

AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF PEACE-BUILDING PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN (2003-PRESENT)

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Abstract: *The armed conflict, withdrawal of foreign troops, political standoff, ethnic and linguistic differences, and discontent over power-sharing mechanism, illegal armed groups, and gangs' violence are matters of grave concern for the practitioners of peace-building. Moreover, the Afghan Taliban has emerged as a victorious political entity as they have taken control of the whole Afghanistan. The emerging scenario forecasts de-escalation of Afghanistan conflict without writing off serious challenges along the way which may handicap the Taliban government. Kabul airport bombings and rocket attack on Kabul airport add up to speculations and fear of failure of state machinery to hunt down miscreants who sabotage the peace of country. The gradual rise of Islamic State Khorasan and transnational jihadi networks are creating a nuisance and emerging as a serious threat to political stability and security of Afghanistan. By analyzing the recent developments taking place and in-depth study of past peace-building programs in Afghanistan, the research concludes that whether these peace-building efforts are sufficient for peaceful Afghanistan or policy makers and stakeholders have need to explore more viable options.*

Key Words: Armed Conflict; Disarmament; Reintegration; Reconstruction; Peace-building.

Introduction

History and the current security environment of Afghanistan reveal the shifting dynamics at intra-state levels. There is an obvious shift in the Afghanistan's political, power, and security structure and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration without mediation process being challenged and USA is reorienting its policies. It is pertinent to note that U.S., Afghan

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government and Afghan Taliban have seen each other through adversarial lens. The baggage of the past has not shed yet. The conflicting parties view each other's interests as opposition to theirs. Afghanistan had been stuck in the vicious cycle of armed conflict since December 1979; ethnic and racial tensions have weakened the already fragile socioeconomic fabric of Afghan society. Peace deal was signed between the US and Afghan Taliban and intra afghan dialogue was underway, albeit deal was under threat from renewed violence. There is an urgent need to reconsider the peace-building efforts which have been proven unsuccessful in past and fail spoilers' nefarious designs in the region detrimental to Afghanistan's security and peace. At the time of the research study, new developments have taken place and now Afghan Taliban leadership has announced a new interim government which consists of 33 members including designated global terrorists and former Guantanamo inmates.

Conflicting parties' dissonance has always led to impediments in the formulation and reshaping of peace-building policies. The emergence of Afghan Taliban as a victor group inflates the concerns of political opponents of group regarding Taliban designs to silence dissenting voices and squash political opponents and liberal democratic values. It, also, augments implications for Afghanistan in due process and exacerbates the sore relations between the international community and the Afghan Taliban.

These questions will be addressed in detail in this paper: Why is innovative peace-building program inevitable for Afghanistan's reconstruction? What factors attributed to the failure of previous peace-building programs? How can peace-builders overcome posed challenges and formulate practicable peace-building policies? To find out the answers of the questions, the research highlights the nature and extent of the depth of the peace-building efforts carried out and the subsequent challenges to be faced by Afghanistan.

The purpose and objective of the study is to propose possible options available to the stakeholders in dealing with dissident elements which oppose peace-building program. The research takes a tour d'horizon of the events and developments, the current scenario and changing situation of the region which may lead to another failure of peace efforts. Furthermore, research aims to explore the shortcomings of previous peace-building programs and how can DDR with mediation fulfill a void.

The research takes into account the recent events with main focus on post-2003 developments in the Afghanistan. Further, the data is news reports and articles and analysis

leading to the conclusion is drawn. The research is qualitative and analytical in nature. It focuses the failure of previous DDR programmes in Afghanistan, significant developments in the region, peace agreement between Afghan Taliban and US government, the apprehensions of Afghan Taliban related to Afghan government and the emerging concerns of the policy makers regarding the future of Afghanistan. The topic is that of a theoretical nature hence descriptive and analytical methodology has been adopted. The events have been described and then they have been analyzed with reference to the topic and doing so, explanatory method has been invoked to predict the future course of action.

Theoretical Framework

In the study of International politics, peace-building operations, and civil insurgency, many schools of thought have been proposed. These different schools explain measures taken by states from different angles; no single theory is available which takes care of all the aspects and factors involved in peace-building process. It focuses on the Theory of Change, Theory of DDR, and Theory of Reconciliation to discuss and explain the topic.

Theory of Change espouses the three components: Factors, Actions, and Impacts; it explains how an appropriate action can mitigate the conflict and its driving factors. A concerted effort may be facilitative to reduce violence and cause peaceful impact.¹

Theory of DDR actually focuses and revolves around the process of disarmament and demobilization, and reintegration. DDR process is particularly designed for post-conflict or war scenario and UN has adopted this process as practice to achieve peace and stability in various countries. Disarmament process means confiscation of weapons and arms from ex-combatants and disbandment of illegal armed groups. Demobilization process includes controlled discharge of combatants from armed groups and transitional assistance which has been provided to combatants to make them able to survive. Reintegration is a socio-economic process which enables ex-combatants to reintegrate into the society and acquire civilian status. It primarily

¹Peter Woodrow and Nick Oatley, "Practical Approaches to Theories of Change in Conflict, Security & Justice Programmes", Department for International Development. March 2013. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304613/Practical-approaches-theories-change-conflict-security-justice-prog.pdf

occurs at local level for individual development and nation building purpose and necessitates long-term assistance.²

Reconciliation is taken as a societal process because of its essentials which are social, cultural, political, psychological, economic and judicial. All these aspects come into play to emphasize mutuality and reconciliation. Parties to the conflict through reconciliation can restore peace and stability. It's a two way process and require participation of all parties to the conflict to reconcile and resolve their issues.³

Peace-building in Afghanistan – Multi-year Effort

Peace-building: It is a multi-year effort and collaborative process which aims to eliminate the factors, reasons, violent inclinations, societal injustice, and incompetent governance to achieve sustainable peace. It includes various approaches and strategies to mitigate the sources of conflict. Peace-building practitioners rely on reconstruction and reconciliation to advance their agenda for peace as socio-economic transformation and aforementioned approaches are inevitable and any efforts without them are futile and purposeless.⁴ Peace-building talks about two phases of peace – one is stability and the other one is positive peace. Stability refers to absence of armed conflict but grievances and differences might lead towards conflict. Positive peace refers to absence of differences and conflict; which is only possible if people get equal opportunities and access to education, health, and justice.⁵

²Vasilina Antonovskaya, "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in the context a total victory: elimination or evolution of the concept", Centre for Peace Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education. The Arctic University of Norway. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8593/0ca48253dc7fd5040ca8dd9a40e08396f7ed.pdf>

³Karen Brounéus, "Reconciliation: Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation", Research Gate, September 2003. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257251588_Reconciliation_Theory_and_Practice_for_Development_Cooperation

⁴ "PEACE BUILD", The Canadian Peacebuilding Network. Available at: <https://www.peacebuild.ca/en/about/what-is-peacebuilding>

⁵ "What is peacebuilding?", International Alert. <https://www.international-alert.org/what-we-do/what-is-peacebuilding>

Reconstruction of the Afghan Institutions and Disarmament in Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is presently confronting the domestic maladies like militancy and political nuisances, and in quest of sustainability, which could be attained through directed efforts and adoption of peace-building approaches. In 2020, **RAND** study opines that peace-building can be carried out in various phases constituting a various practices. Disarmament is the first practice to kick-start the process of DDR, disarming the militants in the Afghan context seems unrealistic, as Afghan government is itself a party to the conflict and due to armed adversary and distrust any third party cannot foist disarmament upon Afghan Taliban and other militant groups. Second practice is to demobilize militants by providing them human security and third practice constitutes reintegration stages.⁶

United States Institute of Peace report terms conclusive disarmament an unrealistic and unachievable process if international actors do not learn from failure of previous disarmament program. This report reveals that foreign actors tended to disarm specific militant groups and rearm groups which favored foreign actors in return. Furthermore, resistance to disarmament program was a result of distrust and some groups remained armed which eventually led this program to failure.⁷ Peace-builders welcomed the peace accord signed between the US and the Afghan Taliban on 29th February, 2020 and were optimistic about the accountability of all criminal enterprises responsible for armed violence and terrorism in country and across the border. However, absence of third party which could oversee the entire process made the chances of successfulness of disarmament program bleaker. Gruesome attacks on maternity ward and funeral in May, 2020 have been witnessed as threats poured in from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and local militias may resist to disarmament as they have been facing threats from ISIS-K

⁶James Dobbins, Jason H. Campbell, Laurel E. Miller and S. Rebecca Zimmerman, “DDR in Afghanistan: Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating Afghan Combatants in Accordance with a Peace Agreement”, RAND Corporation, D.O.I: <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE343>. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE343.html>

⁷Deedee Derksen, “The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan”, United States Institute of Peace. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/politics-disarmament-and-rearmament-afghanistan#:~:text=Four%20international%20programs%20designed%20to,largely%20reinforced%20existing%20power%20relations>.

for couple of years.⁸ There were many factors which impaired the Afghan Peace Process. The major predicament was that stakeholders saw each other through the prism of mistrust. Furthermore, scarcity of resources and trust and abundance of animus characterized the Afghanistan current internal situation and provides vacuum to spoilers to increase their capabilities against the peace-building practitioners.

Reconfiguration of the Afghan Security Sector: In the changing world dynamics, studies find that mere military strength is not a sure way to ensure the sustainability and the security of the state. It has been noted that Western powers have closed their eyes to empowerment of civil society and civilian institutions and overwhelmingly supported security sector of Afghanistan. U.S. has approximately spent 62 billion dollars to improve, equip and train security forces of Afghanistan. Moreover, Ashraf Ghani, former President of Afghanistan, himself confessed that 44,000 Afghan security personnel have been killed for last five years.⁹ General Martin Dempsey, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in August 2014, that command structure, management systems, strategic culture among other pillars of the security architecture, is weak and underdeveloped. 24 percent rise in civilian casualties proves General Martin's statement and concerns right. These statements and statistics signal the deteriorating security of Afghanistan, incompetency and dependency of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Reconfiguration of the Afghan security sector needs incorporation of all ethnic groups into ANDSF, but question arises how this whole process will unfold and how will the recruitment process convince militant groups to surrender for national unity. Initially, security sector reform aimed at transferring responsibility of security from ISAF to ANDSF, in 2011, Afghan forces were handed over control of stable districts and, in 2013, ANDSF were given an opportunity to take control of volatile districts in South and East. There were genuine concerns regarding the security of Afghanistan as ANDSF seemed impotent and incapable.¹⁰

⁸Conor Finnegan and Aleem Agha, "Horrific attacks on maternity ward, funeral in Afghanistan may derail peace process", ABC NEWS. 13 May, 2020. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/horrific-attacks-maternity-ward-funeral-afghanistan-derail-peace/story?id=70644131>

⁹Mark Sedra, M., 2014. "An Uncertain Future for Afghanistan's Security Sector". Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 3(1), p.Art. 35. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ei>. Available at: <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.ei/>

¹⁰Mark Sedra, M., 2014. "An Uncertain Future for Afghanistan's Security Sector". Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 3(1), p.Art. 35. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ei>. Available at: <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.ei/>

Reconfiguration of the Afghan security sector now turns out to be a test case for the Taliban government as various ethnic communities and local militias want to be at the helm of the affairs. Incorporation of the local militias and minority ethnic groups into new Afghan army is arguably the most challenging process to undertake and there is likelihood of robust opposition from the middle layer commanders and rank-and-file soldiers of Taliban. However, Taliban have yet to layout plan of the reconfiguration of security forces; it is also noteworthy that Taliban has their own formidable manpower and Special Forces which have been in charge of security across the Afghanistan.

Political and Socioeconomic Stability: Weberian thinking reflects the significance of comprehensive state building as it is only viable option available to policy makers to undo devastation and damage caused by coercion and state failure. Emrah Ozdemir in Afghanistan: Social and Economic Development as Military and Strategic interests writes that state building is part of liberal peace framework, but in case of Afghanistan, international stakeholders have not taken political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions into consideration.¹¹ According to different quantitative surveys, majority of Afghanistan population are unsatisfied with directionless efforts of NATO, ISAF, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams and eager to move out of Afghanistan in search of better economic and employment opportunities.¹² Furthermore, Afghanistan National Development Strategy vision 2020 which was issued in 2008 has been unable to achieve agenda for peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.¹³ Lack of political order and limited legitimacy and power of government were prevailing issues which demanded immediate solution and decisive policy making. National Solidarity Program was proven more efficient and effective than PRTs. There was uncertainty about Afghanistan's political future due to disagreement over political system, western democratic system have been followed throughout previous twenty years, whereas, Afghan Taliban seek to implement Islamic *Shariah*. Horizontal power sharing formula did not suit other stakeholders than former government of Afghanistan.

¹¹Emrah Ozdemir, "Afghanistan: Social and Economic Development as Military and Strategic Interests", E-International Relations. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/04/09/afghanistan-social-and-economic-development-as-military-and-strategic-interests/>

¹²Emrah Ozdemir, "Afghanistan: Social and Economic Development as Military and Strategic Interests", Apr, 2016. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/04/09/afghanistan-social-and-economic-development-as-military-and-strategic-interests>

¹³"The World Bank In Afghanistan", The World Bank Group, Last Updated: Apr 01, 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview>

Therefore, there was a proposal of vertical power sharing which ensures devolution of power top-down. Alex Thier rightly pointed out a major challenge to peace was disagreement over power-sharing as Afghan Taliban had got legitimacy and Afghan government was concerned over peace deal.¹⁴ IEA could maintain governance structure by resorting to illegal and informal economy but drought stricken and poverty hit Afghanistan needs foreign assistance and aid programs to not hit rock bottom.¹⁵ Had the Afghan Taliban meet the demands of the international community which do not transgress the teachings of Islam and do foster inclusiveness in society, transfer of power from Ghani administration to Taliban would have led towards sustainable peace. Moreover, continuous monetary assistance and humanitarian relief is required to reshape and reconstruct Afghanistan.

Reintegration, Reconciliation and Transition Period: Previously, United Nations Development Program initiated various programs of reintegration and reconciliation under the banner of Afghan New Beginning Program. US and Afghan government failed to meet set target; moreover, for face saving purpose, released unauthentic and highly exaggerated statistics which could be termed as misleading. For instance, Afghan government stated that 50,000 ex-combatants integrated into civilian life in 2005 but government failed to provide any evidence in support of her tall claims.¹⁶ Disbandment of illegal armed groups was also on agenda list, for this purpose, Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAGs) Provincial Committees were established. These committees too failed as illegal armed groups kept operating and recruiting in South and East districts. Successful reintegration and reconciliation demand protection and better life of ex-combatants. In past, Afghan government failed to protect ex-combatants, many of them got mercilessly killed, and others were not provided employment opportunities.¹⁷ In 2014, ISAF completely handed over provinces to ANDSF to ensure security transition at an operational

¹⁴Alex Thier, "What are the Prospects for Power-Sharing in the Afghan Peace Process?", USIP. Sep 2019. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/09/what-are-prospects-power-sharing-afghan-peace-process>

¹⁵ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Will the Taliban regime survive?", Brookings, August 31, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/31/will-the-taliban-regime-survive/>

¹⁶ Caroline Hartzell, "Missed Opportunities", USIP. Sep 2019. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/09/what-are-prospects-power-sharing-afghan-peace-process>

¹⁷<file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/FFinalCPTBAssignment.pdf>

level.¹⁸ Security transition does not only include firepower or military tactics, it also involves legitimate support to local armed forces from all segments of the society. Furthermore, US has planned a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan, security transition would be beneficial as it reduces the dependency of local forces on international armed forces and provides time to country's own armed forces to take over security responsibility of country.¹⁹ Moreover, security transition is not fruitful if political transition fails to take place alongside. In 2014, peaceful handover of governance from one government to another strengthened the democratic process, but elections were marred by rigging allegations. 2019 Afghanistan election results also drove towards the political strife between the political camps of Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Fraudulent political system and dispute over election results of 2019 rang alarm bells for political structure and prospects of intra-Afghan dialogue. Rigging and biased political system contributed to instability, violence, and clashes along ethnic lines. Meanwhile, Ashraf Ghani's dismissal and Taliban's takeover open a new chapter in the Afghanistan's history; Afghanistan pundits' analysis and statements issued by Taliban suggest that Taliban have now diplomatically evolved and sense new realities and consequences of international isolation.

DDR without Mediation – A Complete Failure

Absence of Peace Agreement and Political Obstacles to Sustainable Peace: Four main post-2001 reintegration programmes have been carried out; first two programmes (2003-2005) were aimed at pro-government armed groups and Strengthening Peace Programme (2010) and Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (2016) targeted insurgent groups. Fishstein and Wilder in-depth analysis conclude that DDR programmes fueled the conflict and generated competition.²⁰ Taliban were thrown out of government after US' invasion in 2001, and insurgency was at its peak in 2003.²¹ As no peace agreement or accord was signed and in effect,

¹⁸ "NATO and Afghanistan", North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Jul, 2020. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm

¹⁹ Air Commodore (R) Khalid Iqbal, "Afghanistan Through a Transitional Decade: The Role of Major Powers: An analytical Overview", Criterion Quarterly, May 30, 2016. Available at: <https://criterion-quarterly.com/afghanistan-through-a-transitional-decade-the-role-of-major-powers-an-analytical-overview/>

²⁰ Deedee Derksen, "The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan", USIP. May 2015. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/politics-disarmament-and-rearmament-afghanistan>

²¹ Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, BBC NEWS, 29 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51689443>

distrust and resentment kept security situation deteriorated and uncertain. Taliban, regardless of being non-state actor, held valuable and significant positions in society and without their consent and conditional support; no peace programme could be successful without inclusion of the Afghan Taliban. According to Derksen's 2015 report, 'The politics of disarmament and rearmament in Afghanistan', there were two main aims of DDR in Afghanistan, first aim was to diffuse the command structure of Afghan Military Forces, and second aim was to make reintegrees economically independent. Nevertheless, these programmes achieved mixed success due to lack of transparency and corruption. Those commanders of militias who were accused of human rights abuses and lawlessness were made commanders of Afghan National Forces and made their way into Afghan National Police. Furthermore, induction of AMF commanders changed the civilian policing nature and ANP became more like paramilitary force and militia.²² Commanders and leaders who were close to Ministry of Defense never renounced armed groups and maintained armed groups and no action was taken against them. Without any political incentives at lower, local, and national level, insurgents were asked to lay down arms.²³ And later on, no security and legal assistance was provided to the demobilized combatants and ruthless killings of ex-combatants made demobilized militants to reconsider their decision of surrender and they started rejoining illegal armed groups. Lack of transparency and politicization of peace-building programs consequently entrenched people distrust in the Afghan government. ANDSF meltdown before Taliban's onslaught has exposed the years of maladministration and how political and military elites harmed country by setting their parochial and corrupt self-interests above the national interests. Afghan security officials' unwillingness to fight Taliban and act of selling off their weapons and switching sides demonstrate poor morale and disaffection.²⁴

²² Deedee Derksen, "The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan", United States Institute of Peacebuilding, May 20, 2015. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/politics-disarmament-and-rearmament-afghanistan>

²³ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Civil Challenges to Peace in Afghanistan", Centre For Strategic & International Studies August 20, 2019. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/civil-challenges-peace-afghanistan>

²⁴ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why the Taliban Won", Foreign Affairs, August 17, 2021. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-17/why-taliban-won?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=www-foreignaffairs-com.cdn.ampproject.org&utm_campaign=amp_kickers.

Ethno-political Disagreements: Power sharing formula and appointments of young technocrats irked traditional powerbrokers and warlords. Central government was accused of abuse of power, betrayal, biasness, and patronizing ethno nationalism.²⁵ Powerbrokers and elites are mostly patrons of their ethnic communities and are in position to sabotage peace and incite violence along ethnic and political lines. David Mansfield, scholar of Afghanistan's drug trade, writes that appointment of young technocrat as Governor of Nangarhar irked influential elite Haji Zahir Qadir who campaigned against the new appointment and tried to bypass national institutions. Furthermore, former Balkh governor Muhammad Atta Noor and Afghanistan's Vice President Rashid Dostum faced territorial loss due to disagreements with government and Taliban.²⁶ It is pertinent to note that Afghanistan is an ethnically diverse country, and centralized government usually work for its own socio-political interests which strengthens the societal divide which is clearly seen as north's historical aversion to Pashtun domination in country.²⁷ Warlords from different ethnic groups view peace and reconciliation programmes as threat to their dynasties and politics and warn central government of violent protests in case of encroachments on their traditional turfs. With Taliban's takeover, a question arises that how would the Taliban entertain the urges of various ethnic and political stakeholders and would they continue democratic process to accommodate stakeholders; presently, it seems Taliban do not have any plan or intention other than installing Shariah-compliant regime.

Challenges and Potential Solutions

Ethnic, Linguistic, and Religious Discrimination: Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, language, and religion is prevalent and seen as challenge and impediment to stability and peace of the country. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission conducted a survey 'Evaluation of Average Implementation of All Forms of Racial Discrimination', and published survey report in 2019. Survey results illustrate that 25 percent of participants have

²⁵ANDREW WATKINS, "AFGHANISTAN ON THE EDGE? ELECTIONS, ELITES, AND ETHNIC TENSIONS", War On The Rocks, 31st October, 2019. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/afghanistan-on-the-edge-elections-elites-and-ethnic-tensions/>

²⁶ANDREW WATKINS, "AFGHANISTAN ON THE EDGE? ELECTIONS, ELITES, AND ETHNIC TENSIONS", War On The Rocks, 31st October, 2019. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/afghanistan-on-the-edge-elections-elites-and-ethnic-tensions/>

²⁷Deedee Derksen, "The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan", USIP. May 2015. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/politics-disarmament-and-rearmament-afghanistan>

faced and endured discrimination and been harassed on the basis of their identity. Ethnic discord is visible and responsible for ethnic clashes and violence and discourages peaceful coexistence. Though, Article 22 of the Afghanistan constitution and 218, 256, 409, 870 articles of Afghanistan's penal code encourage pluralism and prohibit discrimination and inequality and provide equal rights to every citizen yet discrimination of all forms have been promoted and reflected on national level.²⁸ Religious discrimination was widespread in Taliban regime as they are adherents of extremist ideology; however, democratic governments have somehow taken concrete measures to cope with this issue. Aforementioned surveys and reports indicate and highlight the fault lines of Afghan society and how the process of infiltration of minds and exploitation in the name of ethnic, racial, and linguistic affiliations deface Afghanistan and her socio-cultural fabric. Reinstatement of the Taliban regime and anticipated sectarian war is likely to further split the society along the religious lines; Taliban's arch rival, ISK, has potential to tempt Taliban members' especially rank-and-file soldiers to defect from the organization and instigate sectarian conflict in Afghanistan.²⁹

Standoff between Afghan Government and Afghan Taliban and Political Crisis: In earlier 2020, Afghanistan presidential election results were announced and violence erupted between the supporters and parties of presidential candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Rockets were fired at presidential palace during oath taking ceremony of reelected President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani. Ashraf Ghani formed the government amid political chaos and uncertainty to avoid further escalation in political violence and uncertainty as deteriorating political situation and absence of government favor Afghan Taliban.³⁰ According to Special Inspector General of Afghanistan Reconstruction's (SIGAR) report, published in January 2018, government rules over 229 districts, Taliban hold control of 59 districts, and 119 districts

²⁸ Zarghona Salehai and Sadaf Ahmadzai, "Ethnic discrimination impedes Afghanistan's stability", PAJHWOK AFGHAN NEWS, March 27, 2019. Available at: <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/03/27/ethnic-discrimination-impedes-afghanistan%E2%80%99s-stability>

²⁹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Will the Taliban regime survive?", Brookings, August 31, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/31/will-the-taliban-regime-survive/>

³⁰ Pamela Constable, "Standoff between Afghan President Ghani and rival Abdullah threatens Taliban peace deal", The Washington Post, March 15, 2020. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/standoff-between-afghan-president-ghani-and-rival-abdullah-threatens-peace-deal/2020/03/15/41d4e8e8-6657-11ea-8a8e-5c5336b32760_story.html

are being contested by both Afghan Taliban and government. In March, 2020, Ashraf Ghani constituted a 21 member negotiating committee to hold negotiations and dialogue with Afghan Taliban. Afghan Taliban immediately rejected the offer to conduct peace dialogue by Afghan government and questioned government's legitimacy. Afghan Taliban demanded release of 5,000 Taliban inmates, and in return, Taliban were obliged to return back 1,000 government officials and security personnel. Afghan government released 3,000 Taliban prisoners to not derail peace process and hold intra-Afghan dialogue with Taliban.³¹ In June 2020, Taliban gave nod to government to hold negotiations in Doha, Qatar.³² A path to political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban urged parties to the conflict to shun submissive activities and rhetoric which stall the peace negotiations. Presumably, Taliban were backing off from their pledge to renounce violence; dissidents within the ranks of Afghan Taliban were might behind the spike in violent activities in Afghanistan. Afghan government turned blind eye to internal dispersion as the years 2020 and 2021 mark the political turmoil in Afghanistan even though political rivals Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah reached an agreement over power sharing. Kabul's administration representatives with diverging political motives swayed the intra-Afghan peace negotiations; moreover, political rift and political turmoil favored the Afghan Taliban and increased their leverage. The establishment of a new government is prerequisite to get things move forward, however, there is a slim chance of formation of inclusive government regardless of Taliban's repeated assurances and consultation with political opponents. Taliban's assurances and guarantees can be viewed as a ploy to consolidate power and solidify their political and diplomatic position; international recognition of their government and securing reserves held abroad is the pressing need of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.³³ Nevertheless, Taliban diplomatic engagements and talks with regional and western countries indicate policy shift from the side of Taliban and international pressure may compel Taliban to relinquish repressive interpretation of Islam.

³¹ "Afghan conflict: Taliban to resume attacking local forces after deal with US", BBC, 02 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51706126>

³² "Afghan government, Taliban agree on Doha as venue for talks", Aljazeera, 15 June, 2020. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/afghan-government-taliban-agree-doha-venue-peace-talks-200615054551706.html>

³³ Atlantic Council Experts, 'Experts React: The US withdrawal from Afghanistan is complete. What's next?', Atlantic Council, August 30, 2021. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-the-us-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-is-complete-whats-next/>

Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution: Experts call violence a learned behavior; moreover, risk and resilience factors for violence define how an individual is perpetrating violence, getting affected, or developing positively. There are several techniques and methods devised by experts to avoid violence and move towards sustainable peace by adopting violence prevention methods and model. Afghanistan lacks mental health resources and facilities and Afghan government needs to take immediate measures to cope with this issue.³⁴ Afghanistan government needs to work upon people friendly initiatives to fulfill local population needs and address grievances. Gang violence is rampant in Afghanistan as local militias operate and different patronage networks freely commit heinous crimes and recruit youth for their nefarious agenda. Training programs surely provide opportunities to youth to learn worthwhile skills and get vocational training. Teresa Welsh, Washington-based journalist, had a conversation with Shoaib Rahim who was senior adviser to the minister for peace and several state affairs which was published in ‘The new Afghan Ministry for Peace Ministry’s Role in conflict resolution’. Shoaib Rahim was optimistic about future of Afghanistan as government announced ministry for peace to oversee peace agreements and political settlements and entitled to make inclusive policies to ensure participation of local Afghans at grass root level. This ministry had mandate to resolve territorial dispute, land dispute, water dispute, and other issues at district level. Ministry for peace was given task to prioritize issues and disputes and identify/ map the drivers of conflict. Community Development councils were established to bridge the communication gap between individuals and communities.³⁵ These methods of conflict resolution enhance joint-decision making and increase involvement of civil society, NGOs, women, youth, and elders. Table talks and peace agreement alone could not yield positive results.

Transitional Justice: Transitional justice means accountability of the perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, and it also acknowledges grievances and suffering of the victims. U.S. government, Afghan government, and Afghan Taliban barely talk

³⁴Patti Culross, Larry Cohe, Ashby Wolfe and Joanne Ruby, “Creating Safe environments: violence Prevention Strategies and Programs” Prevention Institute, 221 Oak Street Oakland, CA 94607 June 2006. Available at: https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/VP_VP%20Strategies%20for%20RWJ_EXEC%20SUMM_WEB_040511.pdf

³⁵Teresa Welsh, “Q&A: The new Afghan Peace Ministry's role in conflict resolution”, Devex, January 2020. Available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/q-a-the-new-afghan-peace-ministry-s-role-in-conflict-resolution-96438>

about the mechanism through which accused of war crimes could held accountable. Ehsan Qanne and Sari Kuovo of Afghanistan Analysts Network say that peace deal between US and Afghan Taliban will marginalize this aspect of peace process as many US military men and Afghan Taliban have themselves committed war crimes.³⁶ In past, commission was formed by Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization and given mandate for conflict-mapping, due to political and unknown reasons; government did not follow up after the findings of commission. In every peace deal and agreement, transitional justice has been ignored due to involvement of the stakeholders in war crimes.

In 2007, National Reconciliation General Amnesty (Amnesty Law) was passed to save war criminals and perpetrators of crimes against humanity. A few good initiatives and steps have been taken by Afghan government and International organizations to investigate and hold accused of human rights violations accountable. International Crime Council is willing to probe into matter of human rights abuse, and ICC provisions have been incorporated into Afghanistan penal code. A committee of war crimes had been established to discharge duties under the supervision of Ashraf Ghani's Peace Advisory Council. Transitional justice can be ensured and implemented through different processes like documenting war crimes, truth-telling, and reconciliation. Victims and witnesses protection is another challenge as no law particularly deals with the said matter. There was hope for victims and survivors as plan and programs like Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program had been given mandate to work for transitional justice.³⁷ Transitional justice in case of Afghanistan seems an uphill task; culprits and perpetrators of war crimes are influential and can obstruct any action and investigation which hold them accountable and proves them guilty. On August 15, 2021, Taliban announced a general amnesty for government officials and members of ANDSF which allude Taliban's intention to give clean chit to members of past government who perpetrated crimes and committed human rights violations.³⁸

³⁶Ehsan Qaane and Sari Kouvo, "Peace in The Air, But Where Is Justice? Efforts to get transitional justice on the table", Afghanistan Analysts Network. Available at: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/peace-in-the-air-but-where-is-justice-efforts-to-get-transitional-justice-on-the-table/>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview recorded by Al Jazeera Exclusive, "Afghanistan's future: Taliban members prepare to appoint government", Aug 22, 2021. YouTube video, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR2pSHSH6V4>

Taliban's Ascendancy: What lies ahead for Afghanistan?

Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has received mixed response, pro-Taliban rallies and anti-Taliban protests ignite a new debate whether Taliban represent aspirations of the majority or they are mere face of religious fundamentalism and extremism in Afghanistan. In this age of disinformation, falling for propaganda is comparatively more convenient than getting to the truth. Propaganda war and the use of public relations is intensifying in Afghanistan with each passing day, media manipulation is at its peak to cultivate favorable conceptions and impression. Afghan and Western media are sharing reports of Taliban's atrocities without verifying the news, and Taliban are denying any involvement in killings and abductions of the political opponents, former government officials, anti-Taliban journalists and common citizens. Taliban exclusive government has irked many; however, geopolitical dynamics and the future role of Afghanistan in the region are considered key factors to international recognition. Despite consultations with the political giants and affirming commitment to inclusiveness, Taliban's new cabinet has hardliners which is the clear indication of Taliban's adherence to their radical thinking and no change in *modus operandi*. Moreover, denying of representation at government level and in political set-up will anger political elites who may rebel against the Taliban rule in future or ally themselves with armed militias sponsored by international actors.

One of the core challenges being faced by Taliban is adoption of a balanced approach to thwart conspiracies against them to escape international sanctions without offending the foot soldiers. Setting the time frame for interim government is another essential task alongside overcoming serious challenges related to functioning of government, political set-up, inter and intra-societal sources of chaos in Afghanistan. Indoctrinated foot soldiers are expected to treat common population especially women with an iron fist which will tarnish the reputation built by the public relations team of Taliban. Financial assistance and humanitarian aid is not sufficient to rebuild Afghanistan from the scratch. Political elites and military establishment share equal responsibility for sad state of affairs. Afghans' acceptance of each other differences is always the foremost concern, given the inherent animosities and social cleavages. Internal rifts in the Afghan society and armed struggle for power result in foreign influence, proxies, foreign

interference, and occupation.³⁹ In the past regime of Taliban, mere focus was on Islamizing the Afghan society overlooking the requirement to boost economic growth. Nevertheless, pro-poor social relations of production can be established by merging the basic Islamic principles with the demands for prohibiting cultivation of opium, criminalizing the arms trade, arranging alternative means of livelihood and sources of income for landless individuals. Taliban need to relinquish narrow-mindedness and develop pro-poor social relations of production in Afghanistan as the notions of struggle, philanthropy, and liberation are already enshrined in the Quran.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The research unravels Afghanistan's peace-building programs and DDR without mediation being considered the impediment to long-lasting and durable peace by peace-building practitioners. Thus, in order to make peace-building programs successful and rewarding, parties to the conflict resorted to peace talks, intra-Afghan dialogue, and peace agreements. In order to achieve sustainable peace, four reintegration programs were introduced, but lack of political will, mistrust, and absence of mediation process failed the peace-building programs. This notion of failure of peace-building program without mediation holds true if the past DDR programs are viewed from peace-building angle. The research illustrates some recent developments as encouraging developments and call flawed policies of US and Afghan government hindrance to successfulness of peace process in past. The research elucidates that ethnic tensions, lack of political consensus, and divisive policies affecting Afghanistan's socio-cultural fabric, economic pursuits, disturbing internal equilibrium, fanning extremist and violent tendencies, intra-rebel skirmishes and created an obstruction to peace process. The research further enlists the challenges Afghanistan has to face and tackle in the wake of the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. As the hypothesis is proven true, it warrants parties to the conflict to reconsider their policy and put more efforts into building a peaceful Afghanistan and look for applicable options to achieve set objectives and foil any mischievous attempt. The research concludes that a few confidence building measures have been taken to initiate the process of mediation at the state and masses level.

³⁹ Amalendu Misra, 'The Taliban, radical Islam, and Afghanistan', Carfax Publishing, 23, no.3 (2002), Available at: <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/13640302.pdf>

⁴⁰ Deepshikha Shahi, 'Post-9/11 Afghanistan: An Alternative Critical Theoretical Perspective', E-International Relations, March 26, 2017, Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/03/26/post-911-afghanistan-an-alternative-critical-theoretical-perspective/>

Moreover, it has been observed that ethnic, racial, linguistic discrimination and systematic trauma is widespread and political rifts and divisive politics destabilize Afghanistan. Notwithstanding all these differences and contradictions, serious efforts had been made amidst ongoing conflict and Taliban dominance over one third of Afghanistan. The research explores the causes of failure of previous DDR programs and concludes that previously not all aspects and factors of the conflict were taken into account as first two reintegration programs aimed at pro-government armed groups and last two programs were specifically designed to disarm and demobilize Afghan Taliban. The research concludes that existence of two power centers in Afghan government that was Ashraf Ghani's political group and Abdullah Abdullah's National Coalition of Afghanistan created difficulties to pen down terms and conditions for successful negotiations with Taliban. High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan was headed by Abdullah Abdullah; the committee comprised representation from both Ashraf Ghani's and Abdullah Abdullah's cabinet made it challenging to find common ground to be negotiated with Taliban. Thus, conflicting interests of both parties put impediments to intra-Afghan dialogue. There was disagreement between former Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan Taliban representatives regarding nature of constitution as the old constitution favored pluralistic society in Afghanistan and the same conflicts with Taliban's Shariah that is highly radicalized. Intra-Taliban divisions was a major impediment in the continuity and success of the negotiations as there was no single representation of all Taliban groups; henceforth, any agreement signed was disputed and violated by few Taliban groups.

The recurrence of violence in Afghanistan against ANDSF despite agreeing to bring peace to Afghanistan between the U.S. and the Afghan Taliban is a case in point. Structural issues in the governance of Afghanistan weakened the Afghan institutions. Former Afghanistan government was plagued by corruption, bad governance, incompetence; and these matters of concern jeopardized the peace process. Taliban's conquest of Kabul in 11 days caught many off guard including anti-Taliban regime Afghans who rushed to Kabul airport to flee the country. The most vulnerable section of Afghan society is women who are very uncertain and bewildered about their future. Many women believe that Taliban has somehow realized that repressive policies and excessive restrictions on women and constraints on social mobility of women would

land them in hot water.⁴¹ However, it is yet to see what rights Taliban afford to women and how the international community will react in case if Taliban do not honor the word. Keeping in mind the plenty of policy options international community have, presumably Taliban will put less restrictions on women as compared with the last rule of the Taliban. Moreover, statements issued by Taliban regarding women rights are encouraging; Taliban members in interviews are categorically saying that women have right to education and work within the framework of Islam. Taliban accuse media outlets of propagating false news regarding Taliban and call out Western media for painting them as beasts in past which was not reflection of the reality.⁴² Haqqani network allegiance with Taliban and their significant role in formation of a new government busts the myth that Taliban and Haqqani network are two separate entities. Furthermore, offer of clemency and announcement of general amnesty might be taken as shrewd attempt to alleviate threats to Taliban's rule from within the country and mitigate intra-state conflict.⁴³

Taliban vow to forget the bitterness of the past and urge the international community including the U.S. to cooperate and collaborate with the Taliban government in the larger interest of the Afghan community.⁴⁴ Given the ISK threat, it could be stated that cohesive Taliban force may face fragmentation in future if rank-and-file soldiers find any shift in policy by top leadership contrary to their interpretation of Islam and Shariah Law. It is also apprehended that targeted killings of Hazara Shias and minority groups executed by armed groups and ISK can set off sectarian war which would harm bilateral ties between the Iran and the Afghanistan resultantly. The continuation of the violence in the Afghanistan will daunt foreign investors from pouring in money and dream of economically stable Afghanistan will remain a dream. Encircled resistance from the Panjshir Valley seemingly does not pose a serious threat to Taliban's control

⁴¹ Weekend Edition Saturday, "*The Future Is Uncertain For Women In Afghanistan Under Taliban Rule*", NPR, August 21, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/21/1029957358/the-future-is-uncertain-for-women-in-afghanistan-under-taliban-rule>

⁴² Interview recorded by Habertürk TV, "Mehmet Akif Ersoy'dan Taliban özel röportajı", You Tube Video, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WphW04KtX9g>

⁴³ Ahmed-Waleed Kakar, "*Taliban, the Next Generation*", Newline Magazine, August 30, 2021. <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/taliban-the-next-generation/>

⁴⁴ Matthieu Aikins and Jim Huylebroek, "The Taliban wants to forget the past, a leader tells The Times, but there will be some restrictions.", The New York times, Sep-02-2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/25/world/asia/taliban-spokesman-interview.html>

all over the country; ISK is a formidable opponent and pose serious challenges which are substantially more intense than challenges owing to the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan lead by Ahmed Massoud and the former Vice President Amrullah Saleh. Fleeing of technocrats and brain drain is an issue at hand which requires immediate attention or else Taliban would only accomplish their objective of ruling Afghanistan without making a good impact on the administrative sector.