

# Afghanistan Peace Process: A Historical Analysis

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b>	This paper focuses on peace efforts that have been made to
March 11, 2021	bring peace in Afghanistan. The end of the conflict to bring
Accepted:	durable peace drives from peaceful dialogues to create a win-
June 20, 2021	win situation for all parties involved in the conflict. Afghanistan
Online:	is a country that is in a war-like situation for the last 40 years.
June 25, 2021	Thousands of men, women, children, and soldiers have been
Keywords: Afghanistan,	killed during this instability. The beginning of Peace Dialogues
Pakistan,	is a key step to bring durable peace in war-affected
Peace Talks,	Afghanistan. Regional and International Powers are involved in
Taliban	the Afghan conflict. Washington, Beijing, Islamabad, and Kabul
*Corresponding	itself are the key players in the Afghan conflict. Lack of trust
Author	among all the stakeholders is the main hurdle on the way of
	durable peace. Internal Afghan rifts also put a big question
	mark for sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Taliban wants
	complete withdrawal of Foreign Forces. Pakistan is worried due
	to the Indian presence in its western border. Pakistan and
	Afghanistan relations have not been friendly as it was expected.
	China wants to explore minerals in Afghanistan and also does
	not like militancy in Afghanistan due to disturbances in
	Xinjiang Province. Washington considers the Afghan war a
	burden on its economy and the people of America are putting
	pressure on American leadership to pull out its troops from
aamirjunaid798	Afghanistan. Dialogue is the only solution to bring peace in
@gmail.com	Afghanistan. Peace can only prevail through a win-win
	situation for all stakeholders.

## Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked country situated on the verge of energy-rich region of Central Asia. Afghanistan has been in the war for the last forty years. In

1978 Soviet Forces invaded Afghanistan to support its communist agenda. The withdrawal of Soviet Forces created a vacuum and Civil war erupted in the country. In 1996 the Taliban established their government in Afghanistan and imposed strict Sharia law. Planes targeted the World Trade Center and Pentagon in America on September 11, 2001. America blamed Al Qaeda and demanded Osama Bin Laden from the Taliban leadership. Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to America. America attacked Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime. American and NATO forces have been fighting with Taliban militants in Afghanistan for the last two decades. The neighboring States also supported the American war against terrorism in different ways and welcomed America and its Allies in Afghanistan (Weinbaum, 2006).

America pressurized Pakistan to take serious actions against the Taliban militants. Pakistan also faced destructive consequences for supporting America in the war against the Taliban. The people of Pakistan were not ready to accept the Taliban as a terrorist organization. Pashtuns majority in tribal areas was a real worry for Pakistan. American pressure and the slogan of "Do More" from Pakistan was a real worry for the government and military establishment of Pakistan. Most of the Taliban leaders have been the students of Clerics from Pakistan. Taliban always had strong relations with the Military Establishment and Religious Leaders from Pakistan. Pakistan is hosting about 4 million refugees from Afghanistan. Iran is also hosting 1 million refugees from Afghanistan, Iran is a major stakeholder in Afghanistan's peace and has an influence on different segments of Afghan society. Iran welcomed America in Afghanistan and supported America in Afghanistan against the Taliban militancy. Tehran had feared that the Taliban's militant activities will harm its efforts to calm down rebels in Iran's Eastern Provinces. Later Iran also supported Taliban militants against the American presence near to its border in Afghanistan. Iran does not want the presence of American troops near its bordersdue to its tense relations with America. Iran also invested a handsome amount to build infrastructure in Afghanistan(Milani, 2010).

India has also invested a handsome amount in Afghanistan, India always supported anti-Taliban Forces in Afghanistan. India welcomed Soviet Forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s and later the American Forces after 9/11. India always supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in Afghanistan. American presence and absence of the Taliban in power provided India a chance to enhance its relations with Afghan people. India is also providing Health, Education, and other facilities to the people of Afghanistan. India had great relations with Hamid Karzai in the past and now with President Ashraf Ghani in the present. India has enhanced its ties with Afghanistan in Security matters and Trade perspectives. Indian Intelligence Agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Afghanistan's Intelligence Agency National Directorate of Security (NDS) have strong working relations, it has made India a Stakeholder in Afghanistan. India has invested approximately 300 billion dollars in Afghanistan which makes India a major stakeholder in Afghanistan(Baqai, 2019). President Obama initiated the Peace Program in Afghanistan and it was the first effort to bring peace in Afghanistan by the American's. Afghan government and Taliban met in Pakistan under efforts made by President Obama but could not get success. Taliban wanted the withdrawal of Foreign Forces, this point created deadlock, and peace talks failed. Republican President took oath after President Obama and pledged with the people of America to end the long war of American history. America started Peace Efforts in 2018 to secure peace in Afghanistan under President Trump. America wants to end this war as soon as possible. America thinks the Afghan war is proving a white elephant for them. America has spent over one trillion dollars in the Afghan war and could not win this war. Even the Taliban now controls a large area in Afghanistan. Islamic State is another threat after the Taliban in Afghanistan. Islamic State Khorasan Province is becoming new threats for all neighboring states. America and other stakeholders think that the Taliban can contain ISKP in Afghanistan. Islamic State has a stronghold in the Eastern Provinces of Afghanistan(Bezhan, 2020).

How America can bring peace in Afghanistan just to talk only with the Taliban? While there are different ethnicities and terrorist groups are working in Afghanistan. Islamic State is also found in different areas of Afghanistan and it has a stronghold in Eastern sides of Afghanistan. ISKP is not only creating disturbance for America and Afghanistan, but it is also another worry for the Regional Powers. Attacks from ISKP in the Holy Month of Ramadan sent a clear message to the Afghan and American authorities that ISKP has strong enough to show its muscles. After American withdrawal groups like ISKP, Turkistan Islamic Movement, and Uzbekistan Islamic Movement will arise with power and challenge the sitting government in Afghanistan as well as the neighboring states. Pakistan, Russia, and China are fully backing the Afghan Peace Process and the Taliban to counter ISIS's threat in the future(Mohmand, 2020).

Things are not clear as for the peace in Afghanistan is concerned. Taliban and the Afghan government are using force against each other. The Peace Process has different hurdles inside and outside the country.

#### Literature Review

Different Authors have worked on Afghanistan. They talked about Afghan history, Culture, and Tribal conflicts. They also discussed in their books and articles the destruction which is done by the Soviet Union and the United States and its Allies. But these Authors gave some little readings on the Perspective of Peace and efforts to bring durable peace in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan {Sly Peace in A Failed State}" by Musa Khan Jalalzai. In his work, he talked about Taliban groups and Regional Powers which are stakeholders in Afghanistan. He categorically said the neighboring states want such Afghanistan which is beneficial for them. He discussed in detail the Regional Powers and their interest in Afghanistan. In this publication, he described the wish of peace demanded by all Regional States but their own terms(Jlalzai, 2019).

"Afghanistan Ki Jang, Mazhab aur Nizam" by Peter Marsden. This book describes the rapid rise of the Taliban. He explains the factors which were involved in the creation of the Taliban. Taliban were emerged as a strong militant group and ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. In this book, he also shows the masses' support for the Taliban. He also highlighted the role played by Regional Powers to promote the Taliban. He shows the support for the Taliban in Afghan masses. He focuses on the ideology of the Taliban and its rapid rise in South Asia and the Middle Eastern States. He discussed the local tribes and their views about the Taliban(Marsden, 2000).

"Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan Since Operation Freedom Sentinel: An Overview" by Maliha Zeba. In her article, she discussed the Foreign Policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan in detail. She said Pakistan has adopted a strong policy towards Afghanistan under Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. Soviet invasion provided a chance for Pakistan to play an active part in Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan did not remain the same after the Soviet invasion. Pakistan always put great stress to bring Peace to Afghanistan(Zeba, 2017).

"Stable Afghanistan: Suggested Government Models for Afghanistan in Post Afghan War Scenario" by Ms. Afshan Sajid. In this article, she expressed her views about the Afghan government models. She knows the Afghan society and tribal systemvery well. The government in Kabul has a very weak grasp of the local tribes. These tribes do not allow Foreign Forces to change their values and traditions. Previously Afghanistan has remained under the different rules. Najibullah's government tried to manage all Provinces from Kabul but they failed to do this. Tribes showed great resistance against this act. After the Soviet withdrawal tribes started to fight with each other for Power (Sajid, 2011).

#### Historical Background of Afghan Peace Process

Afghanistan has witnessed various events on its land for the last forty years. The collapse of its Empire, the Establishment of the Secular Soviet State, and the successful rebellion of Mujahedeen. Later the Emergence of the Taliban was also a great event in the land of Afghanistan. The incident of 9/11 was the event of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. America attacked Afghanistan after 9/11 and still fighting this long war in the history of America. Various efforts were made to bring peace in Afghanistan but all in vain.

The incident of 9/11had shaken the whole world, America directly blamed Osama Bin Laden the leader of Al Qaeda for this brutal activity. The United States attacked Afghanistan and toppled the sitting government of the Taliban. America and its allies started operations in Afghanistan to demolish the roots of terrorism. America and its Allies had not much knowledge about the ground realities. So they decided to get help from the Taliban's enemy Northern Alliance. Northern Alliance said that they will move towards Kabul to protect the people of Afghanistan. Northern Alliance was clear about its priorities. President Bush also supported the intentions of the Alliance with a presser with the Russian counterpart to eliminate the Taliban terrorists(Rohde & Neilan, 2001).

#### Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani Efforts for Peace

Taliban's removal from the power, Prominent Afghan leaders met under the umbrella of the United Nations in Bonn, Germany in 2001. Bonn Agreement was the first step towards the Establishment of a Multi-Ethnic and fully representative government in Afghanistan. Under the Bonn agreement, the Interim government consisted of 30 members led by a chairman was established. In June 2002 Loya Jirga (Traditional Afghan Assembly) was replaced by the Afghan Interim Assembly. The first general elections of Afghan history were held in October 2004. Provincial and Parliamentary elections were held the very next in September 2005. Hamid Karzai was elected the Afghan President in those elections (Sajid, 2011).

Kabul government always had little influence on the rural side of the country. The head of the tribes has power in the countryside. They use power for the benefit of their own. Mostly NGOs are working in Afghanistan to provide relief to the local people. After Karzai came into power the problems of warlords created difficulties for the Karzai government. He tried his best to bring Peace at the local level but could not get the best results (Goodson, 2003).

In 2005 Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced an Amnesty for all militants in Afghanistan. First, he announced that the top leadership of the Taliban could get benefit from this step of the Afghan government. In Brussels, he refused to give an Amnesty to the Taliban leadership. He tried his best to bring peace to Afghanistan to talk with warlords of the country. Hamid Karzai met warlords in different areas of Afghanistan. Under his first tenure, he tried to boost up the economy of the war ruined Afghanistan but he could not get proper results. Hamid Karzai announced direct talks with the Taliban in September 2007. He wanted to meet with Taliban leader Mullah Omer and Hezbi Islami leader Gulbadeen Hekmetyar for the sake of peace. But the Taliban's spokesperson rejected his offer. He said Hamid Karzai is a dummy President. He cannot do anything with his own will. Taliban would not talk with a dummy President. The withdrawal of Foreign Troops is necessary to start Peace Talks with the Afghan government(Achakzai, 2007).

American President George W. Bush said with clear aims no one will talk to terrorists. American Policy was against the Peace Policy of Hamid Karzai. President Barack Obama announced to talk with Taliban militants in March 2009. It was the first time when America announced the term of good Taliban. This approach of President Obama was criticized in the United States. Obama said America is not going to win the war in Afghanistan. The United States should talk to those elements who are going to surrender. Barack Obama said this policy might be effected in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region (Copper & Stolberg, 2007).

In 2010 the United States started to operate its new policy towards Afghanistan. America started to provide money to the foot soldiers of the Taliban. Its main purpose to disarm the Taliban fighters but in other ways, it was the strategy of the United States to weaken the power of the Taliban. President Bush did nothing for Peace Talks in Afghanistan, Bush wanted to eliminate the Taliban with force but it was impossible. Obama took office in 2009 and his administration began work to empower the Afghan Security Forces to fight with terrorists in the country. Obama said America wants its conditional withdrawal from Afghanistan at the end of 2011. Obama hired a former officer Bruce Riedel from the Central Intelligence Agency to review American's policy towards Afghanistan. The main goals of Obama's Policy towards Afghanistan were to bring peace in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of American troops. Obama wanted the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and wanted to raise the capabilities of the Afghan security forces to fight with terrorist groups in the country. Obama wanted a stable Afghan government with a solid writ on its institutions and all parts of Afghanistan (Muzaffar, et. al. 2019 & Fair, 2010).

In Afghanistan, internal steps for reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Taliban were also taken. A famous program named Tahkim-e-Solh was launched in the country. Its main purpose was to bring the Taliban to the peace table. Many famous Taliban leaders accepted offers under this program. Sebghatullah Mujadidi was an educated person and got his education from Al Azhar University was the founder of this program (Rutting, 2009).

In October 2010 this peace initiative was replaced by the High Peace Council. Its main purpose was to bring the Taliban and Afghan government to the Peace table. The High Peace Council promoted Peace in Afghan Society. High Peace Council was the part of the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP)(Asia Crisis Group, 2012).

The first direct talks between the Taliban and America began in November 2010. Germany and the Qatari Royal family helped to arrange talks between the Taliban and the United States. These talks were held in Munich, Germany and later in Qatar in 2011. Preliminary talks were about the Prisoner Exchange Program. Five well-known Taliban leaders were detained in Guantanamo whereas one American soldier was under the custody of the Taliban. This idea was harshly criticized in the American Congress. Taliban did not certify that those Commanders will not take part in the ongoing war. This program could not ripe for further discussion. Peace talks with America and the Taliban suspended in March 2012 (Borger, 2012).

In December 2012 Pakistan and Afghanistan met in Turkey. In Turkey, it was discussed the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 drafted by the Afghan High Peace Council. Taliban leaders could govern the South and Eastern side of the country

according to the new Peace Initiatives. According to this Roadmap, Pakistan was given the main role to facilitate the Peace Process (Karimi, 2012).

In May 2012 there was a little progress in talks with the Taliban. American President Obama announced the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Although it was not an official treaty according to the SPA United States has to bear the Financial, Economic, and Military expenses of the country. Strategic Partnership Agreement was a guarantee that America would not leave Afghanistan without a Proper Roadmap. The senior member of the Obama Administration said that America would not leave the country. United States ambassador to Afghanistan reaffirmed that America would not leave Afghanistan reaffirmed that America would not leave the country. United States ambassador to Afghanistan reaffirmed that America would not leave Afghanistan without Proper Peace (Rubin, 2012). In August 2012 Pakistan permitted the Afghan government to meet with Taliban leaders in Pakistan. Leaders like Mullah Baradar had been in detention since 2010 in Pakistan. Mullah Baradar and others were the key Taliban leaders after Mullah Omer (Ibrahimi & Georgy, 2012).

Pakistan was going to start a prisoner's release on the request of Afghan officials. Afghan government officials and the member of the High Peace Council believed that the release of key Taliban leaders will be helpful in Peace talks. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar was the key figure of the Taliban cabinet. Things were going better with the help of Pakistan. America was also putting pressure on Pakistan to help in Peace Talks with the Taliban. The Afghan government was trying hard to bring peace in the country before the departure of NATO Forces from Afghanistan at the end of 2014(Malik, 2012).

The main problem was to convince the Taliban to talk with the Afghan sitting government. Taliban were not willing to sit with the Afghan government. The Afghan government is a puppet government of America. It was said in the Taliban's rank and files. Taliban refused to sit with the coalition government. America always stressed the Taliban to talk with the sitting Afghan government but the Taliban refused it every time. America would not be in a position to talk with the Taliban directly without the presence of the Afghan government (Latifi, 2013).

In July 2015 first-ever officially acknowledged direct talks between the Taliban and Kabul government took place in Murree with the help of Pakistan. Pakistan tried its best to play its role according to the Peace Process Roadmap (Khan, 2016).

After the Murree talks in 2015, there was complete silence on Peace Talks from both sides. Years of 2016-17 did not show any remarkable progress in peace initiatives except for an increase in American troops in Afghanistan. There were also minor positive developments toward Peace. The first big step towards peace was the deal between the Kabul government and Hizb e Islami in September 2016. It was considered the biggest event since 2001. This deal provided the Hizb e Islami insurgents a way forward to spend their lives peacefully. Kabul government announced to help Hizb e Islami insurgents and allowed them to serve as Security Personals in Afghanistan. Afghanistan government also announced to release prisoners who belonged to Hizb e Islami. It was also said by the Afghan government that refugees who were living in Pakistan associated with Hizb e Islami would be settled in Afghanistan. The most important thing was the return of Gulbadeen Hekmetyar to Kabul from almost twenty years of exile(Johnson, 2018).

Another and very important development that took place in 2018 was the United States' behavior towards Afghanistan and especially with the Taliban. America has changed its policy towards the Taliban and accepted the demand of the Taliban to direct talks. America always stressed on the Taliban to sit with the Afghan government to bring Peace in the country. Trump administration took concrete steps towards negotiations with the Taliban. America met with the Taliban leaders without the officials of the Afghan government in Qatar. The United States appointed its former ambassador to Afghanistan as a Special Representative for Reconciliation. It was the biggest development to end this long war of the history of America (Sheikh, 2017).

In July 2018 Taliban members met secretly with American diplomats in Doha. This was secret meeting between the Taliban and America without the presence of the Afghan government. State Department Spokeswoman did not deny this news nor accept it. The Afghan government welcomed this move to facilitate the Afghan Peace Process. Taliban appreciated this step of America and said the Taliban demanded to meet America without the presence of Afghan government officials(Shah & Nordland, 2018).

President Trump wants the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad met Taliban leaders in Doha for several times with the consultations of Regional States to reach on a Peace Agreement. In March 2019 American Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad said that America and the Taliban are now coming closer to reach an agreement. Taliban will assure America that Afghan soil will not use for terrorist activities. On the other hand, America will set a plan for its withdrawal from Afghanistan. After these developments, Intra Afghan Talks will begin for a Political Settlement (KhalilZad, 2019).

In September 2019, American Special Representative for Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said in his interview that America and the Taliban have reached a peace deal. The United States within 135 days would remove its 5000 troops from Afghanistan. Withdrawal would be made from five bases in Afghanistan but in return, the Taliban must control its violent activities in two main cities Kabul and Parwan. United States troops would leave the country within 16 months or by the end of 2020. After these concrete steps, the Taliban will be ready to sit with the Afghan government to negotiate for Peace(DeYoung, Ryan, Gearanand, & Rucker, 2019).

President Ghani announced a Prisoner Exchange Deal on November 12, 2019. This deal provided great strength to the Peace Talks. Three Taliban leaders were released from the Afghan government's custody. One American and one Australian were released by the Taliban insurgents. This deal was delayed for some days but it was done after a week. This step boosted the momentum of the Peace Process. President Donald Trump made a surprise visit to Afghanistan on November 28, 2019. He met with President Ashraf Ghani and made different statements about the Taliban. He said it's up to the Taliban whether they want Peace by talks or not. President Trump had mixed feelings about talks with the Taliban. President Trump was not clear about his future agenda about Afghanistan. He said the Taliban are very keen to make a deal(National Security And Defence, 2019).

In response to President Donald Trump's views, the Taliban replied hard to America. Taliban's Spokesperson said America had walked away from the Peace Talks. Now America has to decide whether they want to sit on the Peace table or want to fight with us. If America wants to solve the Afghanistan issue, then they should sit with us otherwise the Taliban are ready to fight for the next hundred years(Mashal, 2019).

It was difficult to know what kind of settlement these parties want which can satisfy all parties. President Ashraf Ghani has already promised his people that he will protect the rights of his people. Kabul government would not accept any settlement without its presence. In a television address, President Ghani spoke withdrawal of American forces without a proper plan would lead the country into civil war. He said the country had experienced a civil war that gave birth to the Taliban fighters (Alikozai & Habibzada, 2019).

Afghan people and the Afghan sitting government have serious concerns over the trustworthiness of the Taliban. The Afghan government has said on various times that after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan it would be difficult to control the Taliban. The most important and difficult thing was a Political Settlement with the sitting Afghan government (Constable, 2019).

Now the deal with the Taliban and America has inked in Qatar in February 2020. The most crucial phase of Peace Talks is the start of Intra Afghan Talks. President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah now moving together in the Afghan Political System. According to history, it's difficult to bring Peace in Afghanistan but leaders and countries are trying to get rid of militancy in Afghanistan.

### Conclusion

America and the Taliban have reached on the historical deal after 19 years of destruction in Afghanistan on 29 February 2020 in Qatar. No doubt it is a historical moment for the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan to bring Peace in Afghanistan. Intra Afghan Talks are the most crucial phase in this Peace Accord to achieve durable Peace in Afghanistan. Spoilers are active to sabotage this Peace Process but Afghan leaders should come forward and identify those spoilers and get rid of them to bring Peace in the country. Regional Powers are also playing their parts to bring stability in Kabul. American withdrawal without the success of the Intra Afghan Talks will start a new era of destruction. Its golden opportunity for the people of Afghanistan to get durable Peace in the country. Taliban and other segments of society including Afghan government should find a middle way to get rid of war. America should not leave Afghanistan before the success of Intra Afghan Talks.

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