



Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Challenges February 2020: A Case of United States and Taliban



Pages: 39 – 47

Vol. V, No. II (Spring 2020)

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Abstract *Afghanistan remained the battleground for a long time period for number of strategic wars by external forces. Diverse and multifaceted Afghan society paved the way for external forces. Several negotiations were held for making the peace in country. Many peace agreements failed because the conflict was not addressed. There is a need to reach beyond the use of military force and to apply inclusive approach by involving the civil society in peace building. It is recognized as a crucial factor in the success of peace process. After more than 18 years of war, the US and the Taliban have reached an agreement to end the war. The central deal for the agreement is to withdrawal of US troops and counter terrorism assurance from Taliban. This study digs out, the factors involved in Afghan conflict and their demands from the peace process. The study relies on secondary sources to develop arguments.*

Key Words: Peace Agreement, Conflict, Security, Terrorism, Negotiation, Forces, Afghanistan

Introduction

In response to 9/11 terrorist attacks, US led a military campaign against the government of Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The main purpose of the US was to secure itself from further any terrorist attacks and to ensure its existence in Afghanistan that Taliban refrain themselves with regard to terror attacks in the US. At that time, Taliban government was replaced with an elected government and condition of the country got improved to some extent. So the elected Afghan government initiated number of measures to come to the terms of peace with Taliban. Afghan government undertaken several initiatives towards Taliban that they should give up the military force in the country. From 2001 to 2003, the United State did not want stay in Afghanistan for long time; their victims were Taliban and leaders of Al Qaeda. After 2004 the revolt became open hence the US changed its strategy and focused on state building. However the state building approach focused on building institutions according to the liberal model with the purpose to promote peace and democratic values. Each of presidential administration deemed that the threefold transformation (peace, democracy and economy) would be promoting processes that lead to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

National Security Council presented a policy called “Accelerating Success” in 2003 which encompassed four indicators institutional, political, economic and coercive. In 2004 by implementation of liberal policy, it became clear that liberal economic policies weaken the way of peace and democracy due to social injustices and inequality among the Afghans. As per facts

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earning source of mostly people was agriculture and liberal economic policies shattered the traditional agriculture consequents became great loss in the local people earnings. As result, the dissatisfaction increased towards Afghan government and the US. Taliban used that dissatisfaction in garnering the support from people of eastern and southern part of Afghanistan; hence peace building policy of the United States became undermined.

In 2008, for pursuing the peace building state liberal entities were needed hence a new constitution was prepared in which equal rights were assured for all Afghan people. The recent discourses regarding the state building signify a process of copying the West type liberalism in Afghanistan but historically it has developed a different political and socio-economic stratum hence it will take long time for creating liberal democratic culture. However, since 2001 Afghanistan depends upon the foreign aid of US and due to this government of Afghanistan has being pressurized by the western allies for building the instant democratic regime. The United States and other western allies continuously pressured the government of Afghanistan about the socio-economic policies from last 18 years as result consensus created among the Afghans that Afghan government is not corresponding to the domestic policies. The state building process contributed to build a state which caters the external agendas instead of domestic policies.

The attempts made by the US for a strong centralized state at Kabul in order to guarantee the rule of law asserted little progress. Due to centralized structure of the government, all the institutions are mostly in big cities of the country. In rural areas the legitimacy of the state is weak because the law enforcement agencies and judiciary is not in those areas due to Taliban revolts.

Under the policy of Accelerating Afghanistan, the economic policies placed Afghanistan upon the mercy of IMF, World Bank and other international agencies which led to corruption and detachment state from the society. The electoral system under the "Accelerating Afghanistan" constrained the governing elite in a disastrous. The controversial presidential elections in 2009, 2014, and 2019 produced grievances and accusations among the Afghani people. As result it understood that holding of elections cannot be helpful for creating the stability in government.

The military campaign of the US is not in a position of winning the war, losing the war, sending and withdrawing its more troops. Under all three presidential administrations of the US, in state building the developmental feature remained ignored and military feature in creating the peace been overstated in Afghanistan. All US administrations owned office with their own policies, approaches and agendas. Under the Bush administration, US early strategy was to counter the terrorism in Afghanistan. After combating the terrorism the US had to focus on state building but with the increasing insurgency of Taliban, presidents sent more and more troops and deserted their strategies of withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Peace Building through Talks

About Afghanistan, the United States and other its allies felt that through military success cannot be achieved over the revolts of Taliban in late 2017. As per the findings of Pew Research Center (Oct 2018) 49% respondents stated that the US became failed and 35% favored that the US became successful in accomplishing the goals, so the people of America showed pessimistic attitude towards the US approach in Afghanistan. After almost three decades of war, it becomes troublesome for the Afghans and the US that how the long-lasting peace can be ensured in Afghanistan. In early 2018, the talks about peace initiated between Taliban and United States, have not clear and transparent strategy. Though the conflict in Afghanistan may not end and even is more probably intricate the situation for civil war instead of long-lasting peace ([Glaser and Mueller, Aug 2019](#)).

All administrations of the US carried out negotiations with Taliban in their own perspective of peace for pursuing the interests of US by using different approaches but none of these had well unified between the civilian agencies and the US military.

Early Negotiations

Before 11 September talks moved with Taliban under the administration of Bush and Clinton regarding the demands of the US government. In those negotiations it was asked to Taliban for cooperation with the US regarding the oil companies that access to the central Asia reservoirs can be gain via Afghanistan. But the US negotiations with Taliban minimized after bombing by US in Yemen in 2000, believed that Afghanistan provided shelter to AL Qaeda leadership. President Bush enhanced the communication towards Taliban in early 2001, in order to pressurize Taliban for expelling the Osama Bin Laden from their country and getting facilitation for access to Central Asia reserves by using the routes of Afghanistan.

With immediate effect of 9/11, Bush declared abundance of all negotiations with Taliban until the ending of formal talks with leadership of Taliban. The formal talks between the US and Taliban remained stop up to March 2009.

Reintegration Program of Afghan Government

In 2005, reintegration program (Tahkim-e-Solh program) started by the US that Taliban surrender their position voluntarily. Through this program incentives were granted to the people and prepared Taliban fighters at local level for minimizing the insurgency but that program failed due to corrupt process. In 2010, Afghan government renamed the Tahkim-e-Solh program with High Peace Council due to pressure of the US and its allies. But later on, High Peace Council dissolved in 2018 and handed over the authorities of peace and reintegration under the National Security Advisor of Afghanistan.

Peacemaking under Obama

The Obama's administration asserted willingness for starting the formal talks with moderate level leadership of Taliban. The main objective of the US administration was to takeout it's military from Afghanistan in a comparatively winning narrative. US policy under Obama's administration towards Afghanistan reflected two different groups with different agendas. On one hand as per order of Obama tens of thousands of soldiers deployed to pressurized leadership of Taliban that they choose for surrender or get ready for negotiations in bargaining with limited power. While on the other hand, US president authorized the special envoy Holbrooke to force the government to fight against the corruption and make the reintegration program more transparent. Under the leadership of Obama, the US administration exercised the military functions as well as periodic talks to compel the leadership of Taliban for making reconciliation with the government of Afghanistan. But could not succeed due to factions in Taliban, one of faction was ready for reconciliation while other faction was in opposition of negotiations and reconciliation (Barrett 2012).

In year of 2009 US president initiated unprecedented efforts for negotiations between Taliban and the US. Both parties-initiated talks but could not culminate in peace agreement by the end of presidency of Obama. In spite of results, start of negotiations between the US and Taliban was commenced.

All over the conflict period since 2001, major three key stakeholders; Afghan government, US and Taliban tried time to time to catalyze the peace process. In 2010, President Hamid Karzai, initiated High Peace Council and offered a peace deal with Taliban, the deal sought removal of Taliban names from the blacklists in case they give up Al Qaeda and support government in pursuing the political goals according to the country constitution. But the Taliban rejected the aforesaid offer and increased their activities against the government. In the meanwhile, another peace offer was initiated with Taliban through the National Unity Government under the presidency of Ashraf Ghani; the deal including the statement, "Taliban will be considered as a political party, sanctions will be removed, prisoners will be released and constitution will be reviewed." In 2013, an office was established for political negotiations and consultations in Doha, Qatar, by the Taliban. In June 2018 ceasefire proclaimed by the Afghan government for a

weeklong on countrywide level with Taliban. In response after two days, group of Taliban announced three-day ceasefire. The conflicting parties remained engage in several direct and indirect formal and informal contacts for peace since late 2010. Moreover, with the initiative of Afghan government, the US diplomats met with Taliban leaders for peace and reconciliation. These activities somehow paved the way to end the decades old conflict in Afghanistan and a ray of hope appeared for peace agreement among the conflicting group.

Peace Policy of Trump

The US president Donald Trump declared the new policy about Afghanistan in Aug 2017. As per announced policy deployment of 3500 US fresh troops with increasing number up to 18000 including 2000 NATO troops were ensured in Afghanistan. The elites from Afghanistan deemed this policy a new and better commitment by the US for the country while many others who lived in the control of Taliban, assumed it more war and destruction (Constable 2017). In 2018, based on some ground realities and military standoff Donald Trump realized that United States required commencing unconditional negotiations with Taliban leadership for leaving Afghanistan relatively in victory narratives. So, for this, Trump has to agree for not involving the Afghan government in talks as per demand of Taliban. Hence this Trump policy showed a setback of previous US-Afghan policy, as the preceding leaderships of US claimed for an Afghan led strategy in peace talks (Mashal and Schmitt 2018).

In the earlier initiatives, though the demands of Taliban and the government remained unclear during peace negotiations. Hence the transition from war to peaceful situation needed strong efforts for reintegration and negotiations for making the clear demands. Afghan people strongly felt the exhaustion of three decades war; they desired to bring the country to tolerable situation as numbers of generations have spent their lives in war. Recently, in February, 2020, negotiating plan between the US and Taliban posed potential conditions to end the war through a comprehensive peace agreement, which also includes the later intra negotiations between Taliban and Afghan government. However, it has not laid sustainable foundations for peace as it overlooked the capacity of Afghan civil society, which can support strongly for the peace process in the country as well as in region. National Consultative Peace of 2010 and National Peace Council did not bring fruit as these ignored the democratic representation of civil society. The participation of all the segments of society in peace process is vital for the transition phase. Most of the undemocratic peace agreements have resulted in failure and once they failed, the aftermaths bring much destruction than earlier. History of successful shifts from war to peace reflects the slow and democratic process brings stable and sustainable situation of peace. The deal between Taliban leadership and the US asserts the crucial step for acquiring the lasting peace. But the situation will be challenging as to how Taliban and Afghan government will mutually agree for the future of the country. The US withdrawal may create new conflict and consequently pave the way for Taliban to control the country again.

Sources of Conflict

The conflict of Afghanistan is dynamic, involve Afghan, regional and international factors. The conflict is complex in nature so none of the actor can resolves the crisis and laid the foundation for peace in the country. Hence the concerns and interests of all actors need to be elaborated for understanding the dynamics of the conflict as under:

Internal Sources of Conflict

The rise of the Taliban let the civil war among the Mujahideen and they promised to restore the security and peace. Similarly, Taliban got the opportunity to remerge because the Afghan government after 2001 failed to maintained peace and good governance. As per report of BBC 2018, Taliban got control over 4% area of the country and for operationalizing their activities they have established commissions including education, health, military and judicial

External Sources of Conflict

In Afghanistan the role of external actors remained influential, otherwise Afghan government and Taliban could not survive without the support of foreign factors. It is deemed that Afghanistan remained the arena of proxy war due to other countries. The neighboring and regional countries played their rivalries by using the land of Afghanistan.

Existence OF U.S Troops in Afghanistan

As per official reports Al Qaeda carried out 9/11 terrorist attacks, so in response to those attacks the US invaded Afghanistan. At that time, there was control by Taliban in the country and they provided safe haven to the leaders of Al Qaeda. Before starting the civil war at large level, in October 2001, the former president of US George W. Bush, announced that the presence of the US mission in Afghanistan was to shake the military capacity of Taliban and disrupt the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan. As result, Taliban were ousted due to the use of the power by the US forces, they retreated to neighboring countries especially in Pakistan. US forces in Afghanistan provided support to the Afghani government. But the Taliban continued backed the insurgency against the government in Kabul and on the US forces. With the passage of time the US and NATO forces asserted and the Afghan government was strengthening to fight against the Taliban. By the end of 2014, the US forces handed over responsibilities to Afghan army, but they remained in country to build the capacity of Afghan army.

The Toll of War

As per the report of researchers for the costs of War Project at Brown University, in war since 2001 more than 157000 people demised According to the United Nations refugee agency, 43 thousand civilians died and 2.5 million Afghan were refugees in the worldwide by 2018. Round about more than 2 thousand American injured and 2400 killed. More than 1100 NATO troops died over the period. As per analysts' estimation, in last five years about 45,000 Afghan troops were killed. Tens of thousands of Taliban died since 2001.

During the war era, on the account of developmental projects, antinarcotics efforts and assistance for Afghan security forces, the US spent round about \$2 trillion. Apart from this, billions of dollars spent for medical and rehabilitation care for US officials.

Goals of Conflicting Actors

Afghan Government

For the Peace Processes the Officials of Afghan Government and some other Politically Influential Stakeholders Asserted to Attain the Following General Goals:

- A complete ceasefire
- Preservation of democratic rights and practices according to constitution
- Amicable foreign relations

At broader level, the Afghan government indicated the assent for the reintegration of peacekeeping model for the cessation of hostilities, in which opportunity will be provided to Taliban to accommodate the current government system.

Taliban

On the part of Taliban following goals were stated among them first three are the paramount:

- Withdrawal of all the external forces from Afghanistan
- Establishment of the government based on Islamic system
- New and modified constitution for the country
- Removal of sanctions from Taliban members
- Letting go all the prisoners of Taliban

- Cordial relations with global world

United State

The US presented the following objectives to achieve through peace agreement:

- Guarantee that Afghanistan will not become point of haven for any terrorist group that causes threat to the US.

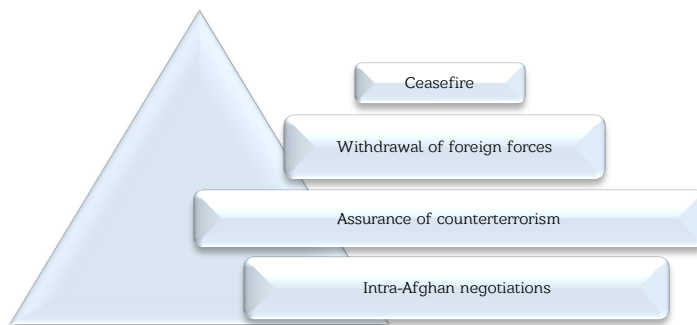
Agreement between Taliban and the US

The official negotiations were held between the representatives of Taliban and the US, which took almost more than a year and finally signed an agreement on February 29, 2020. Agreement laid groundwork for leaving out the external forces from the country and for intra negotiations between government and Taliban.

As per US-Taliban agreement, the US has to draw its forces from 13000 to 8600 in 135 days and will draw all its forces in upcoming 14 months from Afghanistan. Along with this commitment, the US will play role in facilitating the prisoners exchange between Afghan government and Taliban and will take off the sanctions on the members of Taliban. The second party, Taliban assured commitments none of any member or party will allow using the soil of Afghanistan for terrorism that threatens the US and its allies. Apart from this, it also states that negotiations will be carried out between the government and Taliban within speculated time. The ousting of the US forces from Afghanistan is still unclear whether it depends upon the intra Afghan talks or results of such negotiations.

Core of Peace Agreement

The US and Taliban agreed for the following key points throughout the nine rounds of discussions and in Feb 2020 signed the agreement for peace in Afghanistan.



Ceasefire

Agreement negotiators assented for the reduction of violence and agreed that the lasting truce will be the part of intra- Afghan talks among all the three key tiers.

Withdrawal of the Foreign Forces

The US has to draw its forces from 13000 to 8600 in 135 days and will draw all its forces in upcoming 14 months from Afghanistan if Taliban chases its agreed commitments.

Intra-Afghan Talks

Throughout the nine rounds Taliban showed resistance to negotiate with Afghan government, calling it the US backed government. But finally, leaders of Taliban agreed to initiate negotiations with Afghan government after the agreement with foreign force.

Assurance of Counterterrorism

US invaded Afghanistan in the response of 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, for the purpose to eliminate the terrorism threat from the country. As per agreement, Taliban assured that no one will be allowed to use the soil of Afghanistan for terrorist activities which threaten the US and its partners.

Neighbors and Regional Dynamics

In Afghanistan the involvement of non-state actors along with the combined regional factors can be considered as the core to conflict. The bilateral peace agreement received support at large level from the neighbors and region. In this backdrop the role of neighboring countries is considered the most important and particularly Pakistan, as it is blamed that Pakistan has supported Taliban which has always been denied by the Islamabad Pakistan played a role to open up the channel for the negotiators of the US to link the Taliban initially. In January 2020 a biannual report of Defense Department of Afghanistan asserted that “the role of Pakistan is constructive and supporting in Afghan reconciliation”. India remained the strong supporter of Afghan government, provided \$3 billion for infrastructure and built commercial liaison. India's diplomatic relations with Afghanistan focused much on the rivalry of Pakistan to impede its cordial relations with central Asia.

Paradoxically, on the other side India has not even supported the efforts of US for negotiations with Taliban and even posed resistance to legitimize the Taliban as a political segment of Afghanistan. The government of Iran considered Taliban as their enemies due to the religion sects and hence supported the US efforts and Afghan government. Nevertheless, since Iranian leaders tried to improve its ties but both countries' relations were not cordial due to trafficking of drugs and opium through Iran. As Russian forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan in 1989, so their relations were frayed. After decades, Moscow expects to rekindle ties with Afghanistan and to counter the NATO and the US forces in the regions; it facilitated many consultations between Afghan representatives and the US delegations in last year. In broader context of Chinese aspirations Afghanistan possibly will be the growing priority in the region and at global level. China has the economic interest and wants to integrate Afghanistan into Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, Chinese leaders facilitated joint conference for the officials of Afghan and Taliban in Beijing in late 2019. China provided support to the peace agreement between US-Taliban.

Potential Obstacles in Intra-Afghan Negotiations

Peace process gained significant support through the vast majority of Afghani people but several issues remained unclear and to be worked out while the intra- Afghans' negotiations. The areas which need to be worked out during Intra-Afghan talks include sharing of power, exchange of prisoners, disarming, reintegration of Taliban and for future shaping the democratic institutions and constitution of country.

During the intra – Afghan negotiations, one of the major obstacles would be exchange of prisoners which is necessary to end the war in the country. As per peace agreement, up to 5000 Taliban prisoners will be released in exchange for 1000 Afghan security officials while the Afghan government stated that on both sides the feasible numbers of prisoners will be released. President of Afghanistan signed an official order on 15 March, 2020, that within 15 days 1500 Taliban prisoners will be released upon their written assurance that they will remain off from combat zone. As long as Taliban will get initiate negotiations and reduce violence, every two weeks their 500 prisoners will be released. On the other hand, spokesperson of Taliban rejected all the conditions regarding releasing of the prisoners which are out of peace accord and emphasized for the release of 5000 prisoners before going for intra-Afghan negotiations.

Different perspective are presented by Afghan government and the US officials regarding the terror attacks by Taliban. As per Afghan officials, after agreement, within four days 76 attacks

were carried out by Taliban and the nature of attacks were as before the peace agreement which indicates that the level of violence has not decreased. Taliban stated that none of attack was at large level which indicates that they followed the agreement and denied responsibility for a large-scale attack. As per military spokesman of the US, on 3rd March, 2020 Taliban carried out 43 attacks against the forces of Afghans, while in response US conducted only an airstrike in eleven days after the agreement.

Further the process of intra-Afghan talks could be potentially complicated due to weak central government, disrupted by the ethnic and tribal variances. In Afghanistan the elections of 2019 were disfigured due to many reasons which includes, out of the total 9 million registered voters only 1.8 million people casted ballots, attacks were conducted at polling stations, and the results were kept held for months. Upon the announcement of President Ashraf Ghani's victory, CEO Abdullah and his followers rejected the election results on the basis of fraudulent and said they would establish separate government for themselves. This situation led to the fears for the repetition of disputes and violence in the country. Regarding the power sharing agreement an intensive diplomat of the US is required. Currently it is not clear that what type of political arrangements could satisfy the powerful actors in Afghanistan. Moreover, each of them has disagreed to the composition and size of forthcoming negotiating team for intra-Afghan talks.

Being war affected country; the institutions are shattered and instable. Despite of persistent challenges NATO is committed for long term stability and peace in Afghanistan. The main objective of this commitment is to make effective and capable Defense Security Forces at National of Afghanistan. Allies agreed to finance ANDSF by the end of this century and they expect intensive efforts from Afghan government to build strong institutions that become able to fulfill the needs of country. As result the land of Afghanistan can never be again a place of terrorism (Wolfgang HELLMICH Oct 2017). In response Afghan government agreed to play its role to strengthen ANDSF and it will be accountable for the total of its budget by 2024. Due to economic trends in Afghanistan this seems improbable that Afghan government will be able to fulfill its commitments.

Conclusion

This paper presented an outline of the various initiatives of peace in Afghanistan. The peace building processes in Afghanistan were not inclusive. Therefore, the military strategies remained unsuccessful in eliminating the insurgencies from Afghanistan. The circumstances in which military invasion could not become solution, hence the United States has initiated negotiations for peace agreement with Taliban leadership. The agreement paved the path for the peace in the country after a long war period. It can be deemed as a fair chance of succeeding but one cannot be certain as many things are unclear and to some extent contingent to intra Afghan talks. It is not clear what type of political arrangements would be acceptable for both Taliban and Afghan government that later abandon their military efforts. As per President Ashraf Ghani, the government will not agree with any settlement which will compromise the rights of Afghans. On the other hand, Taliban did not elaborate their strategies after settling the governance while referred it as the subject of intra-Afghan talks.

The best logical implementation of peace agreement could be possible if the US ensure the intra Afghan talks successfully and brought all internal factors into political arena of the country. In this way the state building process can be achievable which ultimately leads to sustainable peace.

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