



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Local Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and the Prospects for Democracy After the U.S. Withdrawal**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines localized peacebuilding strategies under Taliban rule and assesses the viability of democratic governance in Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal. Afghanistan's prolonged conflict is rooted in internal power struggles, socio-economic underdevelopment, and global geopolitical rivalries. The U.S.-led intervention post-2001 failed to achieve lasting peace, culminating in the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Despite the end of formal warfare, underlying tensions and drivers of conflict remain. A qualitative approach is used, drawing on exiting literature, policy analysis, and reports to evaluate local peacebuilding under Taliban rule. The Taliban government has excluded women and minorities, suppressed political dissent, and alienated the international community. Peace efforts remain fragmented and localized, lacking formal support structures. Some communities have adopted informal conflict resolution mechanisms, but broader political reconciliation is absent. The regime's ideological rigidity and ties to extremist groups hinder democratic development. The study identifies that international actors should support grassroots peace initiatives and civil society resilience.

**KEYWORDS** Afghanistan, Democracy, Taliban, Peacebuilding, Governance

**Introduction**

Afghanistan has been an epicenter of protracted conflict and internal instability since decades. Political dissent, element of religiosity, tribal and ethnic divisions, along with the external intrusions explicates the complexed security and political dynamics of Afghanistan (Farid, et. al., 2021). In this context, navigating peace building approaches is significant to reduce the probability of conflict escalation and regeneration in Afghan society. Peacebuilding fundamentally navigates the causes of conflict in order to minimize the probability of reoccurrence. Peacebuilding activities include multiple actions which aim to minimize the potential for conflict relapse by enhancing national conflict management skills across all levels while establishing sustainable peace and development foundations. Peacebuilding initiatives focus on transforming and resolving key conflict aspects through official diplomatic efforts together with civil society peace processes and informal methods of dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. This paper examines the initiatives used in peacebuilding, evaluating their efficacy as well as their links and democratic prospects. Racial differences, socioeconomic inequalities and geopolitical designs are all predominant factors in the historical turmoil of Afghanistan (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). The country has endured waves of combat since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Soviet invasion in December 1979, a civil war during and after cold war period, the rise and fall of the Taliban, and an extended presence of foreign military forces.

Peacebuilding in Afghanistan includes a range of actors and strategies such as international organizations, local NGOs, and community-based initiatives. Grassroots programs focuses on community and reconciliation using traditional conflict transformation techniques and fostering local ownership. While national actions largely are

based on governance, inclusive democracy, political transformation, and the integration of former combatants into society. Furthermore, International development initiatives, economic assistance and diplomatic discussions seek to stabilize the area and create the conditions that support sustainable peace. In this context, by conducting an extensive examination of these multifaceted approaches, this study seeks to engage in the broader conversation on peace building amidst conflict regions, providing interpretative insights that could impact prospective democratic efforts in Afghanistan. The paper further points out that an integrated approach is essential in the pursuit of sustainable peace and democracy by transcending the compartmentalization tendencies of local, national, and international dynamics.

## **Literature Review**

The existing literature signifies the main peacebuilding approaches in Afghanistan. One of the dominant themes in the existing literature highlights the role of international community. Rubin, (1995) discusses the social and political complexities of Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion and asserts that a range of internal and external elements including regional and grand geopolitical power clashes, ethnolinguistic heterogeneity and Islam led the state to collapse. In addition, he predicted that if the international community fails to find a solution for rebuilding Afghanistan, there is a high risk of a surge in the flow of weapons, cash, and contraband across the country's porous borders, ultimately posing a threat to global security. Likewise, Semple, (2009) examined the aims and motives of Taliban and their aims are examined in detail, and arguing that to achieve long-term peace in Afghanistan negotiations with the group are required. Semple also said the Taliban does not act as one structure, and there is open communication among factions within the group. The book greatly contributes to the discussion of the role of negotiations in ending the Afghan war.

Schmeid, (2016) evaluates Afghanistan's limited democratization progress through the elite-versus-citizen framework. The analysis disputes the culturalist theory which attributes democratization obstacles to limited democratic experience and religious and cultural norms. The text proposes a political-institutional explanation for Afghanistan's democratization difficulties through two fundamental arguments. The foundation of newly established institutions by the United States together with international partners clashed fundamentally with local conditions. Afghan elites exploited new institutions to gain power which created 'negative hybridity' through neo-patrimonialism. This situation has created a growing divide between ordinary Afghan citizens and both Afghan elites and the international world that faces accusations of hiding their elite cooperation behind democratic support operations. The future of democracy in Afghanistan is dependent on elites catching up with the Afghan masses and accepting democracy for what it is: the rule of the people.

Coburn, (2014) examines the challenges to democratic processes due to the Afghanistan's increasing instability. This article answers the question by exploring why the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 neglected to implement essential State-building operations (Muzaffar, et. al., 202). The Afghanistan Papers' disclosure revealed Washington's disorganized policy and created severe damage to the invasion's effectiveness. This research starts with an examination of Afghanistan's current political scenario by first reviewing the declining confidence in electoral processes since the 2001 invasion. The report investigates how democratic institutions under the National Unity Government demonstrate instability through their failures in political power sharing and corruption elimination while failing to enforce the rule of law. The examination continues by assessing the ways internal challenges along with external threats including the Islamic State's rise in Afghanistan and Pakistan's terrorism support obstruct democratic processes in the country.

Azam, (2021) explains the evolving security dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the post-2014 period. The authors contextualize the bilateral tensions within a historical framework while highlighting the shift from conventional military threats to more complex, hybrid security challenges, including terrorism, cross-border militancy, and non-traditional risks such as economic instability and climate-related stressors. The paper underscores the persistent mistrust between the two nations and critically evaluates Pakistan's security and diplomatic responses, particularly after the NATO drawdown (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021a). Therefore, these traditional and non-traditional security challenges has been a major cause of disrupting peace within Afghanistan and between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Qayomi, (2023) discusses the importance of domestic and international interactions in finding a solution to the Afghan conflict and evaluates new policy and strategy from the perspective of peacebuilding. The paper has important implications about the prospect of political transition and power sharing as a conflict resolution solution to the Afghan conflict. The findings are based on a comprehensive literature review and critical analysis of old policies, which suggested the value of the two-pronged resolution approach. The paper also adds to the literature on consociationalism as a conflict resolution theory and a pragmatic way of implementing it for a lasting settlement in Afghanistan.

### **Material and Methods**

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design to investigate local peacebuilding efforts and the prospects for democracy under Taliban rule. Given the fluid and complex political environment in Afghanistan, an exploratory approach is appropriate to gain in-depth insights into emerging patterns and localized responses to governance and conflict. The research primarily relies on document analysis, including reports from international organizations, policy briefs, academic literature, and media sources. This method allows for the systematic examination of relevant data to understand how peacebuilding is being pursued at the local level and how these efforts intersect with the broader political dynamics under the Taliban regime.

### **Discussion and Results**

#### **Peacebuilding Efforts at the Wake of US Intervention in Afghanistan in 2001**

US intervention in Afghanistan dismantled the regime of Taliban and Afghanistan became a bedrock of conflict and chaos as US and NATO forces moved in Afghanistan. The Bush administration's initial objectives were to defeat the Taliban and eliminate Al-Qaeda. President. Bush emphasized that such enemies need to be confronted directly, without concession (President Bush, 2003). Thus, the state-building process placed combat against terrorism as the primary agenda, with peace as a second priority. Bonn conference was considered as an initial step towards peacebuilding. The Bonn Agreement, a series of agreements aimed at ending the conflict in Afghanistan, was focused on promoting national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the country. The agreement included the establishment of key institutions such as the judiciary, army, police force, constitutional commissions, election commission, banking system, drug enforcement directorate, and the disarmament and demobilization of militias. It also involved the drafting of a new constitution, combating terrorism, drugs, and organized crime, repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and other related subjects (Bibi, et. al., 2023). One of the main goals of the agreement was to address the country's monetary crisis by authorizing the establishment of a new central bank with the ability to manage currency issuance. Additionally, the agreement called for the creation of a human rights commission, marking the first time that Afghan authorities were tasked with establishing such an institution. The overall objective of the agreement was to establish a multi-ethnic, fully representative government that would be elected through free and fair elections by the

people of Afghanistan (Melegoda, 2010). But the process was flawed mainly because it excluded the main participants to the conflict. For example, it left out key actors in the struggle, including the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had huge Pashtun support that comprises of approximately 42 percent of the Afghan population (Erlanger, 2001). Ethnic Pashtuns felt evaded by exclusion, particularly in the Karzai regime, that was dominated by past warlords and Northern Alliance sympathizers. In addition, Afghanistan was polarized on linguistic, regional, and ethnic lines as a consequence of this rift. Subsequently, the Obama administration adopted a more lenient attitude towards the Taliban in an attempt to weaken them and push them towards negotiations. The establishment of a Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar, was an example of this (Rosenberg, 2013). As the conflict escalated, these negotiations yielded minimal progress. Afghanistan remained a fractured nation beset by linguistic, ethnic, and ideological strife, as exemplified by the 2014 presidential elections. The fault lines continued to exist even after the formation of a National Unity Government (NUG) headed by President Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah led by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's intervention. The emergence of technocrats with Western education made it much harder to govern.

To achieve a political settlement and bring an end to the struggle, the former Afghan government negotiated with the political leadership of the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, after the U.S. had signed a peace deal with the Taliban. Global powers, especially the United States, aimed to build confidence among the belligerents and advance the peace process during the two years of negotiations before the Taliban took over. The Taliban and the previous Afghan government could not develop a reliable relationship, which undermined their capability for arriving at a political consensus, even if the United States was in support of the peace process. Consequently, the United States and its allies decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. For the first time since they ruled most of the country from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban seized Kabul on August 15. The Taliban set up a new government and state apparatus after the old one collapsed, thus becoming the de facto rulers (Qayomi, 2023).

### **Reasons for the failure of the Doha Process and the US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan**

The U.S. miscalculated the Taliban's strength and overestimated the will of the Afghan Army and Afghan politicians to fight. For the 20 years prior to signing a peace agreement with the Taliban, the U.S. and previous Afghan government used military peace building as a tool to bring the conflict under control, reduce violence, and stabilize the country. The U.S. was the strong partner and over focused on defeating the Taliban through a military approach to end the violence. A military approach also did not provide a clear window to engage the Taliban directly to find a political settlement. As the U.S. entered the peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government, it also committed itself to the withdrawal of the U.S. troops. This put the U.S. at a disadvantage to employ any leverage to persuade the Taliban into a political settlement. By the time the U.S. changed its policy to engage with the Taliban to negotiate to end the war, it was too late. As the Afghan conflict has so many domestic and international stakeholders involved, such as Pakistan, Russia, Iran, India, and China, it is necessary for the U.S. approach to dovetail with the policy of the regional powers who also have an interest in peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan were impossible without regional consensus on the U.S. peacebuilding approach, which failed for the lack of regional cooperation (Iqbal, 2021).

Due to internal conflicts with important individuals such as Dr. Abdullah, the former Chairman of the Afghanistan High Council for National Reconciliation, the former Afghan administration led by President Ghani was unable to reach an agreement for peace talks. Political crises and administrative gridlock resulted from the ruling elite in Kabul prioritizing personal riches and power above enhancing military capabilities and administration throughout the previous ten years while the U.S. carefully withdrew its

soldiers. Although the Taliban and the Afghan people hold very diverse opinions on peace, both have valued the peace process. One of the main reasons why the U.S. approach to the Doha peace process failed to bring about peace in Afghanistan was the lack of coordination and collaboration among domestic stakeholders, international players, and regional actors. In order to bring about enduring peace, the Taliban have not established an inclusive administration or made concessions to opposition parties since seizing power. International and regional countries have refused to acknowledge the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan in spite of these obstacles. Reaching a political settlement between the Taliban and other political groups requires reviving and restructuring the Doha peace process in order to address these problems and find a comprehensive solution. To completely execute the Doha accord and bring about enduring peace in Afghanistan, this endeavor necessitates creating a new framework that prioritizes cooperation among local, regional, and international peacebuilding initiatives (Muzaffar, et. al.,2020; Qayomi, 2023).

### **Peacebuilding Approaches in Pre and Post US Withdrawal**

Taliban was able to get the political control of Afghanistan on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 as internationally backed Afghanistan regime was collapsed. This incident itself explains the significance of local support and community- based political strength for power consolidation. The peace building discourse can be understood in the context of changing global geopolitical landscape that reshaped the international engagement in peace processes, particularly change of political leadership in United States. From being party to the conflict and initiating the military intervention, US acted as a mediator in intra-Afghan talks. This was accompanied with pre-US withdrawal local attempts to bring peace. In 2018, a generic tendency and support for talks between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban was observed. It was then in June 2018 that Taliban reciprocated to the ceasefire call of President Ashraf Ghani at Eid-ul-Fitr and extended the call to their fighters. It was considered as first nationwide ceasefire. In this context, a senior Afghan official reportedly said that, “after the ceasefire, it was no longer about defeating the Taliban, but how to convince them to sit at the table with us” (Theros, 2023).

### **Jirgas**

In Afghanistan, Jirgas are traditional gatherings of elders and community leaders that have long played a central role in settling disputes and maintaining peace. These assemblies rely on consensus, providing a platform for discussion and negotiation to resolve conflicts. Deeply rooted in local culture and history, they hold strong legitimacy and respect among the people. While Jirgas have traditionally been dominated by men, there have been efforts to include women and younger members to make decisions more representative. Their approach is based on restorative justice, focusing on reconciliation and unity rather than punishment, which helps rebuild trust in communities recovering from conflict. In many areas where formal government institutions are weak or absent, Jirgas serve as an essential form of local governance, addressing disputes and social issues. There have also been attempts to connect Jirgas with the formal legal system, combining traditional methods with modern judicial principles. Despite these changes, Jirgas continue to play a key role in maintaining peace and stability, using long standing customs to bring communities together and resolve conflicts. In 2019, for the first time a significant proportion of Afghan women were able to take part in a Loya Jirga. They spoke out for peace and were instrumental in the current peace talks. Afghan women now say “no” to a token position in peace talks. The recent Loya Jirga seemed promising in that regard, the Afghan women engaged in that play, meaning with the panel they took a part and in terms of the decision-making they are visage as playing a critical role (Gabel, 2024).

### **Shuras**

The term “Shura” or “consultation” in Arabic, refers to Shuras which are councils used in Afghanistan for resolving disputes and making important decisions. While building peace, Shuras employ local elders and other community leaders to tackle disputes, foster conversations, and reach agreement among powerful members of the community. They are bound by local customs and practices as well as Islamic laws, and as such, these people’s judgment is valid and meaningful to the community. Shuras are effective in resolving cases of violence stemming from border conflicts, family disputes or clan feuds over ownership of land. Although self-governed, they maintain contacts with Official state authorities, serving as a link between the local people and their government, and so advancing the strategies of government-sponsored peacebuilding. Their role in Shura is to represent all constituents even those belonging to the minority groups which leads towards achieving peace in Afghanistan in the middle of a challenging environment.

### **Legitimizing the Taliban**

In the wake of the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15th of 2021, there has been a rapid and abrupt shift of power in Afghanistan. The Taliban established their control of most of Afghanistan in a matter of a few days. Upon seizing Kabul, they unveiled an interim government that included key Taliban leaders as the Cabinet members. The Qatar-based US-Taliban Peace Process was dragged into a deal worked out between the US and Taliban clearing the path for the absolute withdrawal of international forces, including the US, from Afghanistan. This process not only put an end to the US's 20-year "War on Terror" in Afghanistan, but it also gave the Taliban the confidence to use force to seize and rule Afghan territory rather than an intra-Afghan dialogue led and supported by Afghans. Shortly after its takeover, the Taliban rejected the existing political as such, the Afghan constitution as the basis for the comprehensive the governing structures in Afghanistan. The Taliban would try to come on their world view and political system based on aspirations driven by hardline readings of Islam. With the Taliban rising to prominence, the global order is challenged with the deciding to recognize or not their governing body (Gill, 2022).

### **Taliban public diplomacy and changing narratives**

The Taliban held their first press conference and made subsequent statements about women's status in Afghanistan after gaining control of Kabul in August 2021 to determine how they shaped their narrative and adopted a unified communication approach. The group builds a favorable portrayal of women under their Afghan governance through image repair techniques which deny negative aspects while presenting themselves as advocates for women's rights within heroic storylines. The Taliban put significant importance on creating a hopeful future for Afghanistan through human rights principles while emphasizing their dedication to women’s rights alongside showing respect towards women. In relation to the restrictions imposed on Afghan women the group employs an image repair strategy that combines responsibility evasion with accusations toward foreign forces (Gabel, 2024).

Strike on August 15, 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan after two decades of war fighting the US and its allies. Outsized controversy surrounded the return of the Taliban to power, specifically as it relates to human rights. The Taliban sought to enhance their image through soft power as a public diplomacy undertake and to use their digital media platforms to amplify each message to the public. The Taliban uses digital media as a platform for public diplomacy and image-building initiatives following its power takeover in Afghanistan (Wahyuni, 2023).

### **Track-II diplomacy**

The prospect of negotiating with the Taliban is fraught. Both the Taliban and the U.S.-backed Afghan government have spurned formal talks to seek a political settlement. Afghanistan is thus stuck in military stalemate, with no discernible end in sight. A "Track

II" diplomacy pre-negotiation, for example, could provide ample groundwork for an eventual peace process without putting either party in a hard commitment to an agreement. What are Track II negotiations? Track II negotiations are non-binding meetings that take place in private; the participants retain their private, unofficial status at the sessions to keep the process informal. These are first testing of the negotiation waters, and can help lay the foundation for initial trust of a potential peace process. Most importantly, Track II would enable not only the Taliban but also the Afghan government to do a lot of intensive pre-negotiation work in secret without being locked into accountability for what came out of those gatherings (Ahmad, 2008).

### **Doha agreement 2020 and Release of Prisoners of War (POW)**

Afghanistan's Islamic Republic along with the United States of America have pledged to work jointly toward forming a peace agreement which will end Afghanistan's conflict for the benefit of all Afghans while enhancing regional stability and global security. A comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will include four parts:

- i. The peace agreement ensures Afghanistan will not serve as a base for international terrorist groups or individuals threatening U.S. and its allies' security.
- ii. Withdrawal of all US and coalition forces from Afghanistan
- iii. The political settlement must emerge from internal Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive team representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- iv. A permanent ceasefire (Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America , n.d.)

These four parts are interrelated and interdependent. Pursuit of peace after the prolonged conflict demonstrates that every party intends to achieve a sovereign and united Afghanistan living in peace with itself and its neighbors. The passage examined the Afghan and Taliban agreement. Under the agreement both sides committed to a prisoner exchange where the Afghan government would free up to 5,000 Taliban members for the release of up to 1,000 prisoners held by the insurgents. (Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America, 2020)

### **Role of United Nations in Peacebuilding**

The United Nations collaborates with multiple entities to advance governance while promoting peace and stability. ministries in Afghanistan. The belief that inadequate governance creates instability drives intervention strategies at sub-national government levels. The UN has implemented interventions at sub-national government bodies due to the substantial instability caused by poor governance. The United Nations supports both sub-national government structures and the central state. The intention is to Develop institutions based on local requirements to create a strong base for extensive delivery of essential services, security and social services is established. The initiative includes objectives to enhance the abilities of civil society organizations along with fostering accountability values. The plan seeks to build the capabilities of multiple civil society organizations while fostering accountability practices. The UN developed three different strategies to address unstable situations. The UN's strategy addresses key destabilizing elements through border management and law enforcement while also tackling drug trafficking and disarmament. The UN has supported regional human rights initiatives as its second approach reintegration of groups into established institutions (Sarwar, 2021).

### **Economic perspectives for peacebuilding in Afghanistan**

The analysis of economic rebuilding efforts in post-war peacebuilding provides multiple insights which can benefit Afghanistan. Successful peacebuilding requires

economic considerations and policies need to strike a balance between economic and political goals. Successful reconstruction policies for Afghanistan require custom approaches that consider its unique context to prevent repeating historical mistakes. Essential lessons involve the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and adapting traditional understanding to fit post-conflict environments while maintaining operational flexibility and implementing thorough monitoring and evaluation (Waldman, 2008). The reconstruction strategy must focus first on creating jobs and then strengthen budget support and national institutions while selecting aid recipients with care and acknowledging peace mission-related distortions. The reconstruction process in Afghanistan should be led by its own government while emphasizing employment growth and economic stimulation to achieve equitable distribution of advantages. International donors must strengthen Afghanistan's planning and implementation capabilities through careful support while providing sensitive funding to enhance budgetary support and peacebuilding operations (Suhrke, 2002). Effective administrative measures from the Taliban Administration have improved government revenue by strengthening control over revenue streams and introducing new fees, taxes, and duties while enhancing royalty collection from natural resource exports. During fiscal year 2022 the government collected 193.9 billion Afghanis (US\$ 2.2 billion) between February 22, 2022 and March 21, 2023 and in fiscal year 2023 collections reached 210.7 billion Afghanis. Revenue levels in Afghanistan are similar to what the former republic experienced when it received extensive aid resulting in substantial revenue growth for the country (Sabit, 2024).

### **Regional Environment and its Challenges to Democracy**

While cooperation and friendly relations among regional states can greatly help provide stability and security in the region, most countries struggle to work together. There is significant potential for cooperation in this area. Many regional countries are connected in various ways. This interconnectedness can play a key role in maintaining peace and prosperity. Additionally, it is crucial for these countries to understand that a free, stable, and democratic Afghanistan would benefit their interests. A strong, democratic Afghan state that is politically secure and economically stable should ease the worries of its neighbors. This matters because Afghanistan needs to stay safe and stable to prevent terrorists from regrouping. As mentioned, these goals can't be met without help from regional states, especially Iran and Pakistan. Therefore, building a legitimate government in Afghanistan with strong institutions would be a major win not just for Afghanistan but also for its neighbors. Initially, neighboring countries did not see how a democratic and stable Afghan state could be in their interest. However, as regional security worsens with new challenges arising, the need for a change in policy is becoming clearer. There is now agreement among regional states that the best way to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan is through free elections and a representative government.

Afghanistan's strategic and significant location has resulted in its neighboring countries having strong historical, ethnic, and social connections. The insecurity prevalent in Afghanistan is not a viable for the region. Despite this, the inhabitants of the area have coexisted within a shared civilization throughout their lives. The similarity in ethnicity and social structures among various ethnic groups is a crucial element in the promotion of democratic concepts. Similarly, the security and stability of Afghanistan depend on regional integration and cooperation for mutual peace and stabilization. The regional states must show support and respect for the emerging democracy in Afghanistan by supporting its government and showing respect towards its political structure. Afghanistan's assistance over the past fifteen years is largely due to the efforts of countries on the international stage. The U.S and its allies must continue to assist the Afghan people in their pursuit of peace, security, and political integration. The maintenance of aid is crucial for Afghanistan to maintain the democratic gains achieved in security, governance, civil society, women's rights, education, and freedom of speech. Moreover, emergency situations can be addressed by continuing to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations. It is crucial to

maintain stability in the country and prevent terrorist attacks. The management of refugee flows and preventing cross-border instability requires regional cooperation. Afghanistan requires a long-term international commitment to economic support, governance reforms, and efforts to promote social cohesion in the face of significant political changes (Doe 2021).

### **Prospects of Democracy**

Democracy has a positive and successful impact on post-conflict communities by fostering peace and security. Furthermore, this is a crucial aspect of democratization tendencies that aim to bring people together and create stable governments. Democracy, according to Charles Tilly, is a political process that leads to equality, citizenship, legally binding citizen consultation, and citizen protection from capricious government actions. In light of the aforementioned observation, the establishment of an elected government is the only political system that can ensure the security of its citizens and bring its people together in a nation that has experienced war and conflict between its ethnic groups or other belligerent parties, like Afghanistan. A democratic process is the only way to achieve this. It is equally vital to execute free and transparent elections based on democratic principles in order to achieve these goals. The successful implementation of the democratic reconstruction model is crucial for post-conflict societies, as they will face security and political challenges, particularly with regard to the integration of anti-state forces, as Afghanistan is currently experiencing.

After three years the Taliban regime continues to hold firm power. Akhundzada established parallel institutions from his private Kandahar office to centralize his authority as supreme leader. The regime shows favoritism towards southern Pashtun Talibs while becoming increasingly exclusive. The Taliban regime maintains its power although more than 90% of Afghans face poverty and food insecurity which has not yet led to an immediate economic collapse. The Taliban regime is witnessing enhanced interaction from Afghanistan's neighboring countries along with China and Russia. Pakistan continues to feel frustrated by Taliban's insufficient efforts to combat Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which operates from bases in eastern Afghanistan. The United States maintains minimal engagement with the Taliban regime because its interests in Afghanistan require stability to advance counterterrorism goals despite the regime's serious human rights and women's rights violations. The Taliban leadership consists of hardline ideologues like Haibatullah along with more moderate pragmatists who prefer limited Sharia implementation but show interest in Western interaction. Pragmatists within the Taliban have been unsuccessful in tempering the Amir's decisions and have avoided confronting him. Haibatullah receives backing from powerful military leaders operating as his praetorian guard from Helmand and Kandahar provinces including Abdul Qayyum Zakir. Haibatullah has filled deputy positions in ministries and agencies with his loyalists to neutralize the influence of rival leaders Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mohammad Yaqub. The Taliban regime has chosen not to include Afghan warlords and politicians who were connected to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan after its defeat into their organizational structures. The Taliban regime demoted and removed multiple non-Pashtun commanders from their positions. To oversee local participants, assuage expectations for inclusivity in policy decisions and maintain its skill in resolving local disputes, the regime has created local religious ulema councils (Aamir Khan, 2024)

### **Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Way Forward**

The peacebuilding process in Afghanistan faces multiple challenges because of its extended history of conflict along with its ethnically diverse population and strategic geopolitical position. Hybrid Peacebuilding stands out as the most appropriate peacebuilding theory for Afghanistan. The method brings together community-level and global initiatives to integrate traditional grassroots approaches with formal state-building strategies.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Maintaining peace while preventing conflicts between rival groups or incompatible parties demands conflict resolution in our interconnected world. The importance of conflict resolution is recognized by leading figures from government, academia and civil society organizations. Conflict resolution uses peaceful approaches such as diplomacy and negotiation to settle disputes without violence. The process of conflict resolution plays a fundamental role in stabilizing and transforming societies by tackling human crises and averting armed conflicts. The process works to advance social justice while fostering harmony and worldwide equity (Wani, 2017).

## **Local Legitimacy and Ownership**

Afghan ownership of the peace process is crucial for its legitimacy, sustainability, and cultural relevance. By being led by Afghans themselves, the process ensures its legitimacy to the local people, generating trust and confidence desperately needed for a sustainable peace. The local leaders and institutions empower, expanding their capability in conflict resolution and governance and national unity is being promoted. Afghan ownership limits foreign engagement, protecting Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence (Baribeau, 2008). Eventually, peace initiatives are adjusted to cater the regional needs of the context in which they exist, so it has a longer-term impact on stability and development of the country.

## **Flexibility and Adaptability.**

Through a hybrid model peacebuilders adapt their peacebuilding strategies based on the specific needs of regions throughout Afghanistan in order to match their unique political social and economic conditions.

## **Building Inclusive Governance**

Hybrid peacebuilding develops political institutions which achieve inclusion between ethnic and tribal groups to create national unity through mediation processes. Afghanistan needs such measures as exclusionary politics have historically led to active conflicts in the country. Hybrid peacebuilding establishes lasting peace when it anchors such initiatives to local conditions while having proper international backing. Local ownership enables the preservation of peace through ownership even after international forces withdraw from the region because it focuses on combating fundamental conflict causes.

## **Sustainable Peace**

Hybrid peacebuilding strives for sustainability by establishing local settings as the foundation of peacebuilding initiatives and making sure that international frameworks assist them. By addressing the underlying causes of conflict rather than just its symptoms, local ownership guarantees that peace is preserved even in the absence of foreign forces.

## **Conclusion**

The Afghanistan peace process demonstrates the complexity of conflict resolution, requiring both multifaceted and nuanced strategies. This study has proven that effective peace building in Afghanistan needs a comprehensive approach that combines grassroots efforts, national changes, and foreign assistance. Local initiatives aimed at fostering peace using traditional methods of conflict resolution and community participation are important in building trust and collaboration amongst varied ethnic and social groups. These

grassroots efforts are essential in building a strong and culturally sensitive foundation for peace. At the national level, inclusivity in governance alongside political liberalization is necessary in closing gaps and fostering stability. The integration of ex-combatants and the advancement of civil rights is crucial to unite a divided society. National policies need to consider the glaring socio-economic inequalities which are the main contributors to protracted conflicts. In addition, consistent global attention along with economic and developmental assistance seems to be of great importance to support the Afghanistan peace building efforts.

### **Recommendations**

- The Taliban government must end its support for extremist groups and move away from its rigid, exclusionary system of governance. Continued ties to transnational terrorist organizations and the suppression of political dissent severely undermine prospects for peace and democracy. For Afghanistan to achieve long-term stability, the Taliban must demonstrate a clear break from violent extremism and adopt more inclusive, flexible governance structures that accommodate ethnic, religious, and political diversity. Only by doing so can it gain domestic legitimacy and meaningful international engagement.
- International and regional actors should invest in and empower grassroots peacebuilding efforts, particularly traditional dispute resolution mechanisms that reflect local cultural and social norms.
- Support for independent media and alternative information networks is critical to foster political awareness, accountability, and the long-term cultivation of democratic norms in Afghanistan.
- The international community should maintain diplomatic engagement with the Taliban, conditioned on measurable improvements in human rights, governance inclusivity, and protection of civilians.

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