



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Afghan Peace Process: Prospects and Challenges**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper highlights the prospects and challenges in the ongoing peace efforts. America has taken the most important step to end the longest war in the history of America. America and the Taliban have signed the historic Peace Accord on 29 February 2020 in the capital city of Qatar. This time America decided to talk with the Taliban leaders directly without the presence of the Afghan government. All the world and regional actors welcomed the American move to talk with the Taliban and called this agreement a historic milestone in the history of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan are hopeful that peace in Afghanistan is not far away. Neighboring states Pakistan, India, Iran, China and Russia welcomed this Peace Process and determined to support the people of Afghanistan. These efforts for peace are encouraged and supported from everywhere but spoilers are also working to implement their agenda.

**Introduction**

Afghanistan has been in a war-like situation for the last forty years. Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support its Communist expansionist agenda. The civil war was erupted among different segments of Afghan society to get power in Afghanistan in the 1990s. The Taliban took control of Kabul and established its own government in Afghanistan in 1996. America toppled the Taliban regime in 2001 after the deadly attacks of 9/11 and tried to demilitarize the terrorist group in Afghanistan. The war of America with the Taliban militants has entered its 19<sup>th</sup> year and the people of Afghanistan are still dying. Although America and the Taliban have reached an agreement to bring peace in Afghanistan (Muzaffar, et. al. 2019). America has spent almost more than 1 trillion dollars in the Afghan war (Almukhtar & Nordland, 2019). America has lost more than 2400 military personals in Afghanistan and the Afghan war is the longest military campaign of America in another country (Nabeel, 2018). America was not keen to talk with the Taliban

militants directly. President Bush wanted to eliminate the Taliban terrorists with military power. President Obama took oath as 44<sup>th</sup> President of America and Obama belonged to Democrats. Obama administration took steps to bring peace to Afghanistan and to end this war but they failed. Obama adopted a Reintegration Policy but later converted it into Reconciliation Policy both policies failed and war could not end. In 2016 Trump became the 45<sup>th</sup> President of America. In his election campaign, Trump promised with American people to end this Afghan war and bring his soldiers back home. President Trump tried to crush the militants in Afghanistan and increased the number of troops. Soon Trump realized that America cannot win this war with military means and we should revisit our Afghan Strategy. Trump administration announced to conduct direct talks with Taliban leaders without the presence of the Kabul government. Trump wants to end this military campaign by hook or by crook. He took concrete steps to bring the Taliban to the peace table and to end this long journey (Thier, 2019). People of Afghanistan want peace in the country and hopeful that signed deal with the Taliban will help to achieve durable peace in Afghanistan. This research will highlight the obstacles and chances of peace in Afghanistan.

### **Literature Review**

Afghanistan is an important country for world peace. Authors have written different books and articles on Afghanistan. The writers discussed the tribal system, various groups working in Afghanistan, American strategy in Afghanistan and the role of neighboring countries in Afghanistan. There is a need to write more on the prospects and challenges Afghanistan is facing on the way of peace. This research highlights the prospects and challenges on the way of peace in Afghanistan.

Little America (The war within the war for America) by Rajiv Chandrasekaran. In his book, He is describing the way the American Army is fighting in Afghanistan. American political leadership and the military leadership have different views about Afghanistan. In this book, he told about the Southern city of Afghanistan. He pointed out two different views of American leadership about Afghanistan. The army wants to stay and spend more money in Afghanistan, which is a matter of serious disturbance for the civilian leadership of America. In this book, the writer explained clearly the division between the establishment and the civilian government which is harmful to the future perspective of Afghanistan (Chandrasekaran, 2013).

Pakistan on the Brink (The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan) by Ahmed Rashid. In this book, the writer describes the role of the military establishment in all three states America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In this book, the author has described the relations among Pakistan, America and Afghanistan. Ahmed Rashid talked about the mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this publication, he expressed his views about the establishment of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and America and the difference between the establishment and the civilian governments (Rashid, 2012).

Stable Afghanistan: Suggested Government Models for Afghanistan in Post War Scenario by Ms. Afshan Sajid. In this article, she expressed her views about the Afghan government and models of the Afghan government after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. She also expressed the tribal system and the weak writ of the government. Previously Afghanistan has remained under different rulers all of them tried to control the whole of Afghanistan from Kabul but failed. Tribes showed great resistance against this act. Right after the Soviet withdrawal, the people of Afghanistan entered into a new era of the Civil War. The Taliban established its government in 1996 but the incident of 9/11 imposed a new war on Afghanistan (Sajid, 2011).

Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom Sentinel: An Overview by Maliha Zeba. In her article, she said under PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Pakistan had strong ties with Afghanistan. Pakistan played an important role during the Soviet invasion and supported the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan did not enjoy cordial relations with Afghanistan except the Taliban regime. The American war in Afghanistan created a divide in Pakistan's society. Pakistan always put great stress to bring peace in Afghanistan but spoilers are also there to sabotage the efforts towards peace (Zeba, 2017).

This research highlights the hurdles and opportunities in Afghan ongoing peace talks. This research shows the importance of the Peace Accord between America and the Taliban.

### **Prospects of Peace in Afghanistan**

Talks between the Taliban and America started in October 2018 to end this long war in Afghanistan. The United States and the Taliban leaders met 9 times in Doha the capital city of Qatar to reach an agreement for peace in Afghanistan. The historic Peace Accord between the Taliban and America has signed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 in Doha. This deal is the first-ever documented effort between the Taliban and America towards peace in Afghanistan. This Peace Accord is the ray of hope for the people of Afghanistan to end this deadly and long war. Zalmay Khalilzad and Mullah Ghani Baradar represented their respective sides in Qatar. This deal will pave the way for the withdrawal of Foreign Forces and the reduction in violence in Afghanistan (Awan, 2020).

Although challenges are severe Americans and the Taliban leaders are hoping to end this long war of American history. The most important thing is the people of Afghanistan are hopeful to end this long conflict. No doubt America has realized that negotiations are the ultimate solution to end this long war. World powers as well as regional powers are working for peace in Afghanistan and all stakeholders are hopeful that Kabul is going to become a war-free area. America has wasted many opportunities to end this war in Afghanistan with the Taliban. According to James Dobbins, a prominent American figure who served on various posts in the White House has said "Americans had made three basic mistakes to

prolong Afghan war. The first thing was America had strongly believed that new and weak governments in Afghanistan with fewer military personals and weapons could control the population and territory with ease. The second thing was America did not take advantage of its early success in different operations in the Afghan war. Taliban militants and even the prominent leaders of the Taliban were ready to surrender but the Bush administration denied talking with the Taliban militants and lost a vital chance to end this Afghan war. The third thing was the blind trust of American authorities on Pakistan to end militancy in Afghanistan, although Pakistan always supported Taliban militants and had a soft corner for the Taliban leaders". Now America has realized that it's time to end this long war and the Trump administration is taking the right steps in the right direction to get rid of this long war in Afghanistan(Tatter & Chakrabarti, 2020).

This Peace Deal has great importance for the region as well as for the whole world and is appreciated by different segments of the world community. Although it is a conditional Peace Agreement between America and the Taliban to bring peace in Afghanistan. If the Taliban do not follow this Peace Deal, then America has the right to prolong its stay in Afghanistan and to use more force than ever to demolish Taliban militants. Within the first 14 months after this Peace Accord American and other foreign troops would leave Afghanistan. In the beginning, the US will reduce its security personals to 8600 within 135 days according to Peace Deal. These are the initial and important developments to end this long war and these developments create hopes for peaceful Afghanistan. The withdrawal of foreign troops is a major development from the American perspective as well as the Taliban. Withdrawal of Foreign troops is one of the key demands of Taliban militants and this step will boost the chances of peace in Afghanistan. According to the Bilateral Security Agreement between America and the Afghan government signed in 2014, American and NATO troops would stay in Kabul to support Afghan National Army against the Taliban militants till 2024 (Ali, 2020).

If the Taliban follow the Peace Agreement, then there is no need for Foreign forces in Afghanistan. This Peace Initiative focuses on three main points. The first thing is the Taliban would talk with the Afghan government to reach a Political Settlement. Although the Taliban did not consider the Afghan government a legitimate identity of Afghanistan. According to this Peace, Accord Taliban will sit with the Afghan government for a Political Settlement, it is a great development for the sake of peace in the country. The second thing is the Taliban will not allow any terrorist organization or a single actor to use Afghan soil against America or any other country. ISIS is the existing terrorist force in Afghanistan and according to this deal, the Taliban have to fight against terrorist forces including ISIS in Afghanistan. The third thing is the Taliban will stop its violent activities against the foreign troops in the country and on the other side foreign troops will not hit the Taliban sanctuaries, this step ultimately will be helpful to bring calmness in Afghanistan (Iuvm Press, 2020).

These developments are showing a ray of hope to bring peace in the country and these are major developments towards peace. Afghanistan has been in a warlike

situation for almost more than four decades. Intra Afghan Talks are the necessary element of the Peace Accord between the Taliban and America. In Intra Afghan Talks the Taliban and the Afghan government will discuss a Power-Sharing formula for the future of Afghanistan. It is a difficult task but still possible and the people of Afghanistan and leadership of America are hopeful for a Political Settlement. The Taliban regime governed Afghanistan with the system of Islamic Emirate from 1996 to 2001. Now things have changed Afghanistan has been practicing a democratic system for almost the last 18 years (Moradian, 2019). In the recent Presidential elections in Afghanistan, though the voter turnout was low but still people intact with the democratic system. The people of Afghanistan want to elect their representatives according to their own will. It's a positive change in war-affected countries like Afghanistan. People of Afghanistan have changed their mindset and have trust in democratic values; they are not going to accept the Taliban with their radical mindset. Taliban must bring change in their behaviors and the Taliban are willing to bring change in their mindset. According to Doha Peace Deal Taliban must talk with the Afghan government within the present democratic system. Taliban should talk about human rights and especially for women's rights, the Taliban are passing soft signals regarding women's rights as the Taliban had radical views about women in the past. It is a positive change in the Taliban and this type of gesture is showing their willingness towards peace in Afghanistan. Taliban will not think about their Islamic Emirate they will get their share from the democratic system. Before getting, positions in Kabul the Taliban must change their radical views and should adopt modern ethos and get rid of the past practices (Shaheed, 2019).

Russia and America also welcomed the Taliban's willingness to talk with the Afghan government for the Political Settlement in Afghanistan. America and Russia stressed that Islamic Emirate is not recognized by the International Community and the United Nations, the Taliban must recognize the democratic values has been practicing in Afghanistan for the last two decades. Washington and Moscow affirmed that America and Russia will not accept the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. Taliban's positive gestures to rethink their views about Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan are considering positive developments on the way of peace (Iqbal, 2020).

The members of the Taliban and Afghan government engaged via video link to discuss the matter of prisoner release. It is a major development towards peace and stability in Afghanistan and this step shows the seriousness of both sides towards peace. American government and Qatar played a vital role to bring both sides to the table and discuss the prisoner's release framework. Although this process works slowly it's a positive step for both the Taliban and Afghan government. America had committed that Taliban prisoners were released but the Ghanni government did not agree to do so. Ghani put some conditions but the Taliban refused to accept it later with the help of America and Qatar both parties decided to sit and discuss prisoner release methods. Taliban are not willing to accept the Ghani regime as a legitimate government but it is a breakthrough to sit with and discuss the matter according to the Doha Peace Accord (Yousafzai, 2020).

Although opposition parties have objected to the negotiator team announced by the Afghan government still it's a positive move towards peace. The most important thing is the behavior of neighboring countries and internal segments of Afghanistan towards peace in Kabul. Neighboring states are playing their positive role in peace efforts. China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and India also are playing their role. China has great economic interests in Afghanistan and China only can get these interests if peace prevails in Afghanistan. The Taliban leaders visited China and met with Chinese officials to discuss progress in the Peace Process in 2019(Gul, 2019).

Russia is considering the Islamic State as a real threat to its National Security. Moscow is also willing to bring peace in Kabul and plays a positive role in the Peace Process. Russia has hosted Talks with the Taliban and other Afghan political leaders in Moscow(Rotman, 2018). Pakistan is the biggest beneficiary if peace prevails in Afghanistan. Pakistan has also lost thousands of men, women, and children in its war against terrorism. All other stakeholders including America appreciated the positive role played by Pakistan in Afghan Peace Process (Ahmed, 2020). Neighboring countries want a peaceful Afghanistan and all states are also playing their role to bring peace in Afghanistan, peace in Afghanistan brings stability in the region as well as in the world. The positive role of the neighboring states enhances the chances of peace in Afghanistan. America and the Taliban both are appreciating the roles of neighboring states(Kingrani, 2017). These all are positive developments and it shows the Peace Process is going in the right direction. Now the leaders of Afghanistan should show flexibility and move towards durable peace in the country.

### **Challenges in Afghan Peace Process**

The Afghan Peace Process is at a standstill after the peace deal is signed. Intra Afghan Talks could not start between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Afghan Peace Process is facing numerous challenges and peace looks difficult once again in Afghanistan.

The formation of an inclusive government is the biggest hurdle in the way of the Peace Process nowadays. According to the Election Commission of Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani took almost 50% votes and declared the winner in the Presidential elections. Abdullah Abdullah called it a fraudulent election and denied to accept its results. Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah took oath as Presidents of Afghanistan at the same time. The majority of the world leaders congratulated Ashraf Ghani on his election victory, although his majority is thin. Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah formed parallel governments in Afghanistan. American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Zalmay Khalilzad met with both Presidents and stressed to set up a comprehensive government. America also announced to cut down its aid to Afghanistan to 1 billion dollars(Ibrahimi, 2020). America is in a hurry to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. Things were not going positively both Presidents were not showing any willingness to form a comprehensive government for the sake of peace. President Ghani offered Abdullah Abdullah the headship of the Afghan Peace Council. Abdullah Abdullah was made the head of Afghan Peace Council and his nominees will sit in President Ghani's cabinet(Sirat,

2020). These were the positive developments towards the formation of a unity government in Afghanistan.

The Kabul government has been evaluating its efforts in Peace Process in line with protecting its National Interest. Afghan government thinks the Taliban should respect the Afghan Constitution and cut its relations with AL Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. National Coordination is compulsory to bring peace to the country. Political parties and minor groups in Afghanistan have different views about the Peace Process and the Taliban. All parties must be on the same page for the sake of peace but it is looking impossible as for as Afghanistan is concerned. Opposition parties are saying the Taliban cannot change their mindset and we cannot accept them without change. Lack of strategy is seen between the Afghan government, opposition parties, and America (Rahim, 2020).

Taliban militants are not going to give any concession to their opponents and the Taliban are increasing attacks on Afghan Security Forces after signing the Peace Deal. Taliban fighters think they are winning this war. Taliban has a stronghold in the rural areas of Afghanistan and the Kabul government has no writ on rural areas of the country. The Taliban also has controlled major roads and now they are extending their writ on city areas. The most important thing is the increase in violence after the Peace Deal. It shows that all groups of Taliban fighters are not on the same page to stop the war. Taliban are ready to fight for another decade but its America, not the Taliban who wants to end this long war (London, 2020).

People of Afghanistan were expecting after the Peace Deal there will be a reduction in violence. Taliban would reduce its militant activities but things are not going in the favor of peace. Taliban are not attacking the US and its Allies Forces but hitting hard to Afghan Security Forces. President Ashraf Ghani has doubts that released prisoners of the Taliban may again join militancy campaigns against the government. It is an alarming situation for peace observers and the trust deficit between the Taliban and the Afghan government makes things complicated. It looks that the Taliban will never give up their militancy campaign against the Afghan government. Opponents of this peace agreement are saying that this peace deal will strengthen the Taliban's ability to fight and the Taliban are not going to change themselves (Brown, 2020).

Pakistan played a significant role in the Afghan Peace Process. America and other regional and International players appreciated the role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process. Unfortunately, Pakistan did not enjoy its cordial relations with Afghan governments after the Taliban regime. Afghan governments and Pakistan could not set a proper border security mechanism to stop terrorists from their ill practices. Although Pakistan is fencing its border with Afghanistan to stop terrorist activities in Pakistan despite the Afghan government's reservations. President Ghani's administration thinks that Pakistan uses the Taliban against the Afghan government and Pakistan gets its interest in Afghanistan by using Taliban

militants (Mazzetti & Khan, 2020). Kabul regime thinks ISKP has contacts with Pakistani spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other Taliban groups who are opposing the Peace Process in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban already rejected these allegations and announced to fight with ISKP in Afghanistan. Pakistan's former ambassador to America under the Zardari regime Mr. Hussain Haqqani believes actors from Pakistan will be in contact with ISKP. United Nations report on Afghanistan revealed the Taliban has strong ties with Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups working in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban has rejected the United Nation's report Taliban must clear its policy after America's withdrawal (Sarban, 2016).

Foreign players are fully active and playing their role in Afghanistan. All regional players have their interests in Afghanistan. Iran, India, Russia, and China want peace in Afghanistan but their own terms. After the Taliban regime, India invested a handsome amount of almost 3 billion dollars to improve its soft image in Afghanistan. India has strong ties with all other factors except the Taliban in Afghanistan. India has enhanced its presence in different shapes in Afghanistan. India does not want to Taliban in government, India considers the Taliban a real threat to its investment. China also invested a large amount in different sectors and considers the Taliban's upper hand a threat to its security. China thinks the Taliban's militant activities have a spillover effect on Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. China wants to contain the Taliban as well as other militant groups working in Afghanistan. China wants to protect its investment and also minimize the American influence in Afghanistan. Iran supports the Taliban but does not want full power to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Neighboring states are playing their roles to bring peace in Afghanistan. Regional players want peace in Afghanistan but their own terms, it's a challenge for peace in Afghanistan (Griffiths, 2017).

The sincerity of the American establishment is a key point to achieve durable peace in Afghanistan. President Trump only wants its next term in the White House and President Trump announced in his election campaigns to end the Afghan war back in 2016, Trump wants to fulfill his promise. Although the American economy cannot bear the burden of the Afghan war and people of America have no interest in the Afghan war. If the Afghan war ends and peace prevails then Trump will take its credit otherwise new Civil War will erupt in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a fragile state and needs serious efforts for peace from America but the American deep state thinks beyond Trump's election and does not want to withdraw its forces in a hurry (Lgnatius, 2020). It looks difficult for Trump to end this war without proper planning. Another most important thing is the economy of America as well as Afghanistan. Now America spends a huge amount of approximately 6 to 8 billion dollars in Afghanistan per year. After the withdrawal of foreign troops who will provide money to the Afghan government. America has many economic problems back at home. After withdrawal, it is difficult for America to support financially to the Afghan government. Afghanistan will see towards Saudi Arabia and China for money but the economy of Riyadh is not in a position to support the country like Afghanistan. China is not a generous country like America for Afghanistan. So the



chances of civil war will increase in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of America. The economy and internal rifts among different Afghan factions are the biggest hurdles in the way of peace in Afghanistan (Samo, 2020). Peace must prevail in Afghanistan and all states must play their role. The most important thing is the internal rifts must be an end and Afghan leadership must come forward to grab this opportunity. Peace Accord between America and the Taliban is a vital chance to end this long war.

### **Conclusion**

Afghanistan has been affected by corruption, war and political instability for the last 40 years. However, the recent talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government provide a chance to bring stability and durable peace in Afghanistan. Now the time is for the leadership of Afghanistan to remain united. President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah should show their commitment to the soil of Afghanistan and try their best to bring peace to Afghanistan. America should also overview the Intra Afghan Talks and play a positive role. America wants its withdrawal from Afghanistan its good thing but Afghanistan is a fragile state. America must overview the talks and pending its withdrawal till the political settlement of Afghan factions. Although the progress is minor on the Intra Afghan Talks still it is a historic moment. It's a golden opportunity for Afghans to end the long era of bloodshed in Afghanistan.

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