



Looking towards Peace in Afghanistan after the US-NATO Withdrawal

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Abstracts

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Panel 1: Complexities of the Formal Peace Process

Faiz Zaland

Complexities of the Formal Peace Process in Afghanistan

Over the past few months, numerous qualitative changes have taken place in the peace process of Afghanistan. This includes the on-going high level of violence, lack of political consensus in Kabul, trust deficit among the two sides, the hasty US troop withdrawal for September 2021, the conquering strategy of Taliban and national as well as regional spoilers playing a more proactive role in destabilizing the current momentum of the peace process. Therefore, this research paper will comprehensively analyse the complexities of the formal peace process in Afghanistan that have affected the optimism for the process.

This paper will analyse certain underlying principles, such as peacebuilding efforts, and the role of these principles play in the making of the peace process in Afghanistan to answer the question “what are the main complexities in the formal peace process of Afghanistan?” It will initially provide a theoretical foundation describing peacebuilding efforts, the main actors of the peace process in Afghanistan. Next, the paper provides an account of the historical events, regional, and international efforts for the peace building support in Afghanistan, that brought about the Doha Peace Process and are trying to open a new venue for Afghan peace talks in Istanbul, Turkey.

With these immense accounts and international efforts in place, the paper will then examine the role of national, regional and international actors in bringing peace to Afghanistan with special attention to the US and Taliban peace agreement in 29th Feb 2020 in Doha, Qatar which paved way to an intra Afghan dialogue in Doha. The Agreement still faces a stalemate in leading towards a viable permanent ceasefire and negotiated peace settlement between the Afghan conflict parties. It will then conclude with a discussion of the question, “Do we have hope for Afghan peace?”



Meredith Preston McGhie

Pluralism in the Intra-Afghan Peace Process: Options and Risks

Afghanistan is a varied and diverse nation. Afghanistan's diversity is one of its great strengths. This diversity, however, has not always been well-managed and has contributed to the endemic conflict, violence and insecurity witnessed in the country. This paper argues that diversity need not necessarily lead to conflict in Afghanistan; that, on the contrary, pluralism (the positive response to diversity) can enrich and strengthen the nation. After defining pluralism and its application to peace processes, the paper highlights how a pluralist lens can be incorporated into the intra-Afghan peace process, some considerations for the parties to the conflict and to national stakeholders and the international community, as well as risks and challenges of such an approach. The paper draws from international examples of peace agreements and processes to argue that a greater consideration for pluralism can help facilitate agreement, build confidence between parties and ultimately lead to more sustainable agreements. However, the paper also suggests that current approaches to inclusion in Afghanistan and elsewhere are flawed, as they both fail to recognise the true range of diversity in a particular context (by focusing exclusively on Women and Youth, for example) as well as privileging form over substance by emphasising representation in delegations rather than broad consultation and impact upon outcomes.

Alex Thier

The Nature of the Afghan State: Republic vs. Emirate

The Afghan government, backed by public opinion and a declaration of the April 2019 consultative Peace loya jirga, has stated that the Afghan peace negotiations must uphold the integrity of the Islamic Republic's system. The Taliban have expressed a clear desire for a more "Islamic system" of government and continue to call themselves an "Islamic emirate." These seemingly opposite demands obscure a more nuanced discussion about what form of government may satisfy both negotiating parties' desire for a system that can achieve mutual goals of a peaceful and inclusive state that respects Islamic values. This paper focuses on the elements and principles of governance rather than labels to identify opportunities for compromise.

For example, parties to the Afghan conflict have suggested that a constitutional review may be necessary for a successful peace process that results in a legitimate and sustainable peace. Many want to keep the existing Afghan constitution virtually unchanged, while others reject the 2004 document as either illegitimate or unworkable, potentially presenting a difficult hurdle at the outset of Afghanistan peace negotiations (APN). Agreeing on a reform process, let alone on challenging substantive issues, will not be easy. Furthermore, the current peace process in



Afghanistan is likely to resurface a longstanding debate about the right balance of political power between the central government and local governance institutions. Decentralization has been a vexing issue for many decades but may provide opportunities in the current peace process because it creates more pieces of the political pie to divide among the factions that are fighting for more power.

Panel 2: Regional Policies Towards Afghan Peace

Nilofar Sakhi

Afghanistan's Geopolitics and Transnational Challenges and the Opportunities for a Political Settlement

Historically, securing Afghanistan's peace and stability has been challenging for a number of reasons. Sophisticated internal political manoeuvring has led to divides over what issues are considered to be in the country's national interest. External geopolitical factors, including regional neighbours' long-standing and conflicting interests in war and peace in Afghanistan, have also made peace and security elusive. Afghanistan's fragility is both a threat and an opportunity for countries in the region. They have used Afghanistan as their surrogate to achieve their strategic and political goals. At the same time, the transnational security challenges posed by Afghanistan threatens the security of her neighbouring states and the region more broadly. An unstable and insecure Afghanistan is a threat to her neighbours because militant, terrorist, and criminal activity could bleed more deeply into their territories. However, Afghanistan in South and Central Asia could provide opportunities for business connectivity and economic development through regional cooperation, which could lead to peace, security, and prosperity in Afghanistan.

The current Afghan peace process has so far only addressed the regional component of the Afghan conflict by holding irregular meetings between the Afghan government and neighbouring and regional countries' representatives. There is no organized platform from which to produce a signed agreement on issues concerning peace and security in the country. Against this backdrop, the proposed chapter aims to examine and highlight the external factors and transnational challenges facing Afghanistan that impede and could promote peace and security and lead to political settlement. This article discusses regional dynamics through the lens of contemporary developments in Afghanistan's peace process and the region to forecast a new trajectory for Afghan-regional relations.



Malaiz Daud

From State-Centric Conceit to Deep Time Reckoning: A Possible Pathway to Peace in Afghanistan?

In this article, I explore the discrepancies between the temporal imperatives of the 'international community' and those of the social structures inhabiting Afghanistan, even overflowing its nominal, albeit 'internationally-sanctioned', borders. I demonstrate that fixation on state as the undisputed medium of social organization fails to capture the nature and behaviour of social structures that either stand in direct opposition to current national states - of Pakistan and Afghanistan, in particular - or compromise their sovereignties to the extent that national states in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been rendered incapable of providing stability and security. These conditions of national stability are required to not only move both countries away from an array of social malaises but also ensure better regional security and integration. I will be taking stock of resilient structures that have weathered the test of time again and again and are, thus, poised to withstand another test in the form of the withdrawal of the foreign military troops from Afghanistan and in all likelihood shape its post-withdrawal future. Therefore, I propose the following: a) reverting to exploration, analysis and explanation of temporalities indigenous to Afghanistan, and the region, to bring about fresh understanding of the current conflict, b) moving away from focusing on national states as decisive institutions for waging the current conflict and, even more so, creating peace and, c) establishing better understanding of and with the social structures more in step with the aspirations of a war-weary peoples of Afghanistan and Pakistani regions close to the Durand Line.

Amina Khan

Regional policies towards Afghan peace

The war in Afghanistan, which has spanned over 19 years appears to be coming to a rather inconclusive end, with the political, security, and economic transition processes still in a limbo. With limited gains, Afghanistan is far from being stable, as it continues to be challenged by a plethora of problems, thus presenting challenges to the international community, the region, and its neighbouring states, particularly Pakistan. Given its proximity to Afghanistan, common linkages and its close association with elements and events inside Afghanistan, Pakistan is perhaps the most important regional player that has always been directly affected by events in Afghanistan. Despite the apparent commonalities, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been strained and uneasy at best, with the exception of a few brief moments of stability. While the relationship has failed to evolve due to perpetual differences, both countries do realise the need for a broad-based relationship that revolves around mutual respect and cooperation.



Furthermore, perplexed by instability in Afghanistan, there is a realization within the region that the geopolitical dynamics are not what they used to, new and multiple actors that have taken centre stage with new realities, and strategic rivalries over and in Afghanistan have increased. As a result, region regional actors, namely Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran, and Central Asian states have come to the realisation that they no longer can stay on the sidelines, nor depend on the international community, but rather it is time for them to take ownership of the region. Despite their previous differences and diverging interests, it appears that, for the first time, these regional states appear to be on the same page and have a common (regional) vision for the future of Afghanistan.

Hence the aim of this study is to recognise the ongoing critical developments in the peace process and focus on their impacts. The study also aims to focus on regional stakeholders — Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China, their increasing role in the peace process as well as the challenges that stand in the way of an integrated region that is based a common vision for a strong, enduring, and comprehensive partnership. Lastly, a macro-level assessment of the security risks the region as a whole and Pakistan in particular may face in the aftermath of the withdrawal is essential.

Ambassador Janan Mosazai

The Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship: A role for Pakistan in promoting regional peace?

At the heart of Afghanistan's contentious relationship with its neighbour, Pakistan, is the question of what legitimate role Pakistan could play in promoting peace in Afghanistan. This paper scopes out the potential and rationale for why Pakistan should support the ongoing peace process in Afghanistan - not only as an end in itself, but also as an opportunity to play a leading role in the area of regional peace and connectivity.

Panel 3: The End-state and Post-conflict Governance

Amin Saikal

Transition and post-governance conflict in Afghanistan

The mosaic and landlocked country of Afghanistan is in the grip of long-term structural instability. The prevailing centralised presidential system of governance is unlikely to endure for too long following the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country by 11 September 2021. Three scenarios may be envisaged at this stage: an Afghanisation of the conflict, with potential neighbourly and regional actors' involvement in support of different groups for contrasting interests; a very shaky power-sharing arrangement



between the conflicting Afghan parties, with the Taliban having a substantial share; and a collapse of the current government and Taliban takeover of power. In each case, state structures are bound to experience fundamental changes. The only system that could possibly prove to be viable in the medium run is a decentralised one within the framework of a weak state in dynamic relations with strong micro-societies. Yet, this would require a degree of national unity that Afghanistan has not seen for more than forty years.

Astri Suhrke and Susanne Schmeidl **Aid for sustainable peace in Afghanistan - Round Two**

The basic principles of peacebuilding are well known and many were reflected in the declaratory policies that framed the international aid engagement in Afghanistan after 2001. While the principles were rarely followed in practice, the experience of the past two decades affirms their continued relevance.

Two kinds of peacebuilding strategies pursued in Afghanistan in the past two decades are examined here to draw out insight for future aid strategies: a) macro-level efforts to establish state and societal structures as foundations for peace and stability, and b) micro-level social and political peacebuilding addressing coercion and violent conflict in specific areas or for specific groups. The macro strategy, heavily funded by donors, had limited success and distinct counterproductive results, contributing to new conflicts and a revived Taliban. Peacebuilding efforts focussing on the grassroots level – funded on a much smaller scale – had some positive results, particularly when working with traditional actors (e.g. religious figures, tribal elders) and customary structures.

The general conclusions echo findings in the peacebuilding literature and the broader debate on aid strategies for Afghanistan. There is a place for both top-down and bottom-up strategies. Time-frames must be realistic to allow bottom-up peacebuilding efforts to be coordinated with top-down policies. Effective peacebuilding on both the micro and macro level must be inclusive (of ideology, ethnicity and gender). Aid must be conflict-and context-sensitive. Building peace is not a project that can be bought with massive aid funds, but a long-term inter-generational and contextualised process that requires local leadership and support. Heavy external funding and management of funds and projects are typically counterproductive.

More specific to the present situation in Afghanistan is the recognition that the central statebuilding project of the past two decades has not translated into successful peacebuilding outcomes. The current fragmented authority and conflictual political landscape in Afghanistan strengthen the case for decentralization of aid and localized peacebuilding.



Antonio Giustozzi (speaking in English)

The potential end-state in Afghanistan: perspectives on the Taliban's approach

The paper discusses the Taliban's political culture and how it has changed, if at all, the Taliban's current aims in terms of institutional changes, reintegration, power-sharing, and the possible end state of intra-Afghan peace talks. The paper argues that while peace might be possible, it is unlikely to be all inclusive one and it might have to take a tortuous path.

Mazar Rahim Salih (speaking in Pashto)

The Vision of the Taliban Movement for Post-Conflict Governance

There are expectations that the intra-Afghan negotiations will produce an outcome in the lasting interests of the Afghan people. This is because the two sides share many commonalities that center around religious beliefs and national interests. This paper sheds light on the ideology of governance for the Taliban, as a religious movement that seeks to implement Islamic law in the form of the Islamic Emirate to better the situation of Afghans. The movement seeks to establish a state on the platform of the rightly guided Caliphate, in which absolute sovereignty is the sole right of God and relative sovereignty is delegated to the nation within the limitations of the Shari'a.

Hence, their view of the prevailing political systems in the contemporary Islamic world differs from Afghan political parties on issues such as the system of government, the election of the head of state, the people's participation in political work and their connection to the sources of sovereignty and governance, the participation of women in political activities, and the election process. Issues of contention include amendments to the 2004 Bonn Constitution that was established under the shadow of the American occupation. The movement emphasises the importance of a centralised model of governance to unify Afghanistan and reconcile Afghan society after decades of divisive war.

Panel 4: Aid for Sustainable Peacebuilding

William Byrd

Can aid foster sustainable peace in Afghanistan? Is there potential and where are the pitfalls?

With the withdrawal of remaining US and other international troops from Afghanistan, increased attention is being focused on financial assistance to the country—including



whether and, if so how, aid can advance the prospects for peace and incentivize achieving and sustaining peace. This paper attempts to shed light on this question, keeping in mind the specific context in Afghanistan and its highly uncertain prospects. The paper starts with a review of international experience regarding the impacts of aid on growth and development as well as on conflict and peace, which provides grounds for caution about any benefits and for concern about possible counterproductive effects. The broad contours of aid to Afghanistan are then discussed, along with the chequered history of aid conditionality in the country. The final section of the paper delineates areas of possible potential for aid to support sustainable peace, pitfalls to avoid, and importantly the need for aid to “do no harm”. The focus is on the broader, more “macro” dimensions of aid, war, and peace, not trying to assess the micro-level impacts of the, for the most part, very small amounts of aid that explicitly target peacebuilding.

Jennifer Murtazashvili

State Destroying Aid: Can Afghanistan overcome the aid paradox?

Over the past twenty years, Afghanistan learned a difficult lesson: foreign aid undermines the legitimacy of the state. This lesson is not unique or specific to Afghanistan: it is common to many countries throughout the world and is a feature of many fragile states. Poorly designed and largely unmonitored aid programs implemented by foreign governments have fed corruption and undermined accountability linkages between citizens and the state. They have undermined trust of the state and generated suspicion about the intention and role of foreign actors seeking to build the Afghan state. These dynamics have fostered rentier-like dynamics that have undermined the foundation of the post-2001 constitutional order. This paper addresses a fundamental paradox facing Afghanistan at the present moment: without aid many argue the state will collapse – yet aid has been one of the most important sources of state weakness. What lessons can be learned from the past twenty years? What are potential ways forward for Afghanistan as it seeks to find solutions to this dilemma?

Panel 5: Women and Inclusivity in the Peace Process

Masooma Rahmaty

Afghan Women and Barriers to Participation in the Peace Process

Over a year ago the United States government and the Taliban signed an agreement in Doha that paved the way for the start of a peace negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan government. From the start many Afghans believed that the agreement



amounts to little more than a step towards withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan, and the announcement by the US government to withdraw its troops by September 2021 only proves this argument.

With the security challenges and threats of violence in Afghanistan and sociopolitical limitations, Afghan women have continued their efforts to bring peace and development in the country. Since the start of a potential formal peace process, women's participation however has been limited and their role often viewed symbolic. This discussion will focus on women's meaningful participation in the ongoing peace process specifically highlighting the need to include diverse perspectives of Afghan women peacebuilders across the country. It will also discuss the protection concerns of Afghan women peacebuilders who are paying a high price as a result of their participation in peacebuilding efforts in the country.

Huma Saeed

Women's participation in the peace process and transformative transitional justice

A transformative approach to transitional justice places emphasis on bottom-up and locally driven initiatives, inclusion of socio-economic rights of victims in the process, and addressing structural issues. Gender justice must constitute an important component of a transformative transitional justice system, which has to be addressed in peace processes. The Afghan peace process not only should become more inclusive by having wider women representation, but it should also address women's justice demands as war victims in a victim-centred peace approach.

Panel 6: Rehabilitation, Refugee Repatriation and Global Migration

Ali Wardak, Kate Williams, Palash Kamruzzaman, Yaseen Ayobi

War and Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan: In Search of a Lasting Solution

This paper is based on interviews with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in eight provinces in Afghanistan, relevant Afghan officials and local and humanitarian international aid providers. Our data indicates that while war is the main cause of displacement among Afghan IDPs, interpersonal violence, drought, natural disasters, and a lack of income-generating opportunities have also caused internal displacement. We argue that government and international responses to the IDPs problem in Afghanistan have been seriously inadequate, uncoordinated, focused on the 'short-term', and have lacked a long-term vision. This situation has increased and sometimes caused serious loss of dignity, poverty and suffering among IDPs across Afghanistan.



Thus, while various Afghan wars have caused internal displacement over many years, failure to find permanent solutions to displacement has contributed to both their suffering and continued war. We conclude that a lasting and sustainable solution to the IDP problem in Afghanistan not only requires a lasting peace in the country, it also requires sustainable development, aid that enables the IDPs dignified return and reintegration to their places of origin or their long-term settlement and assimilation into the urban centres where they are 'living'.

Hameed Hakimi

Refugee Returns to Afghanistan: Conceptualising the Subjective Security of Returnees

As one of the world's most protracted refugee source countries, Afghanistan's contemporary history is characterised by substantial levels of forced displacement, outward migration and returns. Since 2001, amidst unprecedented levels of Western donor spending - primarily on security and secondarily on development - Afghanistan's burgeoning demographic landscape has experienced a sizeable expansion. This unparalleled phenomenon has been accompanied by sprawling urbanisation. Albeit unplanned, and ill-planned, the rate of urbanisation in major cities like Kabul is among the fastest in the world; it is comparable with major cities in Afghanistan's regional neighbourhood. Yet, policy perspectives are beset by an antiquated lens on the urban/rural dynamics in the country, particularly concerning the return of refugees. This is partly a result of Western-centric/Eurocentric research and analysis that have been inhibited by methodological limitations or rigidity. As the pressure grows to prioritise policymaking on refugee-returns and repatriation to Afghanistan from Pakistan, Iran and beyond, there is a risk that policy tools fail to react to the realities of demographic and urban terrains of today's Afghanistan.

Returnees are expected to return to, and integrate in, pre-identified or designated locales. However, many opt to settle in major cities for various reasons: economic opportunities, lack of skills to adapt to a rural/agrarian lifestyle, family ties (or lack of thereof), facilities and amenities, and so on. Host communities/populations face further competition over resources including land, services, and local businesses. A key question confronting government, donors and NGOs is how to understand the competing perspectives and the needs, expectations, grievances, and commonalities among the returnees (or prospective returnees)? This chapter proposes that deploying a subjective security lens can help us unpack the question. By subjective security, the study refers to both the reality and the perception of stability, safety, and social well-



being by individuals and groups. In this regard, subjective security symbolises an absence of danger or threat to one's individual worldview and norms. A subjective security approach is also helpful in capturing bottom-up perspectives on local lives; drawing on findings could demonstrate that macro-level phenomena such as 'the root causes' of migration, which international stakeholders like the European Union aim to tackle, require a fundamental rethinking.

Antonio Donini

Looking backwards for looking forward: Understanding the indirect consequences of 40+ years of war in Afghanistan and why it matters for the future

Significant progress has been made over this past decade or so in documenting the direct impact of the war in Afghanistan on civilians. Civilian casualties are often referred to as direct deaths to distinguish this mortality from the accumulated and indirect costs of war. The indirect consequences of war have only recently begun to receive attention even though it was estimated that "in the majority of conflicts since the early 1990s for which good data is available, the burden of indirect deaths was between three and 15 times the number of direct deaths." There is broad consensus among different sets of stakeholders that reliable, valid data and analysis are critical requirements not only to understand the overall impact of armed conflict but also to support efforts geared to preventing and addressing the harm experienced by civilians in to-day's war zones. Strategic and military decision-making has, for far too long, greatly ignored the necessity of taking into account the likely or potential indirect effects of attacks that damage or destroy services, assets and infrastructure essential for survival.

A multidisciplinary team of researchers has come together to document the toll of war on Afghans and their society across the different phases of the conflict. War is a social phenomenon and can be an important vector for the transformation of society. The research will thus analyse how the war was, and is functional, to the interests of various segments of Afghan society. It will also problematize the effects of the different phases of the war in terms of the changes that it effected on Afghan lives both inside and outside the country. My presentation will discuss the challenges faced by this ongoing research, its conceptual assumptions and methods and will explain why it is important for the future of Afghanistan to get a better understanding of the costs of the past.