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Dialogues and Peace Treaties in Afghanistan: An Analysis from 2010 to 2019



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Abstract

After the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the war-torn nation confronted numerous hardships and adversities in the following decade. US-led NATO forces overthrown the Taliban regime on 13 November 2001. The Taliban encountered severe blows from the US and allied forces, which constrained them to take shelter in the neighbouring countries, besides the hilly areas of Afghanistan (Afridi, Afridi, & Jalal, 2016). The region has witnessed a fierce fight between the Taliban and the NATO troops till 2010. Afterwards, a new phase in the Afghan conflict has begun; a progression of table talks and negotiations was initiated at various fronts. This particular research will focus on the dialogues, treaties, and negotiations among the conflicting parties to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan war.

Key Words: Taliban, US, Negotiations, Afghanistan, Withdrawal, NATO, Summit

Introduction

In retaliation to the September 11, 2001, attack, the Bush administration, with the approval of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), attacked Afghanistan. With the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, NATO troops initiated the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) mission and controlled entire Afghanistan. The Taliban were scattered and took shelter in the neighbouring countries in the hope to regroup over there. US and allied forces destroyed the sanctuaries and sleeping cells of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Initially, the Taliban confronted severe damage, but gradually they managed to reorganize themselves and bounce back. In the latter half of 2000, the Taliban attacked belligerently with new tactics and war strategies. A series of Suicide attacks and Improvised Explosive

Devices (IEDs) were used for the first time in Afghanistan against the NATO troops. The world has seen all these ups and downs in Afghanistan till 2010. Thereafter, a new phase in the history of Afghanistan has begun. In this regard, the regional and international actors took initiatives in finding a diplomatic solution to the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Rounds of dialogues, negotiations, treaties and summits arranged around the globe, participated by the conflicting parties of Afghanistan. Pakistan being a frontline state, played a vital role in this affair. Bush administration awarded Pakistan with a new status of a non-NATO ally of the USA. Besides Pakistan, other states, including China, Russia, Turkey and Iran, arranged numerous negotiations and conferences among the Taliban, US and the Afghan

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government to settle the disputes. The dialogue phase entered the final stage when the Trump administration appointed Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-American diplomat, for contacting the Taliban directly without a third party. In almost thirteen rounds of dialogue, Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban officials strike a deal. They agreed on the terms that the foreign troops would leave Afghanistan only if the Taliban assured that the Afghan's soil would not be a safe haven for any other terrorist organization.

Objectives of the Research

- To find out the efforts of the regional and international actors in prevailing peace in Afghanistan.
- To know the nature of dialogues and peace treaties among the conflicting parties.
- To analyze Zalmay Khalilzad's role in the negotiation process.

Research Questions

- What are the efforts made by the regional and international states to end the war in Afghanistan?
- How Pakistan, being the frontline state, played its role in the ongoing war in Afghanistan?

Methodology

The research article aims to discover the answers to the above-given research questions through the qualitative method. This qualitative research would be descriptive and analytical in nature. The study would be descriptive as it mainly discusses how the dialogues have been started and who played a significant role in this affair. Moreover, secondary sources will be used in order to find out the possible solution to the questions mentioned above. In this regard, research articles, magazines, reports, books and newspapers will be taken into consideration

Lisbon Summit of 2010

In November 2010, the NATO summit was summoned in Lisbon, Portugal, for addressing diverse issues faced by the member states. The different heads of the States attended the

conference. In that summit, four core issues were discussed, of which one was regarding Afghanistan (Tisdall, 2010). NATO members reached an agreement consenting to hand over whole duty regarding security concerns to the Afghan National Army and security forces by the end of 2014. A transition period will be started in July 2011 and will end within two years (Taylor, 2010). They have decided that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has concluded its mission in Afghanistan, though Afghanistan's stability and security will intact with our own security (NATO, 2010). NATO authorities declared that a roadmap would be designed for Afghan security forces to lead the country, and ISAF will act as a supporting actor. Transition does not mean that NATO will exit Afghanistan in a hurry and prove as a lethal departure for Afghanistan's inhabitants. The local security forces will take full responsibility in relatively stable cities and provinces and take complete control of Afghanistan in 2014. Member of NATO states met with President Hamid Karzai and assured him that all the possible attempts had been made in assisting the Afghan National Army. Besides, further coordination will continue until Afghan forces can protect their people from the Taliban's overwhelming threats and, like, offshoots (NATO, 2010). In the Lisbon summit, NATO identified the ISAF mission as "the Alliance's key priority" and illustrated that a fresh and new chapter in Afghanistan will now be instigated (Taylor, 2010). NATO officials agreed with Afghanistan's government on the enduring partnership that will pursue to make the long span of corporations with sophisticated ideas and policies. NATO leaders guaranteed President Hamid Karzai that after ending the ISAF mission, the support would continue in diverse fields to help in building war-torn Afghanistan.

London Conference on Afghanistan, 2010

For the first time in a decade of war against the Taliban, NATO states and Afghan legislative specialists demonstrated a motion of table talks and compromised to be made with the insurgent group. For that reason, ministers from nearly sixty nations met in London to find a procedure to put a stop to the continuous war with the Taliban. The gathering was required to

back endeavors to prevail upon Taliban troopers with cash and employment. Besides, United Nations blacklisted people, especially the Taliban, would be encouraged to change their side for the betterment of their own Afghanistan ([Sterner, 2010](#)). The conference was attended by the rival of President Hamid Karzai in the previous election and former finance minister Ashraf Ghani. He stated in the conference that I do not hold any governmental office, but my whole party stands with President Hamid Karzai for the sake of rebuilding our country. Furthermore, he advocated that Karzai and himself have political differences, but we all are one when it comes to national integrity. This positive move from rival Ghani was a boost for Karzai in reconciliation with the Taliban. Ashraf Ghani illustrated the importance of working together of all factions of Afghanistan ([Lakshmanan, 2010](#)). In the said conference, a two-tier peace accord was agreed upon among the member states. The Taliban's foot soldiers will primarily provide jobs, money, and all the essential requirements to halt their terrorist activities. And secondly, a new chapter will initiate in which Taliban leaders will be invited for table talks and negotiations with NATO and American officials to find out a diplomatic solution to the current war ([Borger, 2010](#)).

Afghan Loya Jirga, 2010

The government organized Afghan National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ), also known as Loya Jirga, in June 2010. Some sixteen hundred representatives from all around Afghanistan, including three hundred women, belonged from different walks and corners of the country participated in it ([Mojumdar, 2010](#)). After a continuous war of nine years, the entire population of Afghanistan was willing to stop further warfare and make some concrete steps to minimize the tension between the Taliban and NATO forces. Loya Jirga, arranged by Hamid Karzai, was attended by the country's former president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, regardless of the Taliban declining any proposals. It was perhaps the very first attempt by the government to take such an optimistic step regarding the peace process with the Taliban.

The entrance to the Loya Jirga tent was tighter than any airport in Europe and America. Metal detectors and jammers were all around the Jirga complex. Karzai administration was striving how to start the reconciliation process with the Taliban ([Mojumdar, 2010](#)). The Loya Jirga was convened by President Hamid Karzai in Kabul for two rudimentary purposes. Firstly, Karzai wanted to continue his partnership with NATO forces not permanently but on some necessary basic terms. Secondly, to bring the Afghan Taliban for table talks to attain peace and make reconciliation efforts to restore amity in the country ([Anum, 2011](#)). Taliban were not explicitly invited in that Peace Jirga. But their sympathizers were all around the complex to promote their agenda and hold peace talks with them to better Afghanistan. The entire delegation of Loya Jirga aimed to identify and categorize the mechanism of how the peace dialogue should be started, with whom the dialogue would be initiated, who would be responsible if any misshape happen. ([Mojumdar, 2010](#)).

The Quetta Shura

A dozen pioneer Mujahideen veterans established the Rahbari Shura, also known as the Quetta Shura, a city located to the south of Pakistan and the capital of Baluchistan province. Members of Quetta Shura were all veterans who fought against the former USSR and ruled Afghanistan in the late 1990s. The majority of the Shura members were clerics; Sunni Mullahs belonged from the Deobandi School of thought. Senior members' deaths did not affect Shura's effectiveness, and their juniors were spontaneously assumed by their positions ([Siddique, 2014](#)). Mullah Muhammad Omar remained the Shura's undisputed leader until his death on 23 April 2013 ([Ali, 2019](#)). Political and all strategic verdicts have been made by his, Mullah Omar, name. The speeches of Mullah Omar, which he delivered mainly on two occasions, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, were reliable and considered authentic. After the death of Mullah Omar, the Shura was led by Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who had the back of many Pashtuns. The former Guantanamo Bay prisoner, Zakir, was a leading man in the Shura who had the authority to launch military tactics designed by the Quetta Shura in Loy Kandahar.

Jalaluddin Haqqani was a member of Shura as well, but he did not actively participate in it. His son Naseeruddin Haqqani represented his father after him.

After the creation of Quetta Shura, leaders of the Taliban made their stance very clear on some political issues. They kept their identity distinct from al-Qaeda. Senior commanders of the Taliban who were fighting in Afghanistan mostly travelled physically to Quetta, Pakistan, to meet the Shura and take them in confidence for further military tactics [\(Scott, 2010\)](#). They were well settled in Quetta, Pakistan, as they launched many operations to halt the NATO supply [\(Nadim, 2012\)](#). They only wanted the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the revival of true Islamic sharia in Afghanistan. Since the year 2010, Shura, led by Zakir and Mansour, personally supervised Taliban contact with NATO and American officials. These contacts led the Taliban to take a material step in opening their office in Qatar's capital city, Doha, in 2013.

Peace Step by the Quetta Shura

A secret meeting was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, where the top leaders of Quetta Shura met with Pakistani authorities and showed their desire to find a diplomatic solution to the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The Shura consisted of ten influential figures from the Taliban, including Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the group top military man [\(Moreau, 2013\)](#). Pakistan denied the fact that a secret meeting took place in the capital city of Islamabad, but a senior advisor of the Hamid Karzai administration confirmed the occasion. Furthermore, the advisor told in an interview that the entire Shura was available in the meeting, which was a good gesture towards peace and harmony by the Taliban. The advisor further praised the efforts made by Pakistan to bring the Shura for table talks [\(Moreau, 2013\)](#).

Obama Administration Announced Troops Withdrawal

After the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in 2011, President Barack Obama addressed the nation on June 22, 2011. The speech was delivered from the White House's east room about the troop pullout and the future of

Afghanistan. In his speech, he clarified that America has planned to remove ten thousand soldiers at the end of this year and a total of thirty-three thousand by the summer of next year [\(Sabochik, 2011\)](#). Furthermore, Obama advocated that America had achieved its principal aim of eliminating the mastermind of the September 9 attack. Now it's the ripe time to propose a timeline of troop withdrawal and discuss Afghanistan's future scenario. In his speech, Obama said that political and strategic partnership is changing in the world, especially in South Asia, which will concern our security and integrity [\(Landler & Cooper, 2011\)](#). Additionally, the president explained that when he ordered the troop surge in 2009, we had an apparent mission to destroy al-Qaeda offshoots, cutting their ties with the Taliban. Likewise, we wanted to train the Afghan security forces to face the challenges of tomorrow when the NATO-led international mission will wind up. Today "I (President Obama) am delighted to announce that we had almost achieved those desirable goals". Obama was a very ingenious President because he always picked his sentences very precisely and cleverly. He did not repeat President Bush's mistake when he made such a gaffe by saying "Mission accomplished" in 2003 when they started a military operation in Iraq. Instead of mentioning the word mission accomplished, Obama said that we have demolished al-Qaeda and put them on a path where they could meet only defeat at the end [\(MacAskill & Wintour, 2011\)](#).

Bonn Conference December 2011

After a decade of continuous war in Afghanistan, the one-day gathering at the city of Bonn, Western Germany, brought about more than one hundred international delegates from all around the globe in December 2011. The core agenda of the conference was about the future planning of Afghanistan when NATO forces leave the country in 2014 [\(Naqvi, 2011\)](#). President Karzai attended the conference on 2 December when he was warmly welcomed by German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle at the airport. Karzai stated in his meeting with the foreign minister that Germany is an old friend of Afghanistan who helped us in every challenging situation, especially in the last

decade. Karzai illustrated that Germany assisted us in every field, from fighting with the Taliban to creating jobs and increasing literacy. The conference rigorously concentrated on three fundamental issues. Primarily, the shifting of responsibility to the Afghan government when NATO leave Afghanistan. Secondary, the long term commitment of the world community with Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal. Last but not least, the country's peaceful political process will lead towards stabilization in the long term.

NATO's Chicago Summit, 2012

NATO-member countries met in Chicago, United States, on 21 May 2012. The memo of the summit was precise regarding Afghanistan. Chiefly, troops withdrawal and then long term presence in assisting Afghan security forces and political leaders. In the Chicago summit, the member state reiterated the Lisbon summit of 2010 and added some more concern milestones to be achieved. They decided that the NATO-led ISAF mission would stop functioning actively while remaining in Afghanistan with different tasks and names. Officials of the summit advocated that NATO countries will try to eliminate the differences among the elite groups within Afghanistan and try to persuade the neighboring countries, especially Pakistan and Iran, to play their active role in the peacebuilding of Afghanistan. Moreover, they stated that we had made our decision that NATO presence will remain in Afghanistan till complete amity attained in the country (Weitz, 2012). The leader of NATO alliances said that the member country should take domestic public confidence to pull out our troops as soon as possible and not repeat the mistake as they did in the past. In Chicago, coalition partners are relied upon to create plans for the progress of entire obligation regarding security to Afghans before the finish of 2014 and characterize NATO's job in the nation after the changeover. The change would stamp the finish of what has been the biggest and longest battle activity in NATO's history. As per NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, twenty-two non-NATO accomplices who are enthusiastic about balancing out Afghanistan will go to the summit.

Beginning of NATO-Taliban Talks

In November 2010, the United States of American and NATO allies had begun their first-ever secret negotiations with Taliban leaders. NATO and US officials met with Tayyab Agha, who was a representative of Mullah Omar in Munich, Germany. The clandestine negotiations were then brokered by the Qatari royal family and German officials (Sheikh & Greenwood, 2012). Afterwards, two rounds of further preliminary meetings between America and the Taliban occurred in 2011 in Doha, Qatar and Germany. The rounds of dialogues happened before opening the Taliban's political office in Doha, Qatar, in January 2012 (DeYoung, 2011). These talks were chiefly concerned about the prisoner exchange between the conflicting parties and the political office of the Taliban to be established in Doha, Qatar. It was decided that five Guantanamo prisoners would be swapped for one American soldier. Mullah Muhammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban, did not participate in the preliminary talks with the United States. He even did not attend any Taliban council, which took place inside Pakistan as well. He only addressed his people and the world through cassette tapes. Obama administration was very keen in these introductory negotiations because they wanted to know which faction of the Taliban desire to carry out peaceful negotiations for a better future of Afghanistan (Coll, 2011). Obama's Afghan war advisors convinced President Karzai to take some material steps in bringing Taliban leader on a fundamental term to end the war and make Afghanistan a prosperous country as it was. Karzai was successful in these sporadic talks with the leaders of the Taliban with the help of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and some Gulf countries. But unfortunately, all in vain because the talks ended unproductively. Besides the prisoner swap, NATO officials were willing to discuss some more core issues in these initial talks. That includes that the Taliban should cut their ties with al-Qaeda, stop attacking civilians and NATO forces, reduce warfare operations, participate in the local election with a very positive attitude and observe female and minorities rights.

Taliban's Qatar Office

In 2011, as a significant aspect of the American plan to haul out of Afghanistan, US authorities started holding conversations with a bunch of Taliban leaders. NATO and American officials met with the Taliban in Qatar and Germany to encourage dialogues. The US stopped messing around with the Taliban by contending that, without arranged harmony, the US would probably never pull back from Afghanistan and leave a large amount of artillery, preventing the Taliban from grabbing power again. Moreover, the Americans entreated that the Taliban should break all connections to Al Qaeda and respect the newly form government. As far as it matters for them, the Taliban had one objective as a main priority, to discharge senior Taliban pioneers held at Guantanamo Bay (Nissenbaum, Totakhil & Barnes, 2012). In consenting to these intervened discourses, the Afghan government had trusted that they could divert the Taliban from an aggressor association into a political one to halt brutality and look after harmony. To encourage the compromise procedure, and in line with the American government, Qatar consented to open the Taliban's office where they could negotiate with NATO and the US official on a regular basis (Staner, 2013). Finally, in the month of June 2013, the Taliban formally opened their office in Doha, Qatar (Smith, 2013). This move from the Taliban to open an office in Qatar for processing of peace negotiation was a milestone step by them towards the stability of Afghanistan. In a press conference with German chancellor Angela Merkel, American president Barack Obama told the press that the Qatar office from the Taliban will become a Centre of negotiation in the near future and will play a leading role in solving the conflict (Smith, 2013). The parties who played a leading role in opening the Taliban's Qatar office was the Afghan government and their High Peace Council, United States and the Taliban. Taliban representatives met with NATO and American officials over the last two years for the said purpose. Taliban representatives also attended seminars and conferences on the Afghan peace process in different countries, including Japan, Germany and France, but that was the first time when Taliban leaders came across directly with the Afghan governmental officials.

Trilateral Summit, 2012

In February 2012, a trilateral summit was arranged in the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad, where the presidents of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan met to discuss the core issues of terrorism, Afghan war and the economic road map (Tribune, 2019). The summit organized on a day when an American drone strike killed fourteen militants in the tribal area of Pakistan. All the talks in Islamabad were concerned about how to conclude the Afghan war (Leibey & DeYoung, 2012). The trio pledged to tackle the ongoing conflicts closely, especially terrorism waves, spreading their aftershocks when NATO leaves Afghanistan. The then-president of Iran, Ahmadinejad, said that "when brothers join their hands together the hand of Allah assists them in their aim". Furthermore, the Iranian president advocated that foreign powers have targeted our region only for their own interests and hegemony; we needed to deny interfering in our internal affairs.

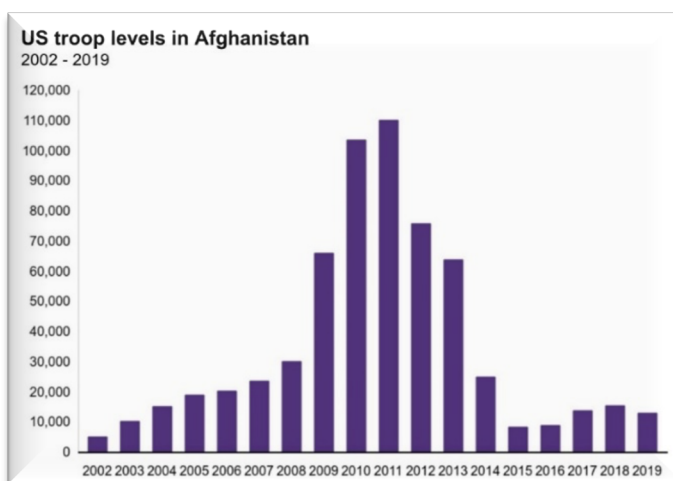
The reconciliation talks between Afghan officials and Taliban leaders faced a lot of hurdles that prevent the dialogue from being effective. As for as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was concerned, Pakistan recognized their government and had a close relationship with the former. That was why Afghan government officials stressed on Pakistan to bring the insurgent group for more reliable talks (Leibey & DeYoung, 2012). In an interview with President Karzai on his way to Kabul, he illustrated that the Afghan people could not bear more hardship and warfare; they are in demand of a political settlement. The former foreign minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, demonstrated that Pakistan had opened its diplomatic ties to each and everyone who will try to bring peace to Afghanistan. Additionally, Khar said that Pakistan is willing to play an active role in solving the conflict. Our country will happily accept any suggestions from the Karzai administration to bring the Taliban for table talks. Pakistani foreign minister supported the arguments that our government will facilitate every kind of negotiation between Taliban and Afghan officials (Leibey & DeYoung, 2012).

NATO Drawdown, 2014

In May 2013, a conference was arranged in Washington, DC, where American President Barack Obama met with NATO Secretary-General Mr Anders Fogh Rasmussen ([Rampton, 2013](#)). In his speech, Obama made it clear to its NATO allies that we are planning to pull out our forces from Afghanistan and hand over security concerns to the local Afghan forces in the upcoming year. But in his address, Obama did not mention how many troops would be left in Afghanistan. US president advocated that we have plenty of time to discuss what steps should be taken to pull out our troops and what necessary measures to keep in mind after withdrawing our forces in 2014. We just need to ensure that Afghan security forces can control their own border and do not let Afghanistan become a safe haven for terrorists in the future ([Rampton, 2013](#)). Likewise, in the same conference, NATO Secretary-General illustrated that by the end of 2014, our combat mission in Afghanistan would be completed, and our forces will come back to their homes. After that, the Afghan National Army and

security forces would be in the driving seat. But still, we will not abandon them and will be there to assist them in many cases.

After 13 years of war, NATO officially finished its battle activities in Afghanistan, leaving the Afghan armed force and police responsible for security in a nation tormented by continuous battling, a savage revolt, and a rising tide of military and nonmilitary personnel losses. Against a scenery of fierce conflicts in various territories and half a month of destructive assaults on the capital, NATO military leaders brought down the flag of the ISAF mission, which was started in 2003 and lifted the shades of another one, the Resolute Mission ([Rasmussen, 2014](#)). Military personals of the Afghan National Army and foreign forces witnessed the ceremony in a basketball gym inside NATO's headquarter in Kabul, Afghanistan ([Constable, 2014](#)). Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) General John F. Campbel said that "From now onward, our Afghan partners will take the mission from here" ([Rasmussen, 2014](#)).



Graph 1

Murree Peace Process, 2015

After a cumbersome struggle from Pakistan, Afghan government representatives and leaders of the Afghan Taliban met officially for the first time to make some reconciliation efforts to end the decade long war ([Riedel, 2015](#)). The peace negotiations took place on 7 –

8 July 2015 in Murree's famous hill town resort which is almost an hour of drive from the capital city of Islamabad, Pakistan ([Khan, 2016](#)). The delegation from the Afghan government included deputy minister of foreign minister affairs, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, Muhammad Asem, Haji Din Muhammad and members from

the High Peace Council. Likewise, the Afghan Taliban were represented by Qari Din Muhammad, Maulvi Jalil Mullah Hasan and Mullah Abbas Akhund. More significantly, the meeting was also attended by Jalaluddin Haqqani's younger brother Ibrahim Haqqani. Jalaluddin Haqqani is the founder of the notoriously famous Haqqani network [\(Khan, 2016\)](#). The participation of Ibrahim Haqqani gave weightage to the Murree Peace Process and indicated the Haqqani network's willingness to make Afghanistan a peaceful country as it was through dialogues and diplomatic efforts [\(Khan, 2016\)](#). One Pakistani official told the media that "it is an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace start; we are here only to assist them" [\(Khan, 2015\)](#).

The first official peace process between members of the Afghan government and Taliban was facilitated by Pakistan and supported by American and Chinese officials as observers. The meeting took place in the Holy month of Ramadan, where the atmosphere was quite warm and positive [\(Johnson & Malik, 2015\)](#). A person from Pakistani authorizes advocated the fact that the environment was much more calm and cool as they sat for sehri meal in the midnight they were celebrating the moment as if had already Eid. Murree Peace Process was very successful as both sides showed harmony and coherence. Afghan government officials and the Afghan Taliban showed their desire to end the conflict that they agree that intra-Afghan dialogue is necessary to remove the disputes among all the stakeholders for a better future of Afghanistan. It was reported that the Afghan Taliban disclosed their willingness a cease-fire in a condition where Pakistan and China guaranteed a United National Government (UNG) in Afghanistan. Taliban also claimed the inclusion of their first-tier leadership in that UNG. The international community praised the role of Pakistan in bringing both the conflicting parties for a successful negotiation. Afghan administration hoped that the dialogue would put a stop to further bloodshed and safeguard a durable peace in the country. The first round of the Murree Peace Process concluded with the confirmation that the second round would be conducted at the end of this month, July 2015 [\(Khan, 2016\)](#). Subsequently, after the initial round of peace talks in Murree, Taliban leaders

endorsed the meeting and also expected that further rounds would help in ending the US-led NATO occupation of Afghanistan. Besides Pakistan, China is very keen to make a stable Afghanistan for the future of their mega project of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) [\(Khalid, Jalal, & Bilal, 2018\)](#).

Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference, 2015

Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference also called the Istanbul Process. It was established on November 2, 2011, in the capital city of Turkey, Istanbul. Primarily this conference was founded to discuss regional issues, especially security, economics, social and political cooperation among the Asian countries placing Afghanistan at its Centre. It was believed that a stable, peaceful and secure Afghanistan is in the interest of all Asian countries. The conference was mainly comprised of fifteen countries having the support of seventeen nonmember states and twelve regional and international organizations. The officials of the conference put terrorism, poverty, illiteracy, fundamentalism and extremism on their hit list. They were very keen and concern about how to counter these serious threats. In this affair, the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference was summoned in Islamabad, Pakistan, on December 9, 2015 [\(Hasnain, 2015\)](#). The conference was attended notably by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and American Deputy Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. President Ghani visits not only resume the warm relation with Pakistan, but he also showed his desire for the resumption of talks with the Taliban [\(Tribune, 2015\)](#). During Ashraf Ghani's visit to Pakistan, he held meetings with Prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif. President Ghani was assured in both meetings of Pakistan's full support in bringing the Taliban back on the negotiations table and guaranteed that Pakistan will work hard in every condition to prevail peace and stability in Afghanistan. President Ghani successful visit to Pakistan faced some domestic criticism and opposition within his administration. Because, there was a faction in his government who were against Pakistan [\(Shalizi, 2015\)](#).

Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)

Quadrilateral Coordination Group consisted of four countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States of America. They were trying to start a new chapter in hopes of restoring the harmonious procedure and peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government ([Ruttig, 2015](#)). In this regard, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) initial meeting was held in Islamabad on January 11, 2016. The gathering included Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai, China's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Diplomat Deng Xijun and US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard G. Olson ([Khan, 2016](#)). The core agenda of the meeting was to start the direct negotiation process between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Each of the four nations consented to seek after endeavors as a feature of a serious timetable of gatherings and talks. The discussions concentrated on embracing a reasonable and practical evaluation of the open doors for harmony and compromise. It also worried about the obstacles in question and conceivable measures to make a helpful situation for the resumption of talks. Talking at the opening session of the gathering, Sartaj Aziz said that we are trying to make such a motivational environment where the Taliban could accept our offers regarding negotiations ([Tribune, 2016](#)). This quadrilateral conference only become possible because of the successful meeting among Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, US Deputy Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the sideline of the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference took place in Islamabad in 2015. All of them agreed to facilitate the Afghan peace process in any possible way to end the continuous war and make the country prestigious once again. In this regard, previously, a trilateral conference was arranged in Murree, Pakistan, among Afghanistan, Pakistan and America to put an end to the war and make Afghanistan stable and prosperous.

On January 18, 2016, the second meeting of the quadrilateral cooperation group was

summoned in Kabul, Afghanistan. China's Special Envoy led the delegation for Afghanistan Ambassador Deng Xijun, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai and the US Ambassador to Afghanistan Michael McKinley. Salahuddin Rabbani, Afghan Foreign Minister, said: "that Afghan government has hereby invited all stakeholders including Taliban and Afghan people to solve their differences through table talks and negotiation". Moreover, Rabbani warned those factions of the Taliban who are against peaceful negotiations. He also stated that those particular factions should be isolated from talks, and the authorities will deal with them with an iron fist. Emphasizing their dedication for an Afghan drive, Afghan claimed harmony process, every one of the four nations examined a potential guide for resuscitating talks and approached all Taliban gatherings to go into early converses with the Afghan government to determine contrasts politically as per the will and desires of the whole Afghan country ([US embassy, 2016](#)). Likewise, the fourth and fifth meeting was also arranged in Pakistan, but unfortunately, those efforts were derailed when a US drone strike in Baluchistan province of Pakistan killed the then leader of Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Mansour in May 2016 ([Khan & Iqbal, 2017](#)). Besides the QCG, Russia favours a swift withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan to counter the US presence in the region ([Khalid, Jalal, & Ullah, 2019](#)).

Kabul Peace Process, 2018

In February 2018, more than twenty states delegates, including officials from NATO, United Nations and European Union, attended a conference dubbed as Kabul Peace Process ([Karzai, 2018](#)). Addressing the conference, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced that Afghan authorities are willing to start fresh and direct table talks with the Taliban after the brokedown of QCG. Moreover, Ghani argued that the Afghan government was keen on accepting the Taliban as an entity and a legitimate political party ([Kramer, 2018](#)). Though Taliban continuously rejected such offers in the past. President Ghani said if the Taliban agree to join the peace process, his

government will facilitate them in every possible way. We will welcome them to open their legitimate office in the capital city of Kabul. Furthermore, the Afghan government will provide a passport to their members and also remove hardcore terrorists from the international watch list until they give up their militant activities. "We will offer a respectful and peaceful life for all Afghan nationals, including Taliban who leaves violence behind," said the Afghan president.

Afghan president was very keen to introduce such an initiative in front of an international audience to show their sincerity in prevailing peace in the country. President Ghani desired that global actors should put pressure on the Taliban to make way for fresh negotiations. Despite their efforts, the Taliban wanted to negotiate directly with the American authorities and dismissed the Afghan government, which they declared an American puppet. Before reacting to Ghani's offer, the Taliban asked US authorities for direct talks in their Qatar office ([Kramer, 2018](#)). Taliban also advocated the fact in their statement that military tactics will only be intensified the war because, through this means, peace is just a myth. Trump administration demanded "do-more" from Pakistan to assist them in this affair and put the Taliban on the dialogue table.

In March 2018, a conference arranged in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, was attended by more than twenty national delegates and regional organizations. In the conference, all nations showed their consensus and understanding of the Kabul Peace process, 2018. They argued that a direct link and negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan government is the need of an hour to end the war in Afghanistan (Jaffer, 2018). The conference concluded that a national government is needed to prevail in peace and stability in the country, putting all their differences aside. Additionally, the conference determined the Taliban to accept the offer of an Afghan-led and Afghan-own peace process (Jaffer, 2018). India's close ties with the Afghan government will be helpful in their rebuilding and peacekeeping in the country ([Hussain, Jala, & Bilal, 2017](#)).

Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban's Rounds of Negotiations

In September 2018, the Trump administration appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as a special representative for the reconciliation process of Afghanistan ([Pant & Kaura, 2018](#)). Khalilzad served the United States as ambassador to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the United Nations during George W. Bush presidency ([Kelemen, Hadid & Romo, 2018](#)). In a press conference, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo confirmed Khalilzad's appointment ([Kelemen, Hadid & Romo, 2018](#)). In fact, Zalmay Khalilzad's meeting with the Taliban was the second time a senior American diplomat met with them in Doha, Qatar. In this affair, the first round of negotiations was started in the Taliban's de-facto political office in October 2018 in Doha, Qatar. Taliban were represented in the very first meeting by their high-rank leaders, including the recently released Abdul Ghani Baradar from Pakistani prison at the request of the United States of American in October 2018 ([Al Jazeera, 2018](#)). Moreover, the meeting was attended by Pakistan, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia as well (Dewyer, 2018). American attitude has changed from the last two years, and they ultimately want to have a swift withdrawal from Afghanistan. Because of which they had accepted the Taliban's demand for meeting directly with American officials ([Sheikh & Khan, 2019](#)). Taliban had wished it earlier to surpass the legitimate government authorities of Afghanistan and meet Americans unswervingly in their political office in Doha ([Baker, Mashal & Crowley, 2019](#)). Western media affirmed that direct contact between America and the Taliban as "talks before talks" because Afghan government authorities were utterly sidelined in the negotiations as the Taliban considered them an American puppet setup ([Baker, Mashal & Crowley, 2019](#)). After the meeting, Taliban's spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid stated that the "Taliban has no intention to invite or hold talks with Kabul government" (Dewyer, 2018). Even the Trump administration gave up its own idea of involving the Afghan government in the peace process with the Taliban. At the end of the first round of negotiation, both sides concluded optimistically that a series of negotiations

would be followed. In December 2018, the second round kicked off. Taliban stayed focused on the same demands, primarily withdrawing all foreign troops from Afghanistan and releasing Taliban prisoners detained in Guantanamo bay prison. But American officials were firm that all these demands will be fulfilled when the Taliban guaranteed that Afghan soil would not be utilized against American interest in the future. In total, nine rounds of negotiations took place between the Taliban and Zalmay Khalilzad led American delegation [_\(Sakhi, 2019\)](#). On 2 October 2019, both parties concluded their ninth round of negotiation in the Qatari capital, Doha. Zalmay Khalilzad told international media that a deal is near to happen, which will ultimately address all the basic reservations from both sides.

Styles of Negotiations

It is way too difficult to disclose the style of negotiations between the Taliban and America. Because all of the talks were kept secret, both sides' representatives were not authorized to unveil the discussion to anyone outside of the conference. But the following roles of the negotiators can be concluded upon the little knowledge of the nine rounds of table talks.

Impact of Taliban and Khalilzad Role in the Negotiations

Taliban remained firm with their highlighted demands throughout the entire negotiations. They primarily stressed the Afghan government's exclusion from the talks because the Taliban do not recognize them as a legit government. Secondary, they stayed committed that cease-fire would transpire in case of withdrawal of all foreign troops. Thirdly, the Taliban also hinted that intra-Afghan dialogues will only be possible if their secondary demand is fulfilled. Besides, these nine rounds of negotiations did not distract the Taliban from their Islamic agenda. They have made it clear to Khalilzad's led American delegation that after the post-Afghan war, the Islamic form of government will prevail in Afghanistan [_\(Sakhi, 2019\)](#). Unlike before, women rights should be

fully observed, and they will be allowed to get an education in separate sections from boys.

The nomination of Zalmay Khalilzad as a special envoy has both positive and negative impacts on these rounds of negotiations. Having Afghani lineage, Khalilzad has a background of political, social, economic and cultural knowledge, which allow him to interfere profoundly as a negotiator with the Afghan Taliban. But adversely, as an envoy, he lost neutrality and impartiality as well. Khalilzad became a party in these dialogues and played a role of a viceroy due to which he carries tasks from his superiors and then according to those policies, he makes and amends certain clauses, but he will always remain firm and focus on the main objectives from the United States of America. Khalilzad played a very calm and cool role and never made any aggression. He visited Kabul and the region powerbrokers and parties to find out a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict. Khalilzad reached political parties, Taliban, elites, Afghan representatives, and officials from different states and made through civil servants, women groups, clergymen, and youth. He was very sincere in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan by any means [_\(Sakhi, 2019\)](#). In the conclusion of all these nine rounds of negotiations, a ray of hope was spread among the people of Afghanistan for the first time after September 9, 2001.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is concluded that an end to the Afghan war is near with the sincere efforts of the regional, especially Pakistan and international actors. In this regard, conferences, treaties, negotiations and table talks were arranged globally among the conflicting parties of Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad's appointment speeds up the negotiation process. In his nine rounds of dialogues, Khalilzad struck a bargain between US-led NATO officials and the Taliban in February 2020. They drew a timeline of a swift withdrawal from Afghanistan in return for the Taliban's guarantee; Afghan soil will not be a safe haven for any terrorist organization in the future.

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