

US-Taliban Negotiated Peace Accord: Analyzing the Future Prospects

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Abstract

Doha Peace Accord is inked between the US and the Taliban, to end 18 years of long-drawn war and bring comprehensively consolidated peace in Afghanistan through a scheduled mechanism. Though the Accord shifted the balance of power in favor of the Taliban but yet they have to conciliate through an intra-Afghan dialogue with all of its complexities and intricacies. The paper analyses the provisions of the Doha Peace Accord and its surrounding environment to portray its future-promising or otherwise. The analyses led to the exploration of events likely to unfold during the process, generating hopes or optimism reroute or creating obstacles in reaching out to the intended future. The research suggests engaged alignments of the Afghan stakeholders in brokering long-term peace through exclusive political arrangements. And for this Taliban must be willing to give away their earned power to other collaborators for the sake of permanent truce and socio-economic development of war-torn Afghanistan. The research concludes that the success of negotiated peace transforming into a broad-based political arrangement is directly dependent on the effective facilitation of America, Russia, China, and Pakistan. However, the chance of India and other proxies acting as a spoiler in the peace negotiation cannot be ruled out.

Keywords: Doha Peace Accord, Future Prospects, Hopes, and Despair. Intra Afghan Dialogue, Political Exclusiveness, Plurality, Comprehensive Peace

Introduction

The American invasion of Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001 was claimed to be in response to the AL Qaida attacks of September, 9th that resulted in over 3000 humans and phenomenal economic loss and to great extent damage to the physiological image of the "only Super Power of the World". Without challenging the American's official version of the incontrovertible facts and concocted evidence surrounding the 9/11 attacks (Meyssan, 2002), the Bush Administration, making no distinction between the terrorists and their alleged abettors, decided to respond with "blood, sweat and tears" (Baloch, 2006, p.152). Before the investiture of the "global war on terror" Richard Armitage's prescriptions like; "either with us or against us" (Owen, 2002, p2) and the threat of "bombing Pakistan back into the Stone Age" (Pervez, 2003, 201) compelled Musharraf to convey his 'principled' decision to join the U.S.-led coalition.

Islamabad's affirmative decision was also perceived to be 'motivated by Musharraf's desire of seeking the legitimacy of his government acquired through military coup from the America and its Allies. The coalition was to be unleashed; dismantle al-Qaeda, and deny safe sanctuaries to them in Afghanistan by overthrowing Taliban from power in Kabul (Haqqani, 2010; Sattar, 2017). Islamabad's decision was mainly as a result of deep fears about what U.S. hostility might entail for Pakistan's age-old enmity with India, its struggles for economic revitalization, survival to its nuclear weapons program, and its equities over Kashmir conflict (Musharraf, 2001).

Having no choice to vacillate amid the likely cost of coercion in case of defying Washington Pakistan sojourned all kinds of movements of fuel and recruitments going to Afghanistan besides agreeing to provide territorial access and overflights as well as landing rights to US military and intelligence operations (Sattar, 2009; 2017). Pakistan beefed up the positioning of its security forces to seal off the Afghan border to prevent the inflow of fleeing elements of Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

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However, the long winding rugged terrain across the porous Durand Line allowed the Taliban to cross over under disguise. The uninhabited and unmanned tribal areas helped to harness them for their avenging attacks on the coalition forces. Having regrouped and reorganized their ranks and files Taliban infiltrated back into Afghanistan and turned their guerrilla warfare into armed resistance intimidating both; the reconstruction process and the U.S.-led coalition forces. (Nation, 2006). Pakistan Army's hot pursuit succeeded in arresting several al-Qaeda operatives with their senior leadership and remanding them to US custody (Pervez, 2003; Zafar, 2005) and the number of Al-Qaida's captives reached around 700 (Tellis, 2008). However, despite the prevailing arrogance of unipolar power, there has always been the realization that counterterrorism operations cannot be won until the political environment in Afghanistan improves to the point where these insurgent forces are denied the conditions that allow them to survive and flourish (Tellis, 2008). General James L. Jones laconically stated in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "I am convinced that the solution in Afghanistan is not a military one." (James, 2006)

Pakistan's determined resolve was not allowed to be undermined by the scarcity of its resources, socio-political polarization on the validity of the WoT, worsening law, and order with ever-increasing bomb blasts and suicidal attacks stood victorious in quelling armed resistance and flushing out the terrorists from their sanctuaries to across Durand Line. The unfolding of Pakistan's war account spread over almost eighteen years reveals that sustained success in such a long-drawn war was backed by the determined fighting spirit of Pakistan's security forces backed by national resolve and unprecedented socio-economic cost paid by Pakistan and its citizens. It was Pakistan's determined resolve and the realization in the American decision-making circle that set the Afghan Peace Process in motion and pave the way for the culmination of the US-Taliban Peace Process in the signing of the much-hyped Doha Agreement on February, 29th, 2020.

The paper aims to investigate to describe the "Afghan Peace Process" with special reference to the "Doha Interim Peace Accord and explore the optimism and uncertainties; anguish and despair; hopes and despondency surrounding the future of the Doha Peace Accord in question.

Afghan Peace Process: Precursor to Peace Accord

Over the years consensus on revulsion for remaining in Afghanistan is developing on the widespread and bipartisan agreement that has been observed during the ongoing Presidential campaign in America. Since 2001, openings for peace talks have come and gone but most of the time negotiations were stalled either due to lack of political will or ineffective communication channels. Timelines of some of the peace efforts are briefly touched below:

- a. September 2007: Afghan former President Hamid Karzai, Pakistan, and Great Britain called for negotiations for peace in Afghanistan which were resisted by the American Administration, followed by blunt rejection of Taliban on the pretext of "no to foreign boots in Afghanistan" and citing the withdrawal of foreign troops as a precondition to any peace talks.
- b. 2009: In the presidential campaign, Hamid Karzai called on, "our Taliban brothers to come home and embrace their land" and laid plans to launch a *Loya jirga* (Farmer, 2009). However, Karzai Plans were thwarted by a surge in American troops by Obama Administration (Hyden, 2009).
- c. 2010: President Karzai, in London Conference, restated his desire of reaching out to the Taliban which was cautiously supported by Hillary Clinton (Landler. et.al. 2010). In May 2010, Karzai once again retreated in America that the "peace process" would be with the Taliban and other militants, not connected to Al-Qaida or other terrorists. Karzai representatives reportedly held talks with Baradar before his arrest in Karachi.
- d. It was not until 2011 that the United States decreased 100000 troops to 14000 and incorporated peace dialogs and consultations as the preeminent way to end the war in Afghanistan, though the progress was slow, lingering, and uncertain. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Afghan Taliban have made bewildering advances toward peace talks, if not peace itself. There were several reports about sporadic talks held between the US and the Taliban in 2011 and 2013, resulting in the opening of Taliban political office in Qatar (Farmer, 2011).
- e. In early May 2015 affiliates of the Taliban and the Afghan government even met in Qatar and expressed real interest in starting official negotiations.

- f. In January 2016, Pakistan, America, Afghans, & the Chinese hold talks in Pakistan that were not attended by the Taliban.
- g. February 2018: Afghan President Ghani suggested peace talks with the Taliban without any condition and offered to recognize them as a political entity with the release of prisoners. A twenty nation's conference was held at Tashkent in March 2018 to support the Afghan government's peace proposal to the Taliban. These efforts inspired peace movements across Afghanistan throughout the year. In September 2018, Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed by President Trump as a special adviser on Afghanistan to facilitate the intra-Afghan political peace process, who later led further talks between the US and the Taliban in Qatar in October which were resumed in December same year.
- h. There were several peace talks between the warring parties such as;
 - i. February 2019, between Taliban and Afghan Government.
 - ii. April – May 2019, four days Loya Jirga to advance peace talks
 - iii. May 2019, Taliban and Afghan Government delegations met in Moscow.
 - iv. August 2019, the 8th round of US-Taliban talks held in Qatar brought down a final peace deal closer to conclude.
 - v. Talks collapse in the wake of the Taliban attack in Kabul killing 12 people including one American.
 - vi. Peace talks resumed in December 2019, followed by 7 days ceasefire starting from February 22, 2020.

Prevailing Environment & Cost of War in Afghanistan: The end of 2019 surpasses the 18th year of the American War in Afghanistan and the following figures related to the cost of War and other outcomes are portrayed in the New York Times (December 9, 2019) as follow:

- a. The economic cost of 18 years of war in Afghanistan amounts to more than \$2 trillion, plus \$1.4 trillion on post 9/11 war veteran's medical and disability cost, with the following breakdown:
 - \$1.5 trillion in war spending
 - \$10 billion on counter-narcotics, despite such a huge spending Afghanistan is still the source of 80 % of universal illicit poppy production (see figure no.1 below).
 - \$87 billion to train Afghan security forces military and police forces but still there exists a widespread belief in the Afghan Government that Afghan military forces are not capable of even protecting themselves.
 - \$54 billion on socio-economic development through over \$15.5 billion are wasted in scam and misuse in reconstruction projects from 2008 through 2017.
 - \$600 billion on the interest of loans taken for war financing.
- b. Much of Afghanistan is under the control of the Taliban and the country occupies no.1 position amongst the world's leading birthplaces of IDPs, refugees, and migrants.
- c. More than 2,300 U.S. American soldiers are killed with more than 20,000 wounded (Malkasian, 2020).
- d. Approximately half a million Afghans have been killed or wounded (Malkasian, 2020).
- e. Al-Qaida is eliminated, Osama bin Laden is dead and the U.S. homeland is not subjected to any major terror attack since 9/11.
- f. About 14,000 US troops and around 17,000 troops from NATO allies are stationed in Afghanistan.
- g. America has failed to end the violence or the Afghan government cannot survive without foreign military support. And Afghan government controls just over half of the total populated area, with the remaining territory being either in Taliban hold or is contested (Pandey, 2019).
- h. Taliban rejected the offer of unconditional peace talks extended by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in February 2018 calling them American stooge having no power to decide about Afghanistan.

The stunning socio-economic cost incurred on War in Afghanistan coupled with NATO's inability and reluctance in fulfilling's their operational role compounded the problem. The local populace was forced to make their peace with the insurgents merely as a means of preserving their security. Given this dynamic, there were emerging perceptions that U.S. and allied military forces

may gain a win in tactical engagement with the Taliban but they are bound to lose the overall war for Afghanistan (DeYoung, 2007).

Prelude to Accord: Therefore, after fighting for more than 18 years, the United States and the Taliban gradually moved towards a meaningful bilateral peace process at Doha, Qatar. The peace process, excluding Afghanistan Government, was spearheaded by Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. special representative for Afghan reconciliation, with the Taliban Political Commission located in Doha. President Ghani's office asserted that the peace consultations without Afghan Government representation would destabilize the already flimsy Afghan political apparatus and the resultant deal would not be able to secure government endorsement at the time of 75 implementations (Andrew & Mujib, 2019). The peace process was overlooked and facilitated by the regional powers such as Pakistan, China, and Russia, alongside NATO. It was expected that the signing of an interim peace accord between the USA & the Taliban would unknit much-awaited intra-Afghan dialogue to map out the future course of the country towards lasting peace. As a prologue to the deal, observance of one-week voluntary restraint in violence was agreed by both parties starting from February 22 and the ensuing agreement was focused on the following key issues:

- a. Guarantee that Taliban will not allow foreign armed groups to use Afghanistan as a Launching pad for conducting any out of the Afghan borders;
- b. Comprehensive withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan soil;
- c. Intra-Afghan dialogue; and
- d. A permanent ceasefire.

Doha Interim Peace Accord:

The much-hyped but a landmarked interim peace accord was signed between the United States and the Afghan Taliban on February, 29th, 2020 at Doha amidst hope, despair, anguish, and uncertainty on the pretext of whether it will end nearly 19 years of war in Afghanistan or otherwise (Shah, 2020). The accord is "An Agreement between Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the United States of America" that spells out 14 months' schedule for pulling out of all of US and allied troops from "endless wars" in Afghanistan. However, the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan is contingent upon intra-Afghan negotiations to be started from March 10, 2020. Salient points of the Accord are:

- a. The Taliban assured to thwart the terrorist operation of terrorist groups such as al Qaeda or the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), from operating in a territory they control.
- b. The observance of a ceasefire between the parties is placed at high priority to nurture a conducive environment for intra Afghan dialogue between a representative of "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", the Afghan government, and all other factions of the society enabling them to deliberate upon modalities and mechanisms for the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.
- c. Under the Doha agreement, the US would reduce its forces down to 8,600 from 12,000 in the next three to four months while the remaining US forces would withdraw in 14 months.
- d. The deal also provides for removing sanctions that were imposed on the members of the Taliban, including travel bans, asset freezes, and an arms embargo.

Future Prospects of Doha Peace Accord:

The settled framework delineated in the accord between the Taliban and the USA is considered to be a breakthrough to end the longest war in American history spread over 18 years of time length. For most of the observers, the Accord presents a win-win situation for both parties and peaceful Afghanistan is at a near distance. The Accord offers an opportunity for America's exit without humiliation on one hand, and on the other, it helps the Taliban to decide about the future of Afghanistan through Afghans-owned peace process in the absence of foreign players. However, some analysts see the Accord as an inconclusive peace process 'imbalanced stalemate' and inconclusive peace process that is unable to bring back long-lasting permanent ceasefire in near future. Keeping in view the complexity of Afghans' political alignments marked with ethnic diversity and lessons learned from post-Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, there exists a mix of hopes and despair; and a blend of optimism and uncertainties. The paper analyses claim from both sides of the arguments grouped under hopes and Grey areas in succeeding paragraphs.

Hopes & Optimism with the Accord:

- a. **Hopes & Optimism:** The peace deal between the two primary parties of the long-drawn conflict in Afghanistan seems to have brought brightened hopes for its promising future as it

delivered win-win situations for both sides. The following points serve as indicators of hopes and optimism attached with the Doha Peace Accord as it unfolds with time:

- i. The leading objective of the US for invading Afghanistan was the elimination of Al Qaida and other foreign terrorists' networks which has greatly been realized over the last 18 years of war and further the Accord seeks guaranty from the Taliban to not allow the foreign terrorist network to operate in Afghan soil or attack across its borders. Whereas, on the other sides the Taliban's primary demand since the start of the war was the withdrawal of occupation forces from Afghan soil which has now been guaranteed within the given schedule in the accord. Hence, the Accord presents a win-win situation for both sides, therefore, holds bright chances of success in bringing peace and stability shortly.
 - ii. The Accord is between the main parties of the Afghan War find their chief objectives of the war fulfilled in the accord therefore the prospects of the accord are promising. Having suffered heavy socio-economic cost with a prolonged stalemate and being conscious of the inability of the Afghan forces to hold ground in the face of Taliban pressure, it is a wise option for the US to sway in favor of peace with the Taliban. The negotiated peace provides the US with the space for the withdrawal of its troops without humiliation. Though there seems no guarantee that this armistice with the Taliban would last long, the negotiated accord is still being perceived as the only viable option to bring an end to the long-drawn war.
 - iii. For the Taliban the Accord serves as a triumph as it guarantees that foreign troops would leave Afghanistan within a brief schedule, helps to release prisoners belonging to their ranks and file, and acknowledges the Taliban as the main player in Afghanistan and ensuing intra Afghans dialogue. Furthermore, the Moscow talks between the Taliban and the notable Afghans including former President Karzai, just before the Doha Accord add to the bright probable chance for the Taliban to keep Accord intact and pursue the revival of permanent peace in Afghanistan.
 - iv. The deal repeatedly mentions "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" which is otherwise not acknowledged as a state by the United States. The signing of a dealer agreement with the Taliban under the title of "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" is tantamount to accepting the Taliban as de facto rulers of Afghanistan.
 - v. The tribute for a sturdy drive towards peace negotiations is credited to President Trump who has forcefully supported disentanglement from endless wars. Indeed, Trump's success in bringing troops back to America before the forthcoming presidential election would elevate his standing and brighten the chances of his repositioning in the White House for the next term. Therefore, Trump would be continuing to facilitate the successful culmination of the intra peace dialogue. During the process, he will use his office in wheeling the weight of Pakistan, China, and Russia in quickening the peace settlement towards a comprehensive peace.
 - vi. The timely deliverance of the commitment of releasing 5,000 Taliban prisoners, alleged for serious crimes, has added to their fighting power and gave a big boost to the Taliban socio-political stature. Furthermore, the elimination of sanctions including travel bans, asset freezes, and an arms embargo imposed upon members of the Taliban has shifted the balance of power in favor of the Taliban. This power shift is likely to bring the Taliban at a decisive and dominating position in the ensuing intra-Afghan dialogue.
- b. **Uncertainties & Grey Areas:** The interim peace accord is signed amidst optimism and uncertainty; anguish and despair; hopes and despondency. The uncertainties and grey areas perceived to be derailing the accord are indicated through the following:
- i. There are fears that intra Afghan Dialogue, in the absence of the Afghan government and US representatives, is likely to lead to a fragmented Afghan socio-political situation resulting in a void of government sanctions at the time of application.
 - ii. The Afghan-owned promising future of the Doha Peace Accord hinges upon the success of the intra-Afghan dialogue. The lessons learned from the pull-out of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 divulge that Afghans are ethnocentric, stubborn, and

- rigid in bargaining for their demands. Therefore, if the Taliban are found averse to give away what they have earned for "an inclusive political arrangement" then the early revitalization of comprehensive peace sounds like a tall order. There are genuine fears that the idea of inclusive political arrangement and sharing powers with other factions may cause a split within their ranks.
- iii. Pakistani faction of the Taliban has a very poor record of honoring their agreements and the Afghan Taliban do not seem different to them. Taliban had inked several agreements but used them as a tactic to preserve their human and other resources, and gain time and space to consolidate their positions.
 - iv. The last forty years of the Afghan turmoil served as a fertile breeding ground for warlords and the proliferation of militant groups. Barring a few small groups, the major two factions; the Northern alliance and Pashtun Taliban are considered to be the extension of India and Pakistan respectively in their proxy war being fought in Afghanistan. For all of its probability, Doha Peace Accord promises a lion share to Pashtun Taliban in Afghanistan's future power politics and India is likely to be looser in challenging Pakistan's strategic interest in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The recent duality of presidents with Abdullah Abdullah representing the Northern Alliance is likely to act as a pawn to further the Indian game plan. Therefore, there exists a strong possibility that India may act as a spoiler pitching the Northern alliance to derail the Afghans Intra dialogue to an inconclusive end. India and other spoilers are likely to foil Afghan Peace with the help of dissenting voices being raised in America and calling the Accord Trump's disgraceful retreat and document of surrender, appeasement that is bound to encourage totalitarianism and chaos in Afghanistan again.
 - v. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society and each ethnic group has been playing as a proxy of their related neighboring country. And this ethnocentric proxy war has nurtured persistency in intra-ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan which do not appear favorable to bring the conflict to a speedy end. Since the accord does not hold any provision for the UN peacekeeping force or another impartial third party to guarantee the security of the two sides as they disarm and demobilize. Afghanistan's neighbors have historically fed their proxies to bring instability to the country.

Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that the unguarded optimism about reconciliation with the Taliban and free walkover for their rule in Kabul seems erroneous and misplaced. The success of a negotiated peace via intra Afghan dialogue, as enshrined in the Doha accord, hinges upon the plurality and exclusive power-sharing arrangement that materializes out of the peacemaking talks. The possibility of the idea of an exclusive political framework is of more probability since the Taliban of today are not the "monolithic" as they were in the 1990s. Therefore, the negotiated peace transformed into a political settlement with the Taliban is likely to be long-lived, as the Taliban has learned lessons to live within global settings. However, considering the prevalence of the spoilers' the success of negotiations could only be positively driven if the external players such as America, China, and Russia play their monitoring role.

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