal will not bring peace to the Afghan people. Al-Jazeera dated September 03, 2019.

After Donald Trump administration the Joe Biden is not likely to change course on the military drawdown specially as this has now gone so far ahead. In addition the presidential election in the past not favoured continued armed engagement in Kabul and instead urged an end to forever wars. A key question is how early and substantively the Biden management focuses on the Kabul issues given its important domestic program and other more pressing foreign policy priorities.

### **Who signed the Peace Accord?**

A comprehensive political accord amongst the following parties is signed after two years of official struggled:-

1. In the first phase commitments of the four parties included the United States, Taliban, Afghan government and NATO.
2. In the second phase included of two parties, the Afghan government and the Taliban.
3. In the third phase comprised Pakistan and Afghanistan, both countries signed simultaneously with the main completed settlement.
4. In the four phase of peace accord a declaration by supporting countries that also would be signed at that time with the main settlement.
5. In the fifth phase which include as an additional documents a side peace accord between the important pro-government Afghan supporting parties and groups stating that the Kabul government's signature on the agreement represents the assent of all these factions. The duty of these factions to defuse current disputes amongst the parties and it would constitute a sufficiently representative negotiating team on the anti-Taliban side.<sup>3</sup>

### **A Core Bargaining of the Peace Treaty**

The peace agreement comprise the under mentioned major deal;-

A complete rejection by the Taliban of association with global terror groups.

- a. A comprehensive end of hostilities and ceasefire for bringing peace in the country.
- b. It is decided to completely phase wise ending of the persistent NATO / US military mission in Kabul, based on completion of peace agreement accomplishment milestones.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, Laurel E, Black, Jonathan S. Envisioning a Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Afghanistan. RAND Corporation, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- c. The Afghanistan local parties invited the world community to come and form a small, limited Afghan support team and focused entirely on assistance and counter terrorism action against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in Khorasan Province, to organize the team.
- d. Political arrangement within Kabul that include comprehensive and broad based version as the basic guiding principles.
- e. In the agreement the parties agreed that a process for the adoption of a new constitution within a year, with some factors and principles for the new constitution included in the peace accord text.
- f. The charter of 2004 in effect until the adoption of a new constitution, except where inconsistent with the accord 2004.<sup>5</sup>
- g. In this peace agreement the presidential system was discussed, with somewhat reduced powers for the president and increased balancing of presidential power compared with the existing structure.
- h. A modern degree of delegation of power to the local level of government to promote wide distribution of power between demographic and political groups in the territory where they are determined and recalibrate the centre regions relationship, but a shift toward more opportunities for a greater number of political and demographical factions to exercise a share of government power.
- i. To facilitate the government and provide flexibility to the government arrangements at the district and lower level, to create space for localization solutions.
- j. The establishment of high council of Islamic scholars with roles in evaluating the consistency of legislation with Islamic tenets and principles and in advising the government.
- k. The security arrangements that include reconstitution of the armed forces to make leadership more inclusive and broadly representative of the common mass and to provide equal opportunity for inclusion amid the rank and file.
- l. Prepared a single Air Force, Border Police, Army and Intelligence Services.
- m. Transfer of policing responsibility to the regional level.<sup>6</sup>
- n. Intermediary security arrangements until recondition that forces of each side responsible for security and public order in areas over which they exercise control, in accordance with negotiated map of territory of responsibility.
- o. Organization of a joint military commission with duties including coordination across the areas of responsibility and implementing of joint command structure.

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<sup>5</sup>Afghanistan's Constitution of 2004, 20 Jul 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- p. Founding of a joint implementation commission composed of the parties of the agreement, responsible for resolving any disputes over interpretation of the agreement.<sup>7</sup>

### **Key Achievement Risks**

There's a huge problem in any peace accord in Kabul, no matter how closely it does or does not resemble the concord we present, will be weak to implementation failure. Harmony implementation processes subsequent severe and protected conflict reasonably is inclined to be fraught in general; in this article I highlighted some specific risks for Afghanistan in particular.

### **Power Sharing could Worsen Kabul's Political Liability**

Over the last two decades, Kabul politics even without involvement of the Taliban have been fractions, democratic, political strength has been delicate and competition for resources has been intense. Establishment is still fragile and therefore provides little weight for the country. Indeed drawing the mainly Pashtun Taliban into the political majority could introduce another political fault line amid the Pashtuns as well as for Kabul. Powerful Afghan leadership and robust outside support will be needed to defeat the naturally weak prospects of reaching a political settlement that is so clear and recognized in its terms that its implementation is not threatened by continual political instability and power struggles.<sup>8</sup>

### **Security Harmony will be though to Achieve**

The main issue of the unitary government is the security accord which is the most complex elements to negotiate and perhaps the area of greatest execution weakness will be security arrangements for the urgent aftermath of a peace agreement, regardless of whether the parties adopted a comprehensive or phased approach to concluding an agreement. If the peace talking parties and their fighters and soldiers do not have clear understandings of who is authorized to use force and where they are endorsed to use it during the accomplishment epoch, any accord could quickly unravel as a result of escalation of local disputes, purposeful spoiling, or other reason for outbreaks of fighting.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Sifton, John, Flawed Charter for a Land Ruled by Fear, International Herald Tribune, Jan 07 2004.

<sup>8</sup> George, Susannah & Hassan, Sharif, Rival Afghan Leaders signed power sharing agreement, breaking political deadlock. The Washington Post, 17 May 2020.

<sup>9</sup>Sipus, Mallory Sutika, Senior Research Analyst, Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between The US and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, May 2, 2012.

During peace agreement the fighting factions are containing spoilers internal to Afghanistan. Those individuals or clusters on any side of the clash that resist the terms and condition wish to see the peace agreement fail. The major way to mitigate this risk in the negotiation segment will be to achieve the maximum extent of consensus and real commitment to the peace agreement as probable. In the completion phase, each side will need to exercise responsibility for organization the potential spoilers within its ranks. Likewise each side will need to police those among its ranks who might effort reprisals against their earlier rivals.<sup>10</sup>

### **The US & NATO Losing the Peace in Kabul**

Almost twenty years of foreign forces intervention in Kabul, the political bar for reinsertion of forces at least on the part of the NATO and US will likely be quite high. Political support for an accord on the part of territory powers and global monetary support could somewhat mitigate the lack of a hard power assurance of achievement. Strong cooperation among the regional powers in common support of Kabul's strength, although not impossible would be historically strange, though the lack of external guarantors would mean that implementation would rely on interior Afghan guarantee to making the concord work and the local power's willingness to at least avoid unhelpful interference. If the United States any genuine plan in Kabul, it seems to be fighting a war of attrition long enough and well adequate for the threaten to drop to a level that Afghan armed forces can handle or accept a peace settlement credible enough for the American to depart. After twenty years of combat, no one at any level is claiming that enough progress has been made in strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces to win; the Afghan Armed Forces is in very vulnerable situation to tackle the security problem of the country.<sup>11</sup>

Security is not the only quagmire of the Kabul, there are so many dilemmas and the west are fully aware of the problems so for that reason the United States is not openly address, but that the U.S will still have to live with. The U.S knows that the only way to swiftly end role in Kabul and may be equivalent of announcing victory in peace talks and leaving, signing a peace agreement with the Taliban that is far more likely to succeed than fail. Subsequently U.S signed a peace agreement on 28 Feb 2020 and living is likely to be no different than declaring victory and leaving. About all that could be said for such a choice is that the world has already more or less accepted the fact the U.S may not win in Afghanistan. In addition one way to win this war to stop playing, it will be United States,

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<sup>10</sup>Gaddis, J.L, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War", International Security 19 (1992-1993).pp142.

<sup>11</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., The Afghan War of Attrition; Peace Talks remain an extension of War by others means, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jul 16, 2018.

Russia, Iran, China, India, Pakistan and South Asian states that inherit the resulting chaos. It is hard to see how they will be any less likely to lose by winning.<sup>12</sup>

Honestly speaking building durable peace in Kabul will require support from or at least noninterference on the part of a group of countries that are not naturally close collaborators and are, in some cases, absolute competitors. This group includes India, China, Russia, Iran, Central Asian States; American's in itself is struggle for power in Afghanistan and eyeing on Iran which could affect Iran's willingness to support a peace negotiations, outcome influenced greatly by US. But Iran will need to weight its disinterest in falling in step with US policy in Kabul against its interest in the stability of its neighbors. The United States trying to influence on China to contain his business in the globe and entirely wanted to counter Russian influence in Kabul as well as in Central Asia. The problem of the Washington is that when US wants to implement new policies in South Asia they begin pushing Pakistan to come to the theater to play a positive role for the American interests and Pakistan numerous times executed this uphill task without informing to their civilians and harms the innocent peoples of the country in various sides of life.<sup>13</sup>

### **Internal diffusion in Taliban**

The recent peace agreement amid the Taliban's and US was base on religious principles, and no official from the Islamic Emirates should violate these agreements. Though, there is no absolute centrality between the Taliban, so the disparity amid the Taliban factions and dominant fighters on whether to abandon their preconditions for ending the clash in Kabul, how to adjust preconditions such as the release of Taliban prisoners and so on are important. As the Afghan Ministry of Defense's ex-chief of staff Asadullah Kahlid has said, the Taliban are in problem, and there is some variety of disaster in the faction and he said "It is predicted that some branches may breach the terms of the peace agreement, so the Taliban should control all its members". In fact during the peace process, the Taliban carried out large and small scale of armed attacks in Helmand, Uruzgan, Balk, Ghazni and some other provinces of the country. Presently, an offshoot of the Taliban is opposed to the United States peace accord, and some dissatisfied Taliban elements may defend some ISIS or other extremist groups.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bandow, Doug. American's Disastrous Occupation of Afghanistan Turns 17 Years, CATO Institute Washington, DC, October 11, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Malkasian, Carter, How the Good War went bad "American's slow motion failure in Afghanistan. Foreign Affairs New York volume 99, number 2, dated April 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Watkins, Andrew. Taliban Fragmentation; A figment of your imagination? Texas National Security Reviews dated September 4, 2019.

It is further forecast that the hostility is persistent, everyone expected that after the signing of the peace agreement the Taliban and the US fighting would be condensed and the ground for intra-Afghan negotiations be shaped. But the situation is unpleasant, while the Taliban appear to have respected their peace agreement not to assault coalition forces and United States; they have continued assaults on Afghan security forces. This is happening while there are no UN peacekeeping forces or neutral third party to guarantee security, and armed factions may be destructive to the peace development. Foes of the peace deal argue that the Taliban's capacity to control violence is limited even they wish to, and the release of five thousand Taliban prisoners may lead to an augmentation in fighting and also increasing aggression and also increasing from Afghan government.<sup>15</sup>

### **Trump's Administration Political Hope**

The signing of an agreement with the Taliban could be a win-win situation for US President Donald Trump as he seeks re-election. However, the US has said that it will carefully monitor the Taliban's pledges to its obligations and adjust its plan to withdraw its troops in line with future Taliban deeds. Subsequently the signing of a peace accord does not mean the end of the war, but the beginning of a long path must be managed with all its dangers and benefits. Now the US administration planning for the future, that what is clear is that the process of achieving a widespread peace with the Taliban in Kabul is very complex. That means the disputes such as fully recognizing the Taliban and the Kabul government, discussing the nature of a US and NATO departure, providing security and replacing the UN peacekeeping forces in the country, the Taliban's commitments to human rights, women's right and religious minorities, inclusive elections and freedom in the future political system of Kabul, and the integration of the Taliban's members into the current Afghan police and army will require prolonged and serious negotiations.<sup>16</sup>

### **Peace Obstacle amid the Afghan government and the Taliban**

The way out of the deadlock is a multi-ethnic, and broad based government that includes the Taliban as a major partner. There's another peace agreement that was reaching amongst the Kabul government and the Taliban on 01 December 2020 in Doha, Qatar, offers some anticipation for moving further on substantive issues. In a way it is a momentous step forward, but it is just a framework of how peace negotiations should proceed should have been worked out in the first few days. It has probably taken some months of discussion on seeking common ground on how the peace talks should proceed amid the

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<sup>15</sup> Terrestria, Niels. Rebel Governance, Rebel Legitimacy, and External Intervention, Assessing three Phases of the Taliban Rule in Afghanistan. Small Wars & Insurgencies Journal Volume No. 31, 2020 dated 25 May 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, Clayton, Afghanistan; Background and US Policy in brief, Congressional Research Report, 10 Nov 2020.



Kabul government and Taliban. That would give a proposal of the mind-setup of the members looking for a peace agreement on how to bring a long clash to a conclusion.<sup>17</sup>

When Taliban and Afghan Unity government met in Doha the excitement generated by the contract on how to conduct meetings may have been prompted by an urge to see a little visible development on the way to a comprehensive agreement. But fast on the heels of the so-called agreement there was an uptick in aggression in Kabul. The Taliban, the armed forces of Kabul and US Air Force launched deadly assaults causing the deaths of civilians and combatants on a large scale across the country. The peace process would now be impacted by the interior dynamics of a quarrel and by the changing regional environment. Then there is a change of leadership in the United States, the new administration in America would have to deal with the prospectus of a multifaceted scenario, the Taliban approving to allow some US national forces in the Kabul in exchange for a transnational government dominated by the Taliban.<sup>18</sup>

The opportunity of US rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its impact on the Kabul circumstances is another imponderable, but what the new US leadership would positively have to face is the increasing level of fighting if a settlement is not reached soon adequate. And its assessment of the current situation in Kabul, the US administration would have to take cognisance of the subsequent ground realities;-

1. The Dr Ashraf Ghani's administration remains the biggest obstacle to any settlement with the Taliban.
2. No government that does not include the Taliban would be able to defeat Daesh, the Turkistan Islamic Movement or other belligerent outfits operation in the country. Only a Taliban inclusive government can bring long-lasting peace to the war-ravaged country.<sup>19</sup>
3. The Taliban have detached all links with Al-Qaeda, if anything's, Al-Qaeda is now an enemy.
4. The Taliban have no trans-border objectives, they are just a "Sharia" enforcement movement restrained to Afghanistan.
5. The key to resolving the deadlocks in peace negotiations lies with the US and Afghan government cannot survive without outside monetary support. Any real pressure brought to bear upon a stressed Afghan government would yield a tangible outcome.

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<sup>17</sup>Kaura, Vinay. Hurdles on the Road to Peace in Afghanistan, Middle East Institute, 26 Aug, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Tanzeem, Ayesha, Afghan Taliban Delegation in Islamabad to Discuss Peace Talks. Central & South Asia Voice of America, 16 December 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Mohmand, Rustam Shah. Afghan Peace Talks and its many Hurdles, The Express Tribune, 15 Dec 2020.

6. The new intermediary government will be established by convening a Loya Jorga, the traditional and time honoured Kabul institution that is respected all across the country.
7. The way out of the peace deadlock is a multi-ethnic, board based government that includes the Taliban as a major partner and other factions including those currently in the administration.
8. Persistence of the status quo will be dangerous because the growing polarization would spread anarchy that could engulf the adjacent countries also.<sup>20</sup>

These are some suggested aspects that would need to be incorporated in any approach or initiative for ending the conflict and leads the country on a path to sustainable peace. Contrary to the opinion expressed by certain quarters there are no spoilers of the peace process other than those at present at the controls of Kabul. All regional countries would benefit extremely from a stable and peaceful Kabul that would reach out to all regional and global powers to shelter its stability and make improvement to change the lives of poor peoples who have suffered for too long. And any continuation of the conflict would enhancement disaster in country.

In the Joe Biden administration all is not lost for the Kabul administration, which has hundreds of thousands of soldiers fighting for it and has backing in urban centers. Much would depend on the policy Joe Biden, the elected President of the United States, would take towards Kabul and the outcome of the peace talks. President Joe Biden said his government would depart all US soldiers from Kabul in his first term, which ends in 2025. Besides this the NATO leadership has also committed to funding Kabul soldiers for four more years. The Biden administration admitted that the good news is that in spite of the massive disputes, both sides the Taliban and Afghan government remain at the peace negotiating table, and appear to have reached an early breakthrough. The American administration has assurance to assume any further armed pulling out responsibility and in spite of the uncertainty, this may be a key moment for the peace process to rearrange and regain momentum.<sup>21</sup>

The American's new management is worried about the Afghan peace talks because the Kabul fight is multi-dimensional, involving Afghans, international and regional actors. Due to its complexity, no single actor holds the key to resolving the crisis and therefore, the interests and concerns of these actors shall be taken into consideration.

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<sup>20</sup>Worden, Scott. Gridlocked Afghan Peace Talks Overcome another Hurdle, United States Institute of Peace, 10 Dec 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Johnny, Stanly. With US drawing down troops, what next for Afghanistan, 24 Nov 2020.

## **Conclusion**

In the Afghan peace process there seems a huge trust deficit amongst the internal stakeholders of the Kabul peace process, e.g., the Afghan government, the Taliban and the elites. So there is direct need to remove the trust dearth between the internal stakeholders of the peace process. The involvement of external stakeholders is the key for establishing peace in Kabul. However, the insurgents do not fully consider the US very sincere in her peace plan and are thus reluctant to wholeheartedly join the peace initiatives. Subsequently, there is a need on the part of the US to show her sincerity in the peace process. Confidence building is the need of the hour, the guarantors of peace talks need to play a middle role to convince the conflicting parties, and Kabul and US authorities to an equally beneficial deal for all striving sections of Kabul who want peace.

The local stakeholders must be included in the peace talk's process and their steps for peace must be encouraged. Iran is a key stakeholder in the peace process and ignoring it cannot bring favourable effects on the peace process in Kabul. The faction initiatives for restoration of peace e.g., Quadrilateral Coordination Group and other similar setups must also coordinate their efforts for a viable solution of the issue. There is maximizing support for the slogan, "the Afghan peace must be Afghan owned" the former president of Kabul Mr Hamid Karzai and all prominent analysts support the maxim for peace. Consequently the external stakeholders must play a facilitation role by providing opportunities for the varying Kabul internal stakeholders to get together and converse their problems.

Islamabad must play key role in Kabul's stability and peace; her role needs to be accepted by all stakeholders both external and internal. However Pakistan's facilitating role must also be coordinated with Russia and China for maximizing the outcome of the process for peace rebuilding and all must play their role up to their maximum extent. Because she is the driver of peace in Kabul, so she needs to drive carefully taking all the important stakeholders to the main direction and achieve the goal.

An additional significant question is the US armed forces withdrawal from Kabul, their depart must be dealt with according to a given timeframe which should be agreed upon by all the stakeholders. The dilemmas of the government system and constitution must be dealt with great care and collaboration of main internal stakeholders. Although it is fully understandable that the US, Pakistan and other long time Afghan supporters are trying to exert financial leverage to incentivize the new Taliban regime to preserve rights and gains, the economic situation is going downhill rapidly. The issues of Power, Poverty and Peace (PPP) is challenging for Afghan Taliban.

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